

# **BECOMING CRITICAL BEINGS:**

***A THEMATIC STUDY EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENT,  
LEARNING AND TEACHING OF A GROUP OF NON TRADITIONAL  
ADULT LEARNERS***

**Martin Fitzgerald**

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Martin Fitzgerald

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## **DEDICATION**

To Mary, Thomas and Anna for their patience and understanding  
and to the memory of my father, who always believed in going forward.

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## ABSTRACT

The current literature on critical thinking, critical reflection and critical action supports the view that higher education cannot be defined as such without the implicit existence of all three elements in the curriculum. There are many who suggest that, given the changing profile of those now engaging in higher education, these features need to be made more explicit. This study attempts to illustrate how these elements can be made more explicit within a unique teaching and learning context and with a specific non traditional group of adult learners. Barnett (1997) goes further and suggests that these features, which he refers to collectively as the practice of critical being, are an essential requirement for those engaging in higher education. He does not give specifics on how this practice can be taught or how it might find expression in the lives or educational understanding and knowledge of participating students, which is one of the issues this research will attempt to address.

In this study I want to evaluate in a critical manner the dynamics and potential of critical being as an educational theory and also explore its practical pedagogical applications within a specific learning context. In doing so I want to carry out this research so as to contribute in an original way to a deeper understanding of the theory of critical being and critically examine its capacity to be absorbed by adult learners in the classroom and applied in their learning and day to day lives. Accordingly, this work takes place in the context of a specific programme aimed at enhancing personal growth and understanding



and exploring how participants make meaning through learning, action and dialogue. It also deals with a very specific group of adult learners. The challenge posed is, first, to translate the conceptual framework presented by critical being into a set of practical methodologies that can be used in the classroom and so test its capacity to be absorbed by learners. Secondly, I want to find a qualitative research framework through which this applied practice of critical being might be evaluated. Dewey's (1933, 1936, 1938) framework for experiential learning and reflection, along with Vygotsky's (1978) work on development, learning and higher mental functions, offer possibilities in this regard. Other theoretical frameworks, such as those prescribed by Schön (1983), Belenky *et al* (1986) and Mezirow (1990) will also inform this study. While the context of this research is theoretical, the specific focus will be primarily methodological and presented in a thematic format with particular reference to the use of one original technique, which I have called the Reflective Action Project (RAP).

The primary findings of this research will indicate that while the practice and absorption of critical being by learners is achievable to some degree through classroom practice, other factors also contribute to its accessibility. The importance of making this type of learning explicit for non-traditional adult learners is very significant in relation to good classroom practice for a number of reasons that will be presented throughout the study. The research will also explore in detail the nature and impact of these methodologies and student responses to them. While this study will argue that Barnett's (1997) substantive theoretical framework is worthwhile, its merit in the view of this researcher can be evaluated fully only in terms of its real applicability in the classroom. If it can work at

that level, then its wider strategic value in higher education may potentially be very significant.

# CHAPTER 1

## CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

### *Part one: Components of the study*

#### **Introduction**

Critical being according to Barnett (1997) is a way of being through which it is possible to look at the world, engage with learning and reflection, explore the self and act and think in a critical and thoughtful manner. He believes it is necessary to develop this capacity to live effectively in the radical, globalised and uncertain world of the twenty first century. Furthermore he suggests it should be the objective of higher education to develop critical being as a priority among its student population. This is a tall order indeed and a lot of expectation to place on such a concept. Notwithstanding the ideological difficulties of imposing such a model on an entire sector of society, the practical day to day challenges alone would appear staggering. As a teacher in higher education my interest in critical being exists primarily at a micro level. Is it possible to develop the capacity to practice critical being among students at a classroom level and how should it be done? To go about this effectively I will identify a core group of participants, develop and apply a set of materials and methodologies, find an appropriate research framework to evaluate the level at which critical being then exists among this group and finally examine the implications of all this for my practice as a teacher. In doing this I would also have the opportunity to test the range and capacity of Barnett's

concept and establish whether in fact critical being lives up to its author's expectations. Studies such as this tend to be interpretive and qualitative in nature. While this process is not uncommon in educational practice, in this instance it is the context, the student profile and the methodologies employed that may offer new insights into teaching and learning and provide an original contribution to the body of knowledge that is education.

Adult learners are returning to education in increasing numbers and they bring with them specific needs and requirements that must be addressed in a new way. This poses a challenge for teachers to find innovative methods of teaching and of exploring the dynamics of the learning space. At a broader strategic level, it raises questions about the nature and objectives of education and the effectiveness of our current structures to deal with this changing environment. It became increasingly clear to me that what I knew about teaching and had experienced in the classroom up to this point would not be of great value in this significantly different environment. I would have to look closely at my own practice and make changes. To put this in context, I will start with my own story.

### **A First-hand Account**

My first experience of education as a process of development and reflection, rather than simply learning information for the teacher or the exam, came at the age of eight years. I had just completed second class in primary school in Co. Tipperary when my family moved to Dublin. As I was too young for third class, I repeated second class. It was a boy's school and my first time to have a lay teacher, who was female. Each day, as a

reward for being good, she would read a story to us for about twenty minutes before lunch. These stories were always about Irish myths and folklore. Then she would discuss the story with us and see if we could guess the ending or describe characters we liked and so on. I became fascinated by this process and waited eagerly for each day's installment. Unlike the nuns from the previous school, who emphasised order and discipline, this teacher brought warmth and curiosity to the classroom. I responded to this in a very positive way, changing from a slightly belligerent and disinterested student to one enthused by narrative and reflective debate. It was the beginning of a lifelong passion for literature and history.

At seventeen years of age I made a decision to become a teacher following a long discussion with the principal of my school. Naturally, my subjects of choice were English literature and History. In my early years as a teacher I sought to inspire and motivate students primarily through my own passion and commitment, willing them on to think critically and to reflect on the great issues of life through the study of great writers and events. However, I realised early in my career that wanting this to happen was not enough. I needed to find an epistemological framework that would give my passion and enthusiasm the pedagogical effectiveness it lacked.

In the mid-1990s I decided to do a Masters degree in Education. Through this study I began to discover elements of the framework I had been seeking. The focus of the research I conducted was to enable a group of students to develop alternative ways of knowing, using drama and critical reflection. Using Vygotsky's (1978) schema for learning and development, along with various drama techniques and Gardner's Multiple

Intelligence Theory (1983), I attempted to develop the learning capacity and reflective awareness of these students, with varying degrees of success. What emerged for my own part was recognition of the value of ongoing, critical self-reflection and using this in my practice to enhance my teaching. Since then this epistemological framework has evolved and grown into a reasonably coherent set of teaching values and practices. As a result of this work I believe that Vygotsky's model will also be significant in the context of the present research.

### **Educational values**

As a teacher I became committed to the principles of reflective practice (Schön 1983) and transformational and emancipatory learning (Mezirow 1990). I sought to develop my practice in a way that would allow me to promote these principles explicitly. In order to develop critical being in others, I have to understand this concept at a level that allows it to be expressed explicitly in my practice. This, in turn, leads to questions about the relationship between critical being and reflective practice. What do I mean when I say that I am engaged in critical thinking or critical self-reflection or critical action? What are the fundamental characteristics of these concepts? If I develop my understanding of them, in what way will that impact on my practice? What teaching and learning methods are currently in use? Can they be adapted and applied in my own practice and, in particular, with a group of adults for whom returning to education after a long absence presents significant challenges in a variety of contexts? These questions provide the educational landscape for this research.

Non-traditional adult learners who engage in higher education after a long period away from the learning environment (many of whom may not have completed secondary education) are generally very apprehensive and often experience a crisis in confidence, initially believing they are not smart enough to survive or succeed in education (Knowles 1996). A crisis of this nature can be intensified by the demands made on students in higher education to develop a capacity to think, act and reflect critically on their learning experiences. Barnett (1997) suggests that in higher education today there is a need to encourage students to become critical beings. By this he means that students must engage with critical thought, critical action and critical reflection as essential components in the journey towards critical being. He argues that in the complex world of the early twenty-first century and onwards, students will face different challenges that will require a greater degree of critical analysis, reflection and self-reliance than ever before. A difficulty arises here, however, in relation to the word ‘critical’ and its embedded meanings, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 2 and throughout further chapters. For the adult learner returning to education after a substantial time gap, and whose previous experience of education may not have been positive, this requirement by Barnett adds an even greater burden. Consequently, it places a responsibility on the teacher to have a very clear understanding of these concepts and to develop effective ways of teaching them explicitly to students of diverse abilities, backgrounds, ages and experiences. In acknowledging Barnett’s position along with the challenging profile of adult learners currently entering higher education in Ireland—then to assume that these skills will be

developed implicitly is no longer a realistic expectation. Nor, I would suggest, is it an acceptable one. This is central to my concern as a teacher in higher education.

Furthermore, to what extent have the methods outlined above been successful thus far and is there a need for a more innovative and creative approach to the teaching or facilitation of critical being among adult learners? Is it, in fact, possible to develop a sense of critical being among adult learners through teaching alone, or must other, external factors also be considered? To what extent are the current structures and practices in higher education supportive of such a development given the apparent lack of interdisciplinarity and critical reason that presently exists, according to Barnett (1997)? These questions clearly encompass the two interdependent dynamics of the classroom: teaching and learning. In a learning space that is fully emancipatory and interactive these dynamics should be interchangeable and reflexive, if this type of development is to occur.

### **Aims and objectives of the study**

Central to this research is my concern for the non-traditional adult learner who returns to education after a long absence and needs to acquire key skills in critical thinking, critical reflection and critical action if he/she is to reach his/her full potential in higher education. Assumptions made at an organisational level and by many teachers about the existence of these skills among non-traditional adult learners often lead to underachievement or, in some cases, withdrawal. In addition many of these learners return to education with low self-esteem and a poor self-image; therefore the focus needs to be on the whole person



and the development of all three domains of learning: cognitive, affective and pragmatic.

Keeping this in mind and in relation to the practice of critical being my aims are to;

- Attempt to develop the practice of critical being among participants in three particular classroom contexts using specific teaching approaches and methodologies
- Establish an analysis framework to evaluate the extent and degree to which the practice of critical being exists among the participants involved after their participation in the classroom work.
- Evaluate the significance and value of critical being based on this study within the context of higher education and the implications of this research for my teaching

My specific objective is to use methods of teaching and dialogue that will enable these students to develop their capacity to think, reflect and act as critical beings and thereby enhance the quality of their experience in higher education and lead, potentially, to a more successful and personally fulfilling outcome. If this research demonstrates evidence of developing criticality among these students as they move towards a practice of critical being, a secondary objective will be to examine the implications of this for my practice as a teacher in a higher education setting. Therefore it will be important to distinguish clearly between the teachings methods employed and the research tools used to evaluate the data that emerges.

The case study and qualitative nature of this research may lead to varied results that will need careful interpretation. A concern therefore arises in terms of how to evaluate, analyse and present findings of this nature. Presenting findings in a thematic framework

which demonstrates a clear link between comments made, activities carried out by participants and the development of critical being will I believe offer valuable insights into how this group of learners have progressed as a result of this research. This thematic model will be explored further in chapters 4 and 5. Furthermore Vygotsky's (1978) model of learning and development may be helpful as a key evaluator of development and change. In Chapter 2 I will look closely at Vygotsky's model and set out the reasons why I believe it is appropriate in the context of this study.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to attempt to develop the way in which non-traditional adult learners engage with critical thinking, critical reflection and critical action and to explore methods of explicitly enhancing this within the context of a particular programme. If we put this in the form of a general research question, it would read as follows:

Can non-traditional adult learners participating in a Personal Development programme engage with critical thinking, critical reflection and critical action through dialogue and activity in a specific learning context and by so doing enhance their capacity to become critical beings?

This can be subdivided into four basic questions:

1. How did the students understand and engage with critical thinking, critical reflection, critical action and what is the significance of this in relation to the concept of critical being?
2. What were the underlying teaching and learning methods used and what impact did they have on this group?
3. What methods of research and what research tools were used to analyse and evaluate this data?
4. What implications emerge from this for my own practice and for its broader significance in terms of teaching this type of student in the higher education context?

### **Profile and background of research group**

This research focuses on eight students who would typically be defined as non-traditional adult learners and who are engaged in studies across a number of undergraduate programmes currently on offer at Tipperary Institute (TI). One student was attending a pre-entry or Access programme to prepare for full entry to higher education. Five were second-year students completing a primary degree in Rural Development. The final two were part-time students, one in Business Studies and one in Software Development. They were all doing Personal Development as a compulsory module; it must be completed by all students attending TI. They ranged in age and gender (four male and four female), came from diverse backgrounds and had returned to education for different reasons.

The criteria for selection to this group were based on the following:

- Six of the eight selected had not participated in any educational programmes for a long time (at least ten years in most cases) before returning to TI;
- All had expressed concerns to me relating to their ability to cope with returning to education and dealing with new and challenging concepts. Their reasons for this concern differed, but none had ever engaged in any explicit learning relating to critical thinking, critical reflection or critical action;
- One student, Kelvina (Kel), had been to college previously. She had studied Science and was working in a laboratory. However, Kel had not enjoyed her college experience, had never heard (or remembered hearing) the phrase ‘critical thinking’ during her four years studying science and was of the view that she had not developed in any personal way during this period. Her selection was based on this assessment, but also because she provided a contrast to the others in the group.

Other factors relating to background and biographical profile will also help situate the group within the contexts referred to above. First, as a qualitative and interpretive study the nature and dynamic of the different participating groupings is central to our understanding of the process. Secondly, I have stated from the beginning that the group could be defined as non-traditional adult learners and this assertion requires detailed clarification at this point. Thirdly, each member of the research group brought specific characteristics to the study that need to be explored and presented in relation to the

overall outcomes. Finally, the research highlights a number of contextual issues that will offer further significant contributions and insights to this work.

As stated earlier, the selection criteria were specific in relation to age profile, gender and previous educational experience and opportunities with the exception of Kel. Apart from that I wanted a group that were randomly representative of this profile and who were in different programmes yet all taking the Personal Development module. My interest is in adult learners who have returned to education after a long period and who have minimal experience of the education system. Tipperary Institute takes in a high percentage of these students because social inclusion is a stated aim in the organisation's mission statement. The Institute began taking students in 1999, and the focus initially was on meeting the needs of the immediate community. Many adults who could not travel to other centres due to low incomes, family commitments and limited opportunities were first on our priority list. This was in keeping with the Government's *White Paper on Adult Education* (2000), in which emphasis was placed on equality of opportunity, systemic learning and recognition of ethnic diversity. While ethnic diversity is not an issue here, equality of opportunity and the creation of a systemic learning environment would be significant factors for consideration at an institutional level. A final element in this context relates to the outcomes assigned to the programmes taught in the college. These are based on defining graduate attributes that are identified with students and on progressing towards achieving those attributes over the duration of the course. These attributes are categorised under two headings: personal and professional. The former has particular relevance here as personal attributes are explored specifically in the Personal

Development module. Identifying and discussing these attributes with students involves a level of participation and reflection that can be challenging. The students who participated in this study found this process difficult. These considerations will have a bearing on the findings of this research. The following is a detailed profile of the individual participants in the study, outlining relevant biographical and educational details.

### **Betty**

Betty is in her late forties, married, with children in their late teens and early twenties. Her husband is a farmer and Betty has worked on the farm for most of her married life. Betty had committed her energies to her family and the farm. On many occasions she expressed the view that while she was happy to do this, many of her own ambitions were put on hold as a result. She stated that she passively accepted this situation and often allowed the needs of others to be addressed at the expense of her own. In one reflective exercise, Betty describes one such incident:

A situation arose involving close family members and extended family. I behaved passively instead of standing my ground and standing up for what I believed in. As a result I suffered and my family was affected also. In other words I sat on the fence and became immobilised out of fear. My self-esteem was badly affected, but I gradually built myself up and had a very painful learning experience. I became wiser and more cautious.

(Reflective portfolio, writing activity: Appendix 8)

Betty's decision to return to education was therefore borne out of a desire to re-assert her identity and do something for herself. She decided to do a one-year preparation course initially. This brought her to Tipperary Institute and the HighWay Programme (a one-year direct access course). Betty recognised that she had been away from formal education for over thirty years and needed a transition programme to prepare her for higher education. During the HighWay programme, while participating in the research process, Betty's reflections and actions indicated a significant change in her attitudes, thinking and practices; these will be looked at in more detail later.

## **Una**

Una is a single woman in her forties who has worked in various capacities throughout her life, spending a significant amount of time in the music industry. Una is currently taking a BA Degree in Rural Development in Tipperary Institute and participated in this research during her second year of that course. Although registered as a full-time student, Una is still working on a part-time basis to finance her education. Una's reasons for deciding to do the Rural Development degree programme are very specific. Una's passion is the environment and she is committed in a very radical sense to bringing about change and global awareness with regard to this issue. Una demonstrated a high level of critical thinking at times during the group activities, which she attributed to her experience of work. However, she did observe that the busy nature of her working life left little time for reflection. The concept of critical action is clearly evident in her comments following a Critical Incident activity:

I've been challenged to be more of a 'walker' and less of a 'talker'.

(Critical Incident Activity: Appendix 3)

### **Anna**

Anna is in her forties, plays music semi-professionally and is also a full-time student on the BA in Rural Development. Anna qualified as a nurse, but has always been committed to environmental issues, so this course has been a significant change of direction for her. Anna is a naturally reflective person who has kept diaries at various times in her life, most importantly during the illness and death of her daughter. Consequently, Anna came to the course already recognising the retrospective value of reflective writing. But she does acknowledge that her journaling has become more structured and instead of writing randomly, she is now asking herself: '*Why do I think this or that?*' (Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.8, p.5: Appendix 2).

### **James**

James is a second-year student on the Rural Development degree programme. He is in his mid-forties and married with young children. James has worked in various occupations, but always wanted to return to education. He has a very strong sense of self-belief and is the kind of student who will participate fully in class and want to discuss and tease out complex issues. One of the challenges presented by James from a teaching perspective is that he has very clear views on issues and will not change this view without



deep and serious consideration. However, the reflective work presented James with an opportunity to look critically at some of these views and his own implicit sense of their significance. In a Learning Autobiography exercise, James made the following comment:

Right now I feel I can embrace most reflective memories and the reason is that I feel very comfortable about 'the me in me'

(Learning Autobiography exercise: Appendix 5)

### **Aiden**

Aiden is single and in his mid-twenties. He has worked for a number of years since leaving school. He is also a second-year student in the Rural Development degree programme. Aiden is just a few years out of secondary school, but did not attend any other course before coming to Tipperary Institute. At the end of year one Aiden was elected Student Union president and took a year out to fulfill those duties. He acknowledges that he often tends to talk more and think less. However, he has noticed a significant change in this pattern since participating in the module and the research. In relation to actions he says:

Now before doing a task [I] take time to plan it out and think about it as if I had to write up a journal afterwards.

(Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.8, p.5 : Appendix 2)

## **Noel**

Noel is in his mid-fifties, single and a second-year Rural Development student. He is a quiet, reflective man by nature. Noel spent a large part of his life working in the construction industry and as a result has developed a very pragmatic learning style that is very outcome-focused. This contradiction of reflective personality and learned behaviour presented Noel with a challenge when he returned to college. He had to re-adapt to learning in a theoretical context and initially found it very difficult to reflect in a structured way and spend time thinking. He commented on this problem in his reflective journals, but eventually came to realise a shift in his thinking:

I think yes in that it has raised my consciousness somewhat. I am a little more inclined to ask myself the question, what do you really think of this?

(Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.8, p.5 : Appendix 2)

## **Martin**

Martin is a farmer in his early forties, married with young children. His motives for returning to education are to do with finance and future security for his family: he sees no future on the land. Instead of pursuing Rural Development, as might seem the obvious choice, Martin is doing a Science degree in Software Development on a part-time basis. This has placed a lot of stress on him and on his family, and it also presents huge challenges around time management as farming can be a very unpredictable way of life. Despite this, Martin has contributed in a very proactive way to this research. He began to think in a different way about himself and his own thinking. He is thinking about

thinking, and has become aware of the need to think critically about his own views and those of others. In the questionnaire on evaluating his reflective writing, he states:

The strongest challenge was looking at my attitude to other people, more so with people I know than strangers. Looking at their side is by definition giving up some of my own, it comes slowly.

(Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.7, p.4 : Appendix 2)

### **Kelvina (Kel)**

Kel is a postgraduate with a degree in Science. She is single and in her mid-twenties. When she joined the ACCS (part-time) course in Personal Development she was working as a laboratory technician and had very little confidence in her own ability, despite having a third-level education. In this regard, Kel offered an interesting contrast to the other participants because, despite her opportunities, she had not experienced critical thinking in an explicit way during her time in college. She may well have had to apply levels of critical thinking to specific tasks and topics, but made no explicit connection between this process and her development as a young adult. She certainly did not relate this in any way to her poor self-awareness or her sense of feeling unfulfilled in her professional life. Nor was she prepared for the impact the Personal Development module and her participation in the research would have on her own self-image and self-belief. This raises a question about her increased capacity to engage with the content at this level due to her previous

learning, a facet Kitchener and King highlight in their study (1994). Kel's transformation was quite dramatic and her own words describe it succinctly:

It's like for the first time I am being properly educated; its like things you learn in a room with a teacher can be taken away, worked on and made practical. It's amazing after being in the Irish educational system for twenty years I am only now learning how to learn.

(Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.10, p.7 : Appendix 2)

### **Other contextual issues**

To enhance further understanding of the research, there are also a number of contextual issues to be mentioned. These cover areas such as the purpose of the study for each group in the research, the length and expectations of the courses of study and the size and dynamic of each group and how that impacted on both my teaching practice and teacher-learner relationships. Clandinin and Connolly's (1995) work on a teacher's professional knowledge landscapes highlights the qualitative nature of teaching and the importance of knowledge constructed through narrative in the classroom. Many of the methods used in this research reflect this approach. Clandinin and Connolly focus on how teachers come to understand the nature of their professional knowledge and they describe this knowledge as '*a body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social and traditional) that are expressed in a person's practices*' (1995:7). The narratives presented during this research process have

transformed many of my convictions and meanings and must also be considered as a contextual issue that will be explored in more detail later.

The reasons why the members of this group chose to return to study are varied and diverse, as the profiles suggest. However, I would like to elaborate on this element a little more here. The reasons fall into three distinct categories. Betty was part of an access group doing a one-year course as a preparation for returning to full-time higher education. When Betty began the access course, she wasn't sure what direction it would lead, or even if she would continue in higher education. Tensions in her class group were strained at times and her participation in the research was coloured by this experience. Una, James, Noel, Aiden and Anna were second-year, full-time degree students. The dynamic of this group was very positive and supportive and everyone in the class was committed to the core concepts and values of the Rural Development programme, namely social inclusion, sustainability and environmental protection. Their enthusiasm and sense of belonging in Tipperary Institute offered another perspective to the research process. The Rural Development course is the primary reason for the Institute's existence. Martin and Kel were part-time students attending Tipperary Institute two or three evenings a week and working full-time. Their initial perception of the Institute and the research process was naturally more disconnected from the college. However, the research process allowed them to engage in a way that would not otherwise have happened. They became very animated by the work and regarded it as having a significant impact on their experience in Tipperary Institute. These contexts are significant because they impacted on the mindset and expectations of the group in terms of understanding, research and

participation procedures, activities covered and feelings of belonging within the group and the college. All of these issues need consideration in the context of an analysis framework that has the capacity and flexibility to reflect these concerns.

While each participant clearly wanted to return to education, their reasons for doing so varied, as did their attitude to education in general. For some, previous educational experiences had been negative and had impacted on their self-esteem and opportunities for success. This would have been the case for Betty, Kel, Noel and, to a lesser extent, Anna. For others, such as James, Una and Martin, education was viewed in very pragmatic terms as an outcome to be achieved, but something almost external to everything else in their lives. Aiden comes to the process with a more positive and integrated view of education. He sees his education as permeating every aspect of his life in that everything is connected to it and the choices he makes. Each member of the group is at a different stage of life and their views of education are coloured by this, also by their own personal circumstances and how they view the world. The urban–rural divide in the group may also have a bearing on this. Martin and Betty’s perceptions and filters have a distinctly agricultural bias, while the others all come with a more urban, small-town perception. In this context ‘urban’ would not relate to city but to small communities within a rural landscape. All of these contextual issues are significant in relation to a qualitative research model and will be discussed again in Chapter 4.

## Teaching and Learning methodologies

In attempting to stimulate critical thinking, critical reflection and critical action among the participants in this project, I used a diverse range of techniques and methods that would engage all three elements. Initially I worked with groups of adults in a variety of different classes, but then invited a small number to join this research project. Each participant signed a validation letter explaining in detail what was involved (*see* Appendix 1) and agreeing to participate in the research. The students were studying three different courses in TI—Rural Development, Business Studies and Information Technology—six full-time and two part-time. I worked with each group separately, which allowed me to repeat activities and compare responses. The process involved a number of stages and activities:

- During an initial discussion and stemming from activities in class, each participant expressed concern about his/her capacity to think or reflect critically about concepts being studied on the Personal Development course;
- Participants within each class group then engaged in a series of Activities and reflections. These included creating a Learning Autobiography using metaphor, exploring values and assumptions using a Critical Incident technique (Brookfield 1987), analysing group processes through metaphor-analysis techniques (Deshler, *op cit.*, Mezirow 1990), carrying out a Reflective Action Project (RAP) over five days, filling out a questionnaire

and participating in an individual, taped interview with me as a final stage in the process. (These methods will be explained in more detail in Chapter 3 but the latter three mentioned here were also significant research tools used in the study as they provided relevant data for analysis.) Participants also maintained their own individual reflective journals throughout the study. This process of reflective action in carrying out the RAP will contribute significantly to the originality of this research as it allows participants to explore and respond to their experience of critical being in the moment as it occurs.

- During each stage I kept records of activities and responses in my own personal journal.



## **Part Two: Issues for broader discussion**

### **Higher education and the Irish context**

Educational practice and curricula in Ireland have experienced significant changes in recent years. Most notable has been the radical overhaul of the second-level system in relation to course content, methodology and assessment (Drudy and Lynch 1994). More students are now continuing their education in universities or Institutes of Technology. In addition, the growth in numbers of adult learners returning to education has altered the profile of students entering the third-level sector. According to a Department of Education and Science report published in May 2001, the numbers of mature students entering higher education are increasing, but have not, as yet, reached the government target of 15 per cent. A report published by the Higher Education Authority (HEA 2004) identified as a key goal the increasing of access for mature students to higher education through further education and community education.

Attitudes towards education have changed, too; it is no longer considered a privilege, but a right. Interest groups, such as parents' organisations, corporations and trade unions, are far more proactive in terms of expectations and influence with regard to policy decisions and the allocation of resources. Consequently, a school's effectiveness is more likely to be measured in terms of student performance in exams than social and personal development (Smyth 1999). Parents equate quality with results at second-level, while at third-level the focus on knowledge and academic credibility (demonstrated quite starkly

in the league table structure in the United Kingdom) has become an issue of serious concern for many involved in higher education. While these comments are general in nature, there is a growing concern among various academic and educational organisations that higher education in Ireland is placing greater emphasis on student numbers and financial resources at the expense of learning and teaching, not to mention equity of participation. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) Action Plan 2005–2007 set out to address some of these concerns. But to date there has been little real evidence of any tangible success, and current government policy is focused largely on the Further Education (FE) sector. The priority over the last decade or so has been to get people trained and into the workforce as quickly as possible. As a result, the training identified has been short-term, skill-based and delivered mainly outside the third-level sector. In contrast, the focus of this study is to place teaching and learning at the centre of the process.

Massification in higher education is another factor for consideration. The increase in numbers attending higher education in Ireland has been significant over the last fifteen years (Department of Education and Science DES 2003). Pressure on resources and an enlarged educational bureaucracy have contributed to the perception of students as commodities to be serviced rather than human beings with specific educational needs. Particular concern has arisen over the allocation of places to ‘mature students’ (over twenty-three years of age). According to the *White Paper on Adult education* (2000), it was recommended that adult learners would fill 15 per cent of all places. To date, none of the universities in Ireland, and very few of the Institutes of Technology, has reached this

target. (Tipperary Institute is one of the exceptions, with a 33 per cent adult intake.) This is the case despite annual increases in mature student applications and a decrease in the numbers of Leaving Certificate students (DES 2003). A report published by the Union of Students of Ireland (USI 2003) highlighted the concerns of mature students, including the poor quality of teaching in higher education, lack of awareness of the specific needs of adult learners, the absence of feedback or discussion of assessments completed and the failure of teachers in higher education to accommodate the barriers that exist for adult learners returning to formal study.

While it is not the focus of this study to address the broad difficulties that exist within higher education in Ireland, I want to provide a context for my concern in relation to adult learners, particularly non-traditional learners for whom returning to higher education and engaging with critical thinking and reflection is a daunting challenge. A non-traditional adult learner can be defined as anyone over twenty-three years of age who may not have completed second-level education or may not have engaged in any formal education since leaving school. At Tipperary Institute, non-traditional adult learners fall into two broad categories: one group in their mid- to late twenties and a second group in their mid- to late forties (Student records). In the latter group approximately 8 per cent would not have completed the Leaving Certificate (final State exam at second-level). These comparatively high figures are what initially prompted my concern and interest in relation to these students' specific learning needs.

My interest in this area stems from a commitment to education as a process that needs constant re-evaluation and reflection (Dewey 1938). It is also driven by a personal educational journey that is rooted in a desire to create a learning environment that is participatory and transformative in nature (Mezirow 1990).

### **Personal Development, Communications and Group Dynamics**

Tipperary Institute offers a unique, compulsory module to all students who register for Diploma or Degree programmes. It is a one-year course, or two years in the case of the Degree in Rural Development. The purpose of the course is to provide students with an opportunity to explore the components mentioned above and to become more effective in managing their lives and relationships and their capacity to articulate thoughts and feelings. It is unique in that Tipperary Institute is the only higher education college in Ireland that requires all full-time students to take this module. The purpose is to provide both the public and private sectors with graduates with highly developed communication and interpersonal skills. The programme attempts to provide students with specific skills in areas such as time management, stress management, assertiveness skills, communications, group dynamics and team-building. This is incorporated into a conceptual framework that focuses on student self-awareness and making meaning. These core concepts are studied in conjunction with relevant theories on human development and are taught in a collaborative and interactive manner. The course is divided into four sections, covering personal effectiveness, interpersonal effectiveness, communications and group dynamics. Each section covers specific topics that allow the student to

progress to a greater level of self-awareness, which in turn improves his/her capacity to relate to others in a more assertive and direct way and to participate more effectively in groups and teams. While the course places emphasis on skills development, the cognitive and affective learning domains are fully explored through the study of key theoretical frameworks and ongoing reflective activities, such as maintaining journals, dialogue and reflective action projects. Figure 1.0, below, provides specific details of the Personal Development course content and structure.

**Personal Development and Group Dynamics**

**Lectures will begin on week one and tutorials on week 3**

Group Work and Problem Solving	Personal Effectiveness (Delivered in Two Parts)	Communication Skills
<b>Defining the Nature of Groups and Teams</b> Lecture 4 Revision: BK	<b>Self Awareness, Values and Value Systems</b> Lecture 1, 2, Completed: BK	<b>Reading, Writing and Research for College</b> Lecture 3 New BK
<b>Group Dynamics and Team Building</b> Lecture 5 Revision: BK	<b>Setting Goals and Time Management</b> Lecture 11 Revision: MG	<b>Introduction to Communication</b> Lecture 18 Revision: DC
<b>The Group or Team Player</b> Lecture 6 Revision: BK	<b>Assertiveness</b> Lecture 12 Revision: MG	<b>Verbal and Written Communication</b> Lecture 19, 20 Revision: MR
<b>Motivation</b> Lecture 7 New: BK	<b>Personal and Remote Networking</b> Lecture 13 Revision: BK	<b>Presentation Skills</b> Lecture 21 Revision: MF
<b>Leading Groups and Teams</b> Lecture 8, 9 Revision: BK	<b>Influencing</b> Lecture: 14 Revision: BK	<b>Non Verbal Communication</b> Lecture 22 Revision: MF
<b>Facilitation Skills</b> Lecture 10 New: CAO'C	<b>Creativity</b> Lecture 15 New: BK	<b>Job Applications, (Interviews)- CA'OC</b> <b>Career Networking</b> Lecture 23, 24 New
<b>Problem Solving Rational and Creative</b> Lecture 17 Revision: MF	<b>Cultural and Social Aspects of Business</b> Lecture 16 Revision: MF	

Table 1.0: Course outline for Personal Development module in Tipperary Institute.

Since it was first introduced in 1999 the feedback to the Personal Development course throughout the college has been very positive, especially from mature students. Based on their experiences of life and the work environment, older students see this programme as meeting a valuable need both in terms of job capacity and personal growth. Evidence of the latter was gathered during a small piece of research on reflective journaling carried out by the author in 2001 with a range of students (mixed in gender and age) across different programmes, both full- and part-time. In other words, mature students are ready for what the course has to offer because of their retrospection, maturity and understanding. This raises the question of whether mature students are more receptive to becoming critical beings simply by virtue of their age and experience. King and Kitchener's (1994) reflective model links the seven stages of reflective judgment with chronological maturity, where the latter stages are reached during the early to mid-twenties for students who have completed a higher education degree. They argue that people who do not attend higher education do not reach the higher stages of reflective judgment until their thirties, if at all. Barnett's stage of critical being would clearly equate with the higher stages of the reflective judgment model. What, therefore, are the implications of this for the current study? Are age and the capacity to become a critical being connected and to what extent, if any, does engagement with higher learning accelerate the process?

Exploring the relationship between critical being and learning opens up a discussion around a number of issues. These relate to: teaching and its explicit facility to explore criticality; the relationship between maturity and the capacity to think, act and reflect critically; the nature of the emancipatory learning environment, where the notion of 'expert' is interchangeable between student and teacher and power is diffused; and, finally, the extent to which higher education is at present capable of addressing these concerns. This is moving away from the traditional, positivist style of teaching that most of us experienced in the past, where reality existed 'out there' and separate from us and where the curriculum was predefined and students were expected to learn and reproduce to required standards that were not explicitly apparent.

Despite these broad and significant areas of debate, my primary interest remains in developing the facility to nurture a sense of critical being among my students through my teaching and establish research criteria for evaluating the process. This study will therefore focus on ways to generate critical being among adult learners through the exploration of various methodological frameworks and pedagogical practices. Through this process I would hope to offer insights into the relationship between adult learners and critical being, to further our understanding of the needs and capacities of adult learners and to contribute to the body of knowledge of those committed to reflective practice as a way of teaching.

### **Educational challenge for practitioners**

While I will return to this issue in more detail later, at this point I will address some central elements by way of introduction to my specific area of study. I am very interested in the notion of educating students in the context of critical being and how this might be achieved. I believe that the subject area I teach allows for a unique opportunity to explore all the domains outlined above and to engage adult learners with the concept of critical being as a living and liberating reality.

This, I believe, presents a huge challenge to teachers in the higher education environment. If being refers not only to experience but also to knowledge and action, and if critical thought and reflection refer to challenging assumptions around tacitly held values and beliefs (Mezirow 1990), then there is an obligation on the teacher to find ways to create this opportunity explicitly in order to fulfill Barnett's (1997) requirement. This demands a high standard of teaching and a level of commitment that goes beyond the simple transmission of information. It also demands a level of teaching that traditionally hasn't been widespread in higher education in Ireland. This has been due primarily to an absence of educational training for teachers in higher education until very recently, along with a perception that students at this level should simply be directed towards the information and should possess the necessary critical skills to know how to interpret and make use of it. With the arrival of massification and a rapidly changing student profile, both in capacity and age, this perception is no longer accurate, if indeed it ever was.

### **Significance of the Study**



This study has taken place—and its results are presented here—in the context of working with non-traditional adult learners who bring very unique characteristics (Knowles 1996) and specific personal experiences to the learning environment and also in the context of a very specific programme that provides students with the opportunity to explore the self in relation to personal effectiveness, interpersonal effectiveness, communication and group dynamics. This research aims to address these questions and to contribute in a significant way to our knowledge of adult learners, with particular reference to the specific needs of non-traditional adult learners and the relationship between those needs and the fostering of critical being through recommended teaching practice.

### **Original contribution to educational knowledge**

While this issue will be explored explicitly in chapter 6, I want to highlight briefly why I believe this research contributes in a unique and original manner to current educational knowledge. Firstly in examining Barnett's (1997) model specifically in relation to its applicability in the classroom, it is the first time that such an approach has been taken. Barnett presents his model as a macro solution to a deficit he perceives to exist at present in higher education. Secondly I believe that my approach to this issue through the use of very particular techniques in the context of a specific module offers an alternative perspective to teaching and learning and will contribute in an original way to the body of educational knowledge and research. Thirdly the use of the reflection action project (RAP) as both a process of learning and as a provider of research data that is spontaneous and in the moment can offer valuable and alternative insights into how adults learn.

Fourthly the manner in which I will present the research analysis through a thematic framing of concepts and interconnections that emerge highlights a unique model of presentation in terms of this work. It indicates the exercise of an independent critical power in terms of methods and approach to the overall study. Finally I believe the research will highlight some fundamental weaknesses in the model that reduce its effectiveness as a teaching tool and raises questions about its value as a suitable construct in its current form within higher education.

### **Limitations of this Study**

One clear limitation of this study is that it focuses on a relatively small number of mature students across three different programmes within Tipperary Institute. Within this framework, the study explores a number of complex techniques and discussions with eight students of varying age, gender and background. The case-study nature of the research may raise questions relating to the value of this work to others. However, the study does engage with generic aspects of learning (critical thinking, reflection and action) that are universal in nature and applicable to programmes in higher education worldwide. As a result the findings should, I believe, inform others regarding the dynamics of adult learning across a broad range of situations. In addition, the interpretive model employed here is not designed to provide sweeping generalisations about adult learners, but rather to create the opportunity for the reader to interpret the findings from his/her own particular perspective and context.

Another limitation of the study is that in exploring the development of critical being among adult learners, the dimensions of the study are related quite specifically to this area and to the underlying teaching and learning methods involved. Other aspects, such as the role of the facilitator and the implications of this work on my own teaching practice, are peripheral elements that are explored to a lesser degree and should be addressed in more detail in future research.

### **Overview of Dissertation**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 examines and reviews the literature and key concepts that inform the study. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology employed and why I believe it is the most appropriate for this particular piece of work. Chapter 4 will present the data in a thematic model analysing the findings in relation to the first research question. The underlying teaching and learning methods that impacted on the work, as stated in the second research question and the implications of this for my teaching, are explored in Chapter 5. The final chapter presents the significance of the study and the overall implications of the study for adult learning and for my practice.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

The broad thrust of this research is grounded in the tradition of student-centered learning, where the emphasis is on greater engagement with knowledge, understanding and development and less with instrumental outcomes and results. This tradition finds its roots in the Socratic discussion techniques popular in ancient Greece and developed further during the Enlightenment by thinkers like Rousseau and finally given specific expression in the last two centuries by educationalists such as Dewey (1916), Montessori (1949), Freire (1970) and Bruner (1996). Student-centered learning acknowledges students' needs, gives them the opportunity to participate fully in their own learning, is open and discursive and builds collaboration and trust between teacher and student. In the modern classroom, this approach requires the teacher to review his/her role as an expert, to negotiate learning options, to facilitate and influence rather than teach didactically and to acquire flexibility. This is the learning context within which this research takes place. In chapter 1 I have outlined briefly what this research is about, the key questions being addressed and the implications of this for my practice as a teacher.

The focus of this chapter is to review selected literature in order to present an overview of the theoretical framework and the significant concepts that are central to this research. As the literature in these areas is extensive, I want to concentrate on what are generally

considered the most significant contributions and the seminal writings because these have informed my study and therefore provide the context for this work. While some of the theories discussed present contrasting perspectives, their purpose is to locate Barnett's model within current educational thinking, highlight anomalies and possible deficiencies that may exist in this model and suggest a broader theoretical framework that will I believe give the research credibility and clarity.

The theoretical framework that I want to construct revolves primarily around the work of Dewey and Vygotsky and their theories on learning, experience, reflection, development and higher mental functions and where Barnett's (1997) model fits into this construct. I believe the Barnett model is a derivative of these two and that critical being can be viewed as a higher mental function. Consequently critical being may lack effectiveness as a learning and transformational model unless scaffolded within the Dewey and Vygotsky frameworks. By demonstrating the relationship between these theories, I believe the value and concerns that exist in relation to the Barnett model will emerge. In relation to the aim of looking at my practice I would like to look at the work of Schön, Argyris and Mezirow and at how the theories of reflective practice and learning for transformation derive from the central tenets of Dewey and Vygotsky. I will also draw on the work of Belenky *et al*, entitled *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986), as a possible schema or taxonomy to evaluate levels of knowing and their relationship to the practice of critical being. Finally, I want to establish where Barnett's (1997) theory of critical being fits into this construct and its application in the context of the adult learners who participated in this research. While Barnett's theory can be clearly sourced in the work of

John Dewey, I want to explore the possibility that in the context of higher education today and the changing profile of students, particularly in the mature category, his model may provide new insights into the nature of learning and how these students can be taught. It will also require looking at the model of critical being as a research tool and its value within educational research. In the case of Vygotsky, there is a growing recognition that his work on learning and development is groundbreaking; his ideas are being applied to education more and more, and in varying contexts. In this study I hope to demonstrate how his theories can provide a framework for exploring the learning and development that the participants have experienced.

There is also a need to highlight some of the conceptual areas that have a significant bearing on this research. These areas will provide a contextual backdrop for the work and will also impact on the interpretation and analysis of data in Chapter 4. These concepts will include: critical being (along with its various elements); reflection; reflective practice; adult education and lifelong learning; education for transformation and emancipation; characteristics of adult learners (particularly characteristics that may relate specifically to non-traditional learners); experiential learning; concepts relating to teaching and, in particular, to the delivery of a personal development programme. The concepts of *critical* and *reflection* are central and require discussion here in relation to their varied interpretations and the subsequent challenge of framing these within a complex theoretical analysis. To begin with however I want to look at Barnett's model of critical being and its related concepts.

## **Critical being and associated concepts**

Critical being is described by Barnett as “*that state of human being in which is integrated the three forms of criticality*” (1997:179). Criticality embraces critical reason, critical self reflection and critical action and is described as a “*human disposition of engagement where it is recognised that the object of attention could be other than it is*” (1997:179). The component of critical reason is oriented towards formal knowledge and is subdivided into two elements; critical thinking and critical thought defined as lower and higher forms of critical reason respectively. A critical person therefore is one who has taken on these three forms of criticality and so acquires the state of critical being and in doing so has integrated the three domains of criticality; knowledge, self and the world.

### *The concept of Critical*

The term ‘critical’ as applied in relation to critical being is a central concept in this study. The definitions attached to it embody the theoretical framework underpinning this work. A good starting-point is to look at the traditional associations of the word and then explore some alternative meanings as a way of identifying what might be lacking in the Barnett model. A cursory glance at the common meaning of the word reveals little; exercising careful judgment or evaluating concepts with questions like ‘why?’ or ‘compared to what?’ offer limited opportunities for exploration of ‘critical’. Dewey and Schön’s models of learning and reflection tend to place the word within these limited parameters even though Dewey’s notion of meaning must be constantly reshaped by

thinking and reflection and informed by experience. This would liberate the learner from fixities, habit and outmoded tradition. Critical thinking and reflection for Dewey must be grounded and tested in experience and not divorced from it as can sometimes be the case with the more purely scientific forms of empiricism. *“There is, however, a definite opposition between an idea or a fact grasped merely intellectually and the idea or fact which is emotionally colored because it is felt to be connected with the need and satisfactions of the whole personality”*(Dewey,1933: 277). Dewey’s model has a distinctly individualistic and affective emphasis. Barnett’s model, while containing an action element, lacks the experiential dynamic at its centre and he does not embed the practice of critical being within the experience of the whole personality. By contrast the Marxist framework of knowledge opens other possibilities in relation to the word critical at a societal level.

Marx’s interpretation of the word challenges the power-base for every idea as well as its content. While many would suggest that Marx is not strictly a philosopher but rather a historical polemicist (Magee 1998), his dialectical model of history is a fundamental challenge to the very structures upon which modern society is built. This model declares that particular classes rule society at particular times and that class defines which ideas are acceptable. Within the Marxist model it is therefore not simply the ideas that must be questioned, but the very power relations that perpetuate them, who controls these ideas and how they are used to control others. Within his stated domain of the world, Barnett’s model has the capacity to accommodate this view in that the practice of critical being would allow students to challenge such power relations at an intellectual level but not as



an agent of control or subjugation. Barnett views critical being as a way of breaking academic and societal hegemonies and creating a more self reliant and critically aware individual who can survive independently in a diverse world. Accordingly, in this research it is not enough to establish whether the participants have developed their capacity to think, reflect and act critically. It is necessary to look for evidence that their view of the world and their relationship to it has altered significantly and that it can be grounded clearly in real experience and not simply abstract ideas. 'Critical' here would also need to include an awareness of their own development in terms of their higher mental functions. It is my intention to argue that the dynamic that occurs in the Personal Development classroom may allow for this to be explored in a very explicit manner. Exploration of the word 'critical' raises other issues about its relationship to thinking and reflection and how it needs to be understood in this context.

### *The concept of Critical Thinking*

Barnett's model of critical being presents three constituent elements: critical reason, critical reflection and critical action. Each element has specific characteristics and unique features that give it its identity. Barnett claims that each contributes to a totality that is critical being but fails to provide a framework either for implementation or evaluation of the model. Other frameworks may therefore be required to carry out this task.

When one considers the word 'thinking', it triggers associations with a myriad of concepts. Many people confuse thinking with intelligence or with academic achievement.

De Bono (1993) distinguishes clearly between thinking and intelligence, stating that thinking is the *'operating skill with which intelligence acts upon experience'* (1993:6). Thinking, therefore, is a tool to be used to solve problems and to make sense of experience. It is a task-driven activity used to address objective problems or subjective concerns. De Bono further distinguishes between reactive and proactive thinking, observing that the former is predominantly used in education, where students react to information given to them rather than proactively creating or constructing new information. He makes the point that *'it is not the fault of education that pro-active thinking is not so easy to handle as reactive thinking. But it is the fault of education to suppose that reactive thinking is sufficient'* (1993:10). De Bono sees critical thinking as reactive and negative at an educational level especially because it seeks to find fault rather than to constructively create alternatives. It therefore forms only one element of thinking, the other being creativity. De Bono sees creativity and perception as vital elements of proactive critical thinking whereas Barnett's model of critical thinking appears to lack these elements. It is this absence from Barnett's schema that I believe reduces its capacity as both a teaching method and research tool. This issue will be discussed again in chapters 4 and 6. Barnett's notion of critical thought as distinct from critical thinking offers a more holistic view of thinking and is more in line with De Bono's proactive thinking model. I shall come to Barnett's model later, but first I want to discuss Brookfield's more traditional and practical analysis of critical thinking.

In contrast to De Bono, Stephen Brookfield's work on critical thinking (1987) provides some practical approaches to developing critical thinking among learners, primarily in the

Dewey/Schön mould, being more of a reactive thinking model. In this regard he talks of critical thinking as a process rather than an outcome, as being emotive as well as rational and as being prompted by positive as well as negative events. Like Dewey (1933) and Mezirow (1990), Brookfield sees critical thinking as a lived activity embedded in experience, leading in a reflective way to a '*changed conceptual perspective*' (1987:14). Doubt may often play a more prominent role than belief, which illustrates the questioning nature of critical thinking. However, he also recognises its dialectical nature in that it is also concerned with understanding and resolving contradictions. He quotes Morgan, who states that '*dialectical analysis shows us that the management of organizations, of society, and of personal life ultimately involves the management of contradictions*' (1986:266 *op. cit.*, p.13). Here we have Brookfield recognising the broader possibilities of critical thinking in both the traditional and to a lesser extent Marxist sense. He identifies four stages in the process of critical thinking, which is initiated by a trigger event (the first stage). This leads to the second stage, comprising an appraisal of various alternatives and their inherent contradictions. Thirdly, new ideas are tested and explored. Fourthly, these ideas are integrated into the fabric of our thinking. Parallels exist here with Dewey's model of thinking which involves experience, reflection, alternative ideas and the fixing or embedding of learning. Critical thinking therefore has a variety of perspectives as presented here and Barnett's model of critical thinking leans clearly in the direction of the Dewey model but also attempts to encompass a broad societal dimension. This attempt to straddle two paradigms results in reducing the element of personal experience and the domain of self and this deficit will emerge again later in the significance of the study. While Brookfield attempts to provide a more holistic view of

critical thinking, he also suggests that adults need to learn to think in this way and posits that it cannot necessarily be assumed that they can do so naturally.

Adults develop 'frameworks of understanding', according to Brookfield, based on assumptions that are embedded by their experience. When these assumptions are challenged, they undermine the frameworks of understanding, which in turn can distort the adult's capacity to make meaning. Through the practice of critical thinking adults can develop authentic frameworks of understanding. Brookfield suggests that an authentic framework of understanding can best be measured by using Mezirow's model of identifying meaning perspectives (1985). To recognise an authentic framework one must therefore: be informed by complete and accurate information; see experience in a more integrative, inclusive and discriminating way; free oneself from internal and external forms of constraint or coercion; develop a more comprehensive historical and cultural understanding of all aspects of the framework; and engage in dialogue with as many alternative viewpoints as possible in order to enhance the framework in every way. From Brookfield's perspective, critical thinking is the cornerstone upon which this process is built. In the absence of a similar framework in Barnett's model, Mezirow's model could inform the framework analysis for this research as it may offer a schema for testing and evaluating the existence of real critical thinking among the study's participants.

### *The concept of Critical Thought*

While Barnett (1997) sees critical thinking as one of the stages that lead to critical being, he distinguishes clearly between critical thinking and critical thought. Critical thinking is

a set of skills from which, when *'turned on the problem situation and providing the permitted procedures are followed, legitimate outcomes will flow'* (1997:16). In this regard Barnett classifies critical thinking in four ways. First, it should offer a measure of control, standards and validity in addressing any issue or concept. Secondly, it can allow for the reconstitution of his three domains of being: self, knowledge and the world. Thirdly, critical thinking should develop wisdom through understanding, autonomy, contemplation and the broadening of intellectual growth. Fourthly, critical thinking must be viewed as praxis, or taking action, towards a better life, with the aim of achieving emancipation through collaboration and critical reason. For critical thinking to become transformational, however, it must have a 'critical edge'. Barnett identifies critical thought as one of the higher levels of critical reason that provides this critical edge, whereas critical thinking operates at a lower level. *'Critical thought is educationally radical'* (1997:4) because, for Barnett, teachers and students are pursuing a joint inquiry after truth from a similar epistemological level. It is also radical in social and cultural terms because critical thought has a societal dimension, and the function of higher education for Barnett is to challenge the knowledge structures that exist within society, which can be achieved through helping students to realise their transformatory potential through the practice of critical being. Again Barnett presents a broad model encompassing the domains of self and the world without giving any indication as to how this can be achieved. Unlike Dewey's model which is clearly embedded in the individual and his experience, Barnett attempts to merge the self and the world within the framework of critical thought. The question remains whether critical thought has the capacity to engage such breadth and diversity.

Critical thought has four forms within Barnett's framework: *epistemic*, which sets out to reproduce academic identities; *professional*, which seeks to establish professional identities in the wider world; *civic critical thought*, which is concerned with polity; and *corporate critical thought*, which focuses on developing instrumental reflexivity and sustaining economic change. While he acknowledges the existence of these models, he argues that instead of pushing the boundaries of higher education into new paradigms, they are simply reinforcing what already exists and, paradoxically, contradicting the very essence of the word 'critical'. Therefore, is the critical function of higher education being debated in itself or has it become a redundant term in a world that is more interested in generating conformity than real questions? Furthermore, Barnett argues that capitalism promotes individualism and competition at the expense of creativity and collaboration and discourages genuine interdisciplinary dialogue. Reproduction has become more important than revolution or transformation and is contrary to the Marxist paradigm, in which power relations are scrutinised. Critical thought should be collaborative in nature and if it is not, then it is simply another form of unquestioned power preventing real change. Higher education in a world of super-complexity for Barnett requires students to experience multiple discourses that include the practical and experiential, expose them to a critique of every aspect of their academic field and demand a willingness on the part of students to "*see ones own world from other perspectives...the willingness to risk critique...*"(1997: 169). The component of critical thought operates therefore at a macro level stepping beyond the Dewey framework and presents a dynamic challenge to the entire process of higher education. Becoming critical beings will not be a comfortable

journey for students or teachers “*as instrumentality and performativity tighten their grip, so higher education for critical being becomes a necessary counter and means of injecting a creative and transformatory element into society*” (1997: 170). Again Barnett talks in global terms without giving specifics as to how this can be achieved in the classroom and this presents a concern in the context of the individualistic and micro nature of this study.

This also poses a further dilemma in relation to the word ‘critical’ and its application in this research. Barnett asks the question: ‘*Are there any critical standards that we can hold on to?*’ (1997:24). One of the underpinning principles in this research is that adult learners are seeking self-determination through knowledge and understanding and that the application of critical thought is central to the development of a framework of understanding that is rigorous and defensible. Significant meaning perspectives can be fully realised only in an environment that is both intrinsically and extrinsically critical. The data gathered in this research might establish clearly whether self-determination is occurring for this group, and evidence of new and emerging critical thought will be one measure of the process.

This presents a difficulty when attempting to extrapolate meaning from participants in this research by using a concept that is in itself diverse and multidimensional. The answer may be that it is this diversity that provides the opportunity, or range of meanings, to be realised in the context of the experiences and learning of this group. The expansive nature of the concept of ‘critical’ allows it to encompass the multidimensional frameworks and

contradictions that a group of adult learners such as this may bring to the classroom. The discussion and recognition of a traditional, Marxist and postmodern view of 'critical' is not necessarily an attempt to create a new synthesis, but rather to realise, as Barnett suggests, that the nature of learning in higher education has shifted emphasis and that a broader use and application of the term 'critical' may now be required. Indeed, massification has reduced the opportunity to develop critical thinking or thought and higher education is in fact being driven by an instrumental and economic value system that prioritises outcomes over process. Furthermore, massification is forcing disciplines to compete with each other for pupils rather than seek commonalities and explore shared meanings around concepts such as critical (Barnett 1997). There is, therefore, a need to establish a framework that allows for a genuine criticality to be applied to the experiences and learning of this group, to see if there is any indication of critical being taking place. Central to this model proposed by Barnett is the 'self'. If higher education is to address its primary function, then it becomes clear that the *'self constitutes itself through the discourses it encounters'* (Barnett, 1997:34). The critical self must involve itself fully in the process. The contradiction that may lie in the Barnett model is that the domain of self gets subsumed or at best marginalised within the broader societal aspiration that is proposed. However within the Personal Development module that frames this research, the 'self' and exploring the self form the core of the learning process. The 'self' in this case is the non-traditional adult learner who brings specific concerns to the learning environment and who must be discussed in the broader context of adult education and lifelong learning. Resolving this apparent epistemological contradiction will emerge again in chapters 4 and 6.



### *The concept of Being*

The other central concept in this research is that of 'being'. It is a challenging concept because it suggests a state of existence that is permanently in the present and requires a constant awareness of 'the now' in individual experience. It also implicitly incorporates the self as being central to the process of being within a subjective and introspective context. Furthermore, a state of being is an ongoing and instant experience of simultaneous reflection and action driven by critical judgment and immediate responsiveness. Is it possible to experience this state in an educational setting even intermittently, let alone continuously? In this section I would like to explore this concept from an individual and societal perspective, examining it from a number of theoretical angles, with a view to signaling its significance in this study and within a specific education location.

Barnett's concept of critical being and his premise that there is a need to redefine higher education in this context is presented in an alternative conceptual model in the work of Erich Fromm. In *To Have or to Be?* (1978) Fromm explores the relationship between 'having' and 'being' in our lives and argues that western society, in particular, perpetuates a myth that happiness, understanding and fulfillment can be best achieved through the *having* mode. In other words, one's life is defined by possessions, ownership and the desire to accumulate things: '*I am more the more I have*' (1978:15). Corey and Schneider-Corey (1999) have argued that the pursuit of the *having* mode of living in

western society has added to an 'existential Vacuum' in people's lives that they try to fill through the accumulation of external possessions. While Fromm's viewpoint is clearly presented in a Marxist context, he identifies a gap in human development that Barnett suggests might be partially addressed in higher education through the practice of critical being. The suggestion here of replacing external gratification with internal understanding and self-awareness is not particularly new or revolutionary. Dewey's internal processes of reflective thinking and Vygotsky's development of higher mental functions embrace the notion of 'being' in a manner aspiring to inner growth and understanding. Fromm and Barnett would argue for the need to develop this model of thinking and practice at a societal level. In the context of teaching a module on Personal Development, Fromm's perspective on 'being' provides an affective dimension that is lacking in Barnett's more cognitive and critically explicit model. Some of the findings in this research will I believe embrace both of these dimensions.

Barnett sees higher education as playing a pivotal role in this process. In his view society needs to shift from a changing (often in a thoughtless manner) to a learning role. The achievement of this will require three stages. First, society needs to develop a reflexive capacity that addresses the relationship between the self and the world. Secondly, this reflexive capacity must be a mass enterprise. Thirdly, it must be accompanied by critical and constructive action. Barnett's argument may have some merit intellectually but is dependent on creating a major shift in human thinking and behaviour and is accrediting higher education with a capacity and influence that may not exist. If this capacity is to be realised, it must find expression or development in the higher education classroom in

an experiential and discursive manner at some point. Otherwise it remains an intellectual aspiration and contrary to Dewey's position. Fromm, on the other hand though not advocating any specific educational application, embeds his notion of 'being' squarely at the centre of human experience and defends it on the basis of social and moral fundamentalism.

Fromm suggests that the *being* mode must be understood in purely experiential terms. *Being* refers to experience. We cannot have or own experiences; we simply live them. Even describing this process is a challenge because, as Fromm highlights, '*the words point to an experience, they are not the experience. Hence being is indescribable in words and is communicable only by sharing my experience*' (1978:92). While Fromm is suggesting, as a broad philosophical principle, that the mode of *being* is a preferable way to live one's life, Barnett's concept of critical being also goes further than the simple pursuit of learning in a reified context. If higher education is to produce critical beings, this, according to Barnett, can be achieved only through the development of the three domains of human experience: knowledge, self and the world. In his view, higher education has failed to address the latter two of these domains up to now, but they can no longer be ignored as society changes. Each of these domains is addressed through critical reason, critical self-reflection and critical action respectively. Developing critical being, *per* Barnett, is transformational and liberating and will grant adult learners the opportunity to realise their full potential.

It is clear that despite different philosophical positions, for Fromm and Barnett, striving towards a state of being in the human or educational context is a worthwhile objective and can be achieved, to some degree at least, through engaging with education (knowledge) and experience (self and the world) at a high level of criticality. This view is undoubtedly embedded in Dewey's (1938) broader framework of reflection and experience and is also expressed in Mezirow's (1990) concept of communicative learning. Through a Personal Development module, I believe these two dimensions of 'being' can be accommodated and lead to new and unique understandings for adult learners.

### **Dewey, experience and reflection**

Central to Dewey's philosophical framework is the idea of change and its constant mutability. This notion is apparent through all the writings of this prolific author. Of particular relevance to this research is his work on experience and reflection. Throughout this chapter many of Dewey's ideas on reflection are discussed and elaborated under various headings. Here I want to recount a number of brief, general observations on experience and experiential learning made by Dewey, which will have a bearing on this work.

All learning stems from experience and is initiated by it. This leads to opportunities and data for reflection as each individual makes sense of his/her own experience, which is unique to him/her. This in turn leads to reflective thought, described by Dewey 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 constitutes reflective thought.

*(How we Think 1933:9)*

The learning environment needed to be activity-based, interactive and a place where student experience could be explored fully. Dewey did not necessarily see further action as a natural next step, however. Learners would bring the reflective thought process to the next experience. Barnett (1997) is more explicit on this: the subsequent action should be defined as the consequence of the thinking and reflection that has gone before it. For Dewey, this learning experience leads to outer activity, which in turn leads to inner freedom. This inner freedom should give the learner the power to judge wisely, to evaluate consequences and to make decisions based on further reflection. Experience therefore generates a cycle of change that is being redefined constantly by the learning process. Much of the structure of this research is conceived within this framework, with the reflective action project (RAP) stimulating a set of actions that moves the learners beyond their current experience, thereby creating a reflexive, regenerative opportunity. Dewey's model of experiential learning does not move beyond the first cycle.

## **Vygotsky and Education**

In a short period between 1925 and 1934, Lev Vygotsky wrote extensively on many areas of psychology and his theories have been very influential, particularly in education (Vygotsky 1978, Ivic 1994, Harland 2003). While much of his work in psychology focused on the development and learning patterns of children, the application of his ideas to the area of adult education has been widespread in recent years (Ivic 1994). Rozycki and Goldfarb (2000) suggest that Vygotsky's central question is a simple one: how do humans, in their short life trajectory, advance so far beyond their initial biological endowment and in such diverse directions? Vygotsky believed that the answer was to be found in understanding the development and structure of the human consciousness and its relationship to culture and social interaction (Ardichvili 2001). He wrote:

Culture is the product of social life and human social activity. That is why just by raising the question of the cultural development of behaviour we are directly introducing the social plane of development.

(Vygotsky in Wertsch J. V. (ed.) 1981:164)

Influenced by the events of the October Revolution in 1917 and the political model of the Soviet Union that emerged subsequently, Vygotsky's theories were framed within the Marxist model of society and historical materialism. In other words, changes in society and material life produce changes in human nature. Vygotsky, like Marx, believed that the purpose of a theory was not simply to interpret and understand behaviour or learning,

but to change it. Critical being may also have the possibility in practice to change behaviour and lead to a new critical action. This possibility will be explored more fully in chapter 4.

In the Marxist context of ‘historical materialism’, Vygotsky developed his ontogenetic system of mental development, which is also a historical theory of individual development (Ivic 1994, Turner 2005). He saw development as being linked closely to culture, social interaction and the historical dimension of mental development. Ivic describes this as a ‘*socio-historic-cultural theory of the development of higher mental functions*’ (1994:3). Human beings cannot develop in isolation because they are characterised by ‘primary sociability’. This social interaction is vital if the higher functions of deliberate attention, logical memory, verbal and conceptual thought and complex emotions are to develop. Culturally this development takes place via the transmission of signs, semiotic systems and communications through ‘mediation’ as part of social interaction. Vygotsky describes mediation as taking place:

... in higher forms of human behaviour, the individual actively modifies the stimulus situations as part of the process of responding to it.

(1978:14)

As development occurs, learning is reinforced through culturally generated tools, such as those mentioned above, and also including language (written and oral), artifacts and rituals. These tools extend the natural possibilities of the individual and restructure his mental functions. This could be defined as Vygotsky’s first model of development. Due

to the arbitrary and random nature of the individual's interaction with these tools, their primary role is to help the individual to manage objects or external realities within a specific cultural context. However, developing the internal realities of the individual requires a more formal and structured interaction, and Vygotsky viewed education as the key way to achieve this.

In Vygotsky's second model of development he describes education as the 'artificial' development of the individual (Ivic 1994). In this model education becomes development and leads to the growth of the metacognitive dimension, whereby the individual exerts control over his knowledge acquisition processes. While higher mental functions such as this are also socially and culturally mediated, education provides a specific artificial framework that allows the learner to move from impulsive behaviour to instrumental action (Rozycki and Goldfarb 2000). Vygotsky believed that education could not be reduced to the acquisition of a body of information, but instead should provide the tools, internal techniques and intellectual operations to generate a process of development for the learner. He believed schools taught isolated and meaningless facts when they ought to be teaching systems of knowledge within the context of social and cultural interaction. Vygotsky rejected the view that development is independent of learning or that development is learning or any combination of these two (Vygotsky 1978). He argued that all learning brings with it a previous history and that learning and development are inter-related from the earliest stage of living. However, at the 'artificial' stage, or in the formal educational context, learning needs to be matched with the learner's developmental level. This involves identifying the learner's actual developmental stage,



or his Zone of Current Development (ZCD), and through mediation and collaboration with others helping the learner to progress to another developmental level. Vygotsky referred to this as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In this study the potential of the reflection action project (RAP) to act as a link between development and change and provide the opportunity for mediation to participants will emerge during the study and will be discussed in chapter 4. It can relate to Vygotsky's ZPD

#### *The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*

Vygotsky's ZPD is a practical application of his historical dialectic. The 'artificial' model of education acts as a type of bridge, allowing the learner to progress from one stage of development to another with the aid of appropriate collaboration. Vygotsky states that *'learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child [learner] is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers'* (1978:90). Therefore, properly organised learning results in mental development, but does not coincide with learning because *'the developmental processes lag behind the learning processes: this sequence then results in zones of proximal development'* (1978:90). He also points out that the progress of development can vary in different disciplines because each learner has a different relationship with different subjects.

In the context of this research, I want to examine the relationship between Personal Development as a discipline, the practice of critical being and the learning and

developmental processes. Can Vygotsky's model offer insights into the manner in which the students participating in this research progressed beyond their zone of current development and discovered new understandings as a result of the collaboration and mediation that occurred? I would like to explore this in the context of a qualitative model of historical development that operates at a subjective level and involves a communicative learning process where meaning is constructed (Mezirow 1990). I believe that because Barnett does not provide any specifics regarding the application of critical being, the Dewey and Vygotsky framework may allow me to test Barnett's model to see if real learning and development has taken place for the participants. Furthermore I believe the reflection action project (RAP) model will act as a mechanism to allow participants to identify their current stage of being and also provide a platform for development as well as being a rich source of evidence of that change taking place. Barnett's model is deficient in this respect.

## **Reflection**

The purpose of this section is, first, to explore the concept of 'reflection' and its various components and functions. This may appear straightforward, but has in fact become more complex in recent times. Secondly, I would like to establish some of the key elements of reflection that will form the basis of the thematic framework analysis in Chapter 4.

The notion of reflection is neither new nor unique to the educational process. However, in recent times it has been gaining greater currency within education and other professions

(nursing, in particular) as a means of exploring students' intrapersonal dialogue in a more explicit and focused manner. Wade points out that reflection '*reveals to us aspects of our experience that might have remained hidden had we not taken time to consider them*' (1996:64). What are these experiences that might otherwise remain hidden? According to Beveridge (1997), the most common topics written about by students in reflective journals relate to managing feelings, processing course content and controlling the learning environment. However, Moon (1999) suggests that developing the ability to reflect can be a difficult process and not everyone manages to do so initially. In many cases it needs to be nurtured and managed. Moon also links the practice of reflection with the development of wisdom and maturity as the learner grows in his understanding and management of uncertainty and ill-structured problems. This throws some light on our understanding of reflection, but in a limited way. The difficulty, as mentioned earlier, lies in finding some commonality in the literature around the meaning and function of reflection in the educational context.

### *Defining Reflection*

In this study reflection will feature in various contexts and with specific meanings, but I would like to begin here with a general exploration of this concept because the range of meaning given to reflection in the literature is broad. Moon (1999) begins her book on this subject by referring to common-sense understandings of reflection. In doing so she immediately highlights one of the main problems associated with the word, by listing the common synonyms used when referring to reflection. These include phrases such as

'reasoning', 'thinking', 'reviewing', 'problem-solving', 'inquiry', 'reflective judgment', 'critical reflection' and so on. The consequences are significant because, as she points out, *'when words are missing, concepts tend to be missing and the absence of concepts may distort understanding'* (1999: viii). Within the specialised area of education, a question of definition also emerged in the work of Dewey (1933), Habermas (1971), Van Manen (1977, 1991) and Kitchener and King (1994). While one can find similarity and agreement between them at some levels, disparity also exists. The latter three viewed reflection from a hierarchical developmental perspective, with the reflective process moving from structured certainty to ill-structured uncertainty. Yet all three would accept Dewey's view as a basic framework for understanding reflection. Dewey accepted the notion of reflection as a process of progression, but saw that process in terms of building a series of connected thoughts leading in a sustained way to a common end. In this way, each stage of reflective thought builds toward a solution rather than another problem. His description sums it up clearly:

Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a con-sequence—a consecutive ordering that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each outcome in turn leans back on, or refers to, its predecessors.

(1933:4)

Dewey's sense of reflection suggests a linear and symmetrical structure that can be addressed to specific situations, but not necessarily to ill-structured ones. There is also an

implication that one step will lead naturally to the next. However, different viewpoints give rise to other complexities.

Van Manen (1991) takes a similar view to Dewey in relation to reflection. But unlike Barnett (1997)—whose focus is on the broad generality of education, particularly at higher level—Van Manen addresses reflection in terms of curriculum development and pedagogy. He accepts that reflection is central to critique and evaluation in these areas. Like Dewey, Van Manen views reflection as an action that can distance the individual from the event in question and generate a level of objectivity. In *The Tact of Teaching* (1991), he identifies four levels of reflection. The first two relate specifically to reflection on everyday thinking and action, common-sense experiences and particular incidents. Thirdly, he suggests that we reflect more systematically on our experiences and those of others to allow us to develop theoretical and critical frameworks in which to place and interpret our actions. Finally, we reflect on the way we reflect in order to access '*the nature of knowledge, how knowledge functions in action and how it can be applied to our active understanding of our practical action*' (1991:100). He believes that through reflection, educators will act more thoughtfully in their use of knowledge and experience. Reflection is itself an experience that, as Dewey suggests, is a temporary suspension or stepping away from the action of the experience to allow space to address and grow accustomed to a new or revised meaning perspective. There is some similarity here with Habermas' knowledge constitutive interests (1971). Furthermore, Habermas' idea of thoughtfulness, or 'being reflective', suggests a state of mind or consciousness that resonates with Barnett's (1997) and Fromm's (1978) concept of 'being'.

One element of consensus that emerges from all of these views is the emancipatory and transformative nature of reflection. As a model, reflection works towards identifying the best solution based on critical reflection, clarifying the current status of knowledge and moving towards a new theory and transformational change leading to action. A second element relates specifically to the relationship between reflection and ill-structured problems, and this is the next component of reflection that I want to address.

### *Ill-structured knowledge*

Moon (1999) suggests that the highest stage of reflection involves an awareness of and an ability to deal with uncertain knowledge. But she does ask the question: *'Do these different ways in which reflection is viewed describe different mental activities or one activity with different interpretations?'* (1999:5). Different theorists according to Moon are not absolutely clear about this. Kitchener and King's (1994) model of reflective judgment is an empirical model that defines seven stages in the process, but acknowledges that only the final two stages are truly reflective, primarily because they are dealing with uncertain knowledge and the learner's capacity to interpret it. In their model they also distinguish between critical thinking, which is defined as a set of learned skills, and reflective thinking, which is defined as using those skills to deal with uncertain knowledge. Clearly they see the stages of reflection as different activities, but they also noted that when presented with ill-structured problems, participants in the study stayed within their reflective judgment stage or moved only one stage above it. Their study also

revealed a number of important findings. First, those younger students who have had a structured education are not necessarily able to practice reflective judgment. Secondly, mature students who have been away from education for long periods of time have the capacity to reach level seven. Thirdly, educators should not target responses at more than two stages above where the student normally responds because they rarely comprehend at that level. Finally, if transformation is to take place for the learner, then it must occur through reflection on ill-structured problems (where there are no absolute answers). This will involve disequilibrium for the learner and will challenge meaning perspectives. The process must therefore be supportive and developmentally appropriate. In doing the reflection action project (RAP) in this study, the participants who engaged with an ill structured problem or flawed relationships in their own lives experienced greater self awareness and transformational change. They also used greater creativity and imagination while carrying out the task and seeking solutions. This suggests that critical reflection must engage fully with this type of problem for a real dialectical dynamic to exist and this will be explored further in chapters 4 and 6.

This issue will come up again when we look at Vygotsky's (1978) developmental learning model, and parallels may become evident that will be useful in analysing data. Kitchener and King (1994) believe that these stages of reflective judgment are essential as educational tools if high quality critical reflection is to be realised. These diverse views, while overlapping significantly, highlight the obvious importance of bringing some clarity of definition to the concept of reflection. This is necessary because it can

clarify these activities for both the researcher and the participant and inform the educational context of the study.

### *Reflection as process*

Reaching consensus on a definition of reflection is clearly problematic as can be seen in the literature and highlights a difficulty that presents itself in this research primarily in terms of how it will be used in this study. For the participants in this study however reflection must be both a process that enables them to come to new understandings and an agent or catalyst of change as they move towards becoming critical beings. It is best engaged with ill structured problems where dialectical tension exists and where real exploration of self occurs. This is the context of reflection in this study. It should further be noted that defining the nature of reflection will not necessarily inform us about its relationship to the process of learning (Moon 1999). While a definition is helpful, as a researcher and a teacher my interest here must also include some exploration of the process of reflection, of the nature of reflective learning and of the relationship between the teacher, the learner and reflection. As Moon tells us:

The difficulty of distinguishing the process of learning from the representation of that learning is common to many studies of reflection and learning (1999:7).



In this context therefore the focus of the study will be more on the participant's representations of their learning and the impact of this on their individual capacity to become critical beings.

According to Dewey (1933), reflection should imply purpose, although answers may sometimes occur without conscious reflection having taken place. This suggests an intuitive dimension to reflection. Schön's (1983) model of reflection-in-action is a further development of this. However, it should be made clear that both Schön and Dewey represent a more traditionalist viewpoint, which contrasts sharply with the Marxist perspective. The latter views reflection as a social and political tool which enables power relations to be challenged and transformed. Reflection engages with complex issues that have no immediate solution (Kitchener and King 1994). Moon again suggests that reflection '*brings clarity to unclear situations*' (1999:8). This may involve bringing together previous knowledge in order to transcend that previous knowledge and move towards greater clarity.

Reflection therefore has both a process and an instrumental dynamic. It allows the individual to move from one point of understanding to another point, which is more informed, and thereby progresses his understanding in some way, although that movement may not be linear or sequential. Knowledge, or epistemic models, may also imply a relationship to a reflective process without referring explicitly to reflection. The final stage of knowledge as posited by Belenky *et al* (1986) is a position of constructed

knowledge where the knower understands that knowledge is provisional and that the knower is himself also part of the construction of that knowledge. To achieve this implies reflection and has much in common with Dewey's concept of reflection as a tool for learning. Furthermore, reflection embodies a process of thought that may be seen as transformative. Mezirow suggests that reflection '*enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving*' (1990:1) and that critical reflection '*involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built*' (1990:1). I would suggest that the Reflective Action Project (RAP) addresses this specifically. While the word 'critical' was discussed in detail earlier, these elements could be considered primary components of the reflective process. This research hopes to pull together these components of reflection, to evaluate them as elements in the process of critical being and to examine their significance to the learning and the development of the participants.

In the world of the adult learner I think reflection is crucial to determine if what he has learned is authentic and justified and the meaning perspective not distorted in any way. In the context of this work, participants were asked to practice reflection both as process and as outcome. Many of the activities required them to critique their fundamental beliefs and values in relation to learning. This involved reflecting through an experience or activity as it occurred and reflecting on the experience after the event (Schön 1983). It also involved engaging with ill-structured problems, for which there are no absolute answers, challenging meaning perspectives and evaluating transformational change (Mezirow 1990).

### *The concept of Critical Reflection*

Within the epistemological framework that is Barnett's theory of critical being are eight forms of critical self-reflection (1997). He uses the word 'self' specifically because '*there is no abstract self on which to reflect*' (1997:95). Each form of reflection is linked to one of his three domains of criticality: self, knowledge and the world. Barnett doesn't suggest any chronological pattern to this schema, but it is nonetheless clear that reflection must begin with the self before the other two domains can be engaged fully. All eight forms are placed within the learning context and he argues that within higher education they are not taken on equally. Reflection that links to the domain of the world tends to dominate, and external agendas and instrumental outcomes are prioritised. In fact, reflection that focuses on the domain of self is largely neglected and he suggests that students must have the capacity to understand the self if they are to meet the needs of modern society. It is clear that Barnett's (1997) view is derived and developed from Dewey's (1933, 1938) model and also the work of Vygotsky (1978). Of these eight categories, three operate within the domain of the self (educational reflection, reflection as self-realisation and critical reflection), one within the knowledge domain (self-reflection on the students' own disciplinary competence) and four within the world domain (reflection as metacompetence, the reflective practitioner, reflection as social formation and societal reflection).

The three forms within the domain of the self are of particular importance in this research as they may help to form an analytical framework that could illuminate the learning of those participating and the practice of critical being. In the personal development context this reflection can become reflexive and through this process may allow students to reflect on their reflections in a structured manner. This progression must be internal and not instrumentally driven, while the reflexive nature of the process encourages freedom of thought and action, where no possibility is ruled out and no constraints are placed on critique. The three forms of reflection within the domain of self are critical to this process. Educational reflection enables the learner to seek truth, analyse viewpoints, search for deeper understandings, improve communication and develop as a person. Reflection as self-realisation offers learners the opportunity to own their work as a process of self-discovery and, as Barnett points out, '*mature students in particular live out this form of self reflection*' (1997:98). The themes of 'thinking about thinking' and 'reflection and the self' explored in chapter 4 are particular examples of this.

Critical reflection leads to transformation and emancipation and challenges students to re-evaluate old conceptions of self. In other words, it allows them to question meaning perspectives and look for distortions. Barnett's (1997) eight forms of reflection do not occur in isolation, but neither are they exclusively dependent on each other. They are listed as components but he does not attempt to prioritise them or outline any stages that must be gone through to achieve them. This makes them linear and static as research or teaching tools. However, traditionally the emphasis in the learning context has not been in the *self* domain. The learner's exploration and development of self will lead to action

and change within the other domains of criticality, increasing capacity and informing experience. Therefore reflection as social formation, metacompetence and societal reflection cannot be ignored, but these will take a secondary role to the development of the self. It is the self that determines the learner's relationship to the wider world and the capacity to relate to that community, to act in that community's best interest and to develop skills that will benefit that community. These are affected only when the self has reached a significant level of development, whereby one's full potential has been activated. In recent times higher education has not nurtured this beyond mere superficial levels. This research attempts to redress that and to explore critical self-reflection as a central process in the development of the learner as he prepares to engage with the wider and 'radically unknowable' world.

#### *The concept of Critical Action*

Mezirow (1990) sees critical reflection as a way of challenging presuppositions leading to thoughtful action. Like Barnett, he recognises the relationship that exists between reflection and action and also that the most significant learning experiences in adulthood involve critical self-reflection that have consequences for the individuals subsequent actions. This leads to a perspective transformation that has cognitive, affective and pragmatic implications. Unlike Barnett, however, Mezirow is also interested in the nature and repercussions of the action taken:

Critical reflection is not concerned with the how or the how-to of action but with the why, the reasons for and the consequences of what we do. (1990:13)

The practice of critical being, if it is to be effective, involves a perspective transformation for the learner, while critical reflection is a central element in both frameworks. Reflection validates what is known and leads to significant action. The choice of actions taken by the group in this study, particularly in the Reflective Action Project (RAP) exercise, is significant and forms an important part of the analytical framework set out in Chapter 4. The critical reflection process requires a full understanding of the concept of 'critical', as we have seen, because to reflect on values or ideas uncritically would not lead to constructive action or significant change. However, Mezirow (1990) recognises that the process of critical reflection can be distorted. If distortions occur, the meaning perspective becomes skewed and the transformation needed for the practice of critical being as Barnett defines it may come unstuck. These distortions can emerge in three distinct formats. The first Mezirow calls epistemic because it relates to the nature and use of knowledge. Thus reification, or the representation of knowledge that is then manipulated in some way, is defined by Mezirow as an epistemic distortion. This problem can be overcome when the adult learner uses critical reflection in an inclusive and integrative manner. The second distortion is socio-cultural, which he describes as:

... taking for granted belief systems that pertain to power and social relationships, especially those currently prevailing and legitimised and enforced by institutions. (1990:15)

If any of these distortions exists, then critical action becomes difficult. Barnett (1997) would also argue that higher education has failed to subject its own ideology to real scrutiny and therefore is not reflecting critically on its own processes and thus possibly leading to further distortions. The result has been a failure to generate critical action, which has created conformity and an unquestioning acceptance of circumstances. Normally it is difficult to evaluate the criticality of actions until after the event. Is it possible to make this evaluation while the action is occurring? The reflection action project (RAP) carried out by the participants in this research explores this possibility over a prolonged period of five days and the details of this model will be fully elaborated in chapter 4.

Mezirow's final type of distortion is termed psychic and signifies assumptions or presuppositions made by adult learners that cause anxiety or prevent action. Trauma or dysfunction in an adult's life can and does lead to psychic distortions, but through collaboration, support and appropriate intervention from the educator, this distortion can be addressed and new actions can be taken. As Barnett (1997) does not explicitly take these factors into account when addressing critical action, his model has an absence of clarity around the problematic nature of action.

The implications here for the learner and for the practice of critical being are relatively self-explanatory as distortions will lead to a failure to act as a critical being in any consistent manner, but the teacher may also experience distortions and his/her presuppositions must be examined continually through effective critical reflection. Practicing critical being in an effective way that demonstrates substantial critical thinking and reflection prior to action is fraught with complexity much of which is not addressed in a practical way by Barnett. Accordingly, in this research it must be approached with a complex evaluative framework using a broader theoretical canvas. Now that the challenging dynamics of critical reflection and action have been examined to some degree, I want to explore the relationship between reflection and learning and its implications for the practice of critical being.

### **Reflective Practice**

The relevance of reflective practice in this research relates primarily to the third research question stated in Chapter 1 and will be explored in detail in Chapter 5. The significance of this work for my teaching with adults cannot be overlooked. Within a mainly interpretive and to a lesser extent action research framework, as is the case here, the implications of that practice for the future and wider application must also be considered carefully. Schön's (1983) focus is about professional practice and not about the nature of reflection itself. The phrases *reflective practice* and *becoming a reflective practitioner* are generally associated with Schön (1983, 1987 and 1991). In his research into the day-to-day practice of professionals, Schön observed what he believed were inadequacies in the



traditional model of professional competence. He believed these were caused by a slavish adherence to the Technical Rational or Positivist model. This model, he argued, led to the professional perceiving his role in terms of a technician who applies scientific knowledge to problems of practice. He described his own, alternative professional model as professional 'artistry' (embracing an interpretivist or constructivist paradigm). This model involved two central concepts: knowing-in-action and reflection-on- and in-action. Schön's model would allow the professional to adapt to changing situations as they occur and to step outside his technical knowledge in order to improvise, where necessary.

Knowing-in-action is described by Schön as a subconscious intelligence displayed by professionals as part of the artistry mentioned above. Similarities exist here between knowing-in-action and Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge (1966). According to Schön, education professionals are now confronted by greater '*complexity, uncertainty, uniqueness, instability and value conflicts*' (1983:14) in their work, which demands a much higher degree of adaptability. The need for an awareness of knowing-in-action as part of the artistry of reflective practice has gained significance. However, Schön (1987) also points out that our tacit knowing-in-action may not be sufficient to deal with every situation. In this instance we must employ either reflection-in-action (reflection as the episode is taking place, leading to a change or shift in direction) or reflection-on-action (reflection after the fact). In the context of an interactive adult learning space, all three may occur in close proximity to one other. One might suggest that what Schön is offering is similar to Belenky's (1986) final stage of knowing or Kitchener and King's (1994) seventh stage of reflective judgment. All three involve a multi-perspective capacity, an

internal process of immediate knowledge construction and an adaptability that allows the professional practitioner to act quickly in response to changing circumstances.

Schön (1983) has argued that the traditional institutional frameworks within which professionals practice have been challenged in recent years and practitioners have had to rely on their own professional values, which do not necessarily exist. Dependence on these traditional institutional frameworks eliminated the need for values or innovation. Espoused theory has worked within the science disciplines but in disciplines such as education, theory-in-practice or knowing-in-action is also needed. Instrumental techniques are useful when making decisions, which is separate from doing. The professional's artistry allows him to step outside the institutional frameworks and in this way deal with the unexpected. However both Moon (1999) and Barnett (1997) are critical of aspects of Schön's theory

Moon (1999) challenges Schön's (1983) ideas regarding knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action. The latter is like a process of trial and error for Schön in that the unexpected consequences of one action will lead to another action. The question for Moon is whether reflection-in-action, which occurs at the time of the action, is a 'stop and think' process or is 'embedded' smoothly into the performance. She suggests that there are contradictions in Schön's writing in this regard. This makes these two concepts difficult to separate for Moon, particularly if much of our knowing in these situations is tacit to begin with.

A problem arises for educators because reflection-in-action consequently becomes difficult to describe and Schön's model is not broad enough in terms of how it relates to the professional's other experiences, cultural understandings and creativity. Barnett describes reflection-in-action as '*a continual interrogation and imaginative reconstruction of one's actions as they are unfolding*' (1997:97). In essence, Barnett agrees with Schön in respect of reflection-in-action, but sees it as only one component of the critical reflection process that learners and indeed educators need to develop. The professional world, according to Schön, is a combination of strategy, action and communication, and reflection-in-action lends a sense of order to the process. Schön suggests that evaluation and execution are essential to reflection-in-action and that they are indistinguishable. Barnett disagrees with this, seeing them as separate because one is not sufficient without the other. He argues that this process might alternatively be referred to as reflection-*for*-action. While Schön's model has generated much research and debate, there are many who see his model as flawed and limited and lacking in specific operational criteria thus leading to difficulties and variations in implementing a consistent model of reflective practice in the classroom. The educator therefore needs to have an open mind and to look carefully at reflective practice as a model of defining professional activity.

When reviewing the literature for this research I have been keenly aware of the disparities that exist between Barnett and Schön in relation to reflection. Part of the reason for this lies in the fact that reflection-in-action operates mainly at a micro level, whereas Barnett's concept of critical being is presented in a macro context. Barnett's model has

not been tested at the micro level, which is the challenge of this research. Given this, it is clear that Dewey's (1938) overriding framework for reflection and experience and Vygotsky's (1978) model of development of higher mental functions offer a wider context into which Barnett and Schön may fit and which add some value to our understanding of their overall theories. There is one other aspect of reflection that needs to be discussed in relation to this work and that is the relationship between reflection and learning.

### *Reflection and Learning*

There has been little theorising in higher education on the nature of learning, and even less on the relationship between learning and reflection (Brockbank and McGill 1998). Moon's (1999) work in this area has been groundbreaking in many respects because she has attempted to link reflection and learning in a variety of contexts. She suggests that reflection is intimately linked to learning in terms of '*learning from, learning that, learning to do, learning to be*' (1999:100). According to Moon, the inputs necessary for reflection are the same as those for learning, yet reflection is not a common topic in the literature on learning. If this is the case, Moon asks, then how can reflection be used to enhance learning? Certainly, other models I have discussed relate learning to higher stages of reflection (Belenky *et al* 1986, Kitchener and King 1994). Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning explores this relationship to a greater degree and his findings are significant, suggesting that in any cycle of understanding or knowledge, reflection is a given. Yet Moon argues that Kolb's model still does not get at the core of the relationship

between reflection and learning and that it fails to address the differences between deep and surface learning and how reflection impacts on these. Earlier I discussed learning in relation to the needs of the adult returning to education. At this juncture a closer examination of learning and its relationship to reflection will provide further insights into the nature of this research.

In the literature one finds consensus that learning involves a number of similar facets (Kolb 1984, Mezirow 1990, Brockbank and McGill 1998, Moon 1999). While different terminology may be used, these facets include: a significant increase in knowledge; acquisition of skills and methods, including memory; an ability to abstract and critically interpret meanings and process; and, most importantly, greater development or transformation as a person. These reflect many of Vygotsky's (1978) characteristics for the development of higher mental functions. Traditionally, education at all levels has tended to focus on the first two of these facets while advocating all of them (Barnett 1997).

The literature also differentiates between deep and surface learning. The former refers to learning that seeks broad understanding about knowledge and process and its relationship to meaning. The latter focuses on text, relies on memory and tends to engage the participant passively rather than actively, denying him any type of autonomy over his learning. Deep learning, on the other hand, empowers the learner and encourages a sense of control, making him an active agent of learning (Brockbank and McGill 1998). In relation to the three traditional domains of learning—cognitive, pragmatic and

affective—Brockbank and McGill’s research supports Barnett’s view that ‘*emotion holds the key to a higher level of learning through reflective dialogue*’ (1998:42). Argyris and Schön (1974) distinguish between single- and double-loop learning. Single-loop refers to instrumental learning, where values and theories remain unchanged; double-loop occurs where assumptions and values are challenged and changed, where necessary. Parallels with deep and surface learning are evident here.

However, the common pattern again revolves around reflective dialogue as the conduit that leads to change, and emotion provides the required energy. Brockbank and McGill state unequivocally that ‘*strong emotion stimulates double loop learning*’ (1998:46). They identify three qualities for emotional learning that requires a high degree of emotional intelligence. The first quality is realness, or genuineness, in terms of a willingness to engage with and express feelings. Secondly, there is valuing acceptance and trust for the learner, which means living with uncertainty. Finally, there is empathic understanding, which must be communicated or else it has no value. According to Brockbank and McGill, this will bring balance to the learning domains ‘*in order to generate the conditions for reflection, critical thinking and critical reflection*’ (1998:47). This in turn can lead to critical transformational learning, which will generate new knowledge and understanding and allow the learner to deconstruct previously taken-for-granted myths and misconceptions. Brockbank and McGill elaborate on this by saying that this transformation:

... involves a person's thinking and being as well as action: process is integral: the learner is an active, engaged, performing participant: there is continuous interaction between practice and reflection.

(1998:50)

The relationship and balance between all three learning domains, the development of all elements of criticality (thinking, reflecting, and acting) and the opportunity for transformation are vital components in the process of generating the possibility for the practice of critical being for the adult learner. These constituent elements will also add value to understanding Vygotsky's (1978) model for the development of higher mental functions. The role of the teacher in facilitating this opportunity and nurturing an environment where meaningful learning and reflection can occur cannot be understated and requires some examination.

#### *The teacher, critical reflection and dialogue*

The role of the teacher in the process of facilitating the practice of critical being has already been shown to be of great importance. It is the practice of teaching that needs to be addressed here, however, in terms of methodology, providing a range of opportunities for reflection and encouraging a type of dialogue that allows the student full expression within all three learning domains. This type of dialogue could be termed *reflective dialogue*. This does not occur independently of either the teacher or the learner, as the process of learning is also social. If reflective dialogue is engaged with at this level, it

enhances the opportunity for the 'self' to develop. The affective domain acts as an energy lever that pushes the process along, and Brockbank and McGill point out that:

... reflective dialogue for us is not an arid discourse where emotion is absent but one where it is acknowledged as an important contributor to the learner's development.

(1998:55)

If teachers are to engage with reflection, they must therefore recognise this interaction as an ongoing relationship with learners. The nature and dynamics of dialogue also pose some interesting questions for both the teacher and the learner.

Teachers will often assert that what they engage their class in is dialogue. But is it? What they interpret as dialogue may simply be discussion, and there is a significant difference between the two. Dialogue can be defined in different contexts. Bohm describes dialogue as '*a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us ... out of which may emerge some new understanding*' (1996:6). This suggests a transformational and subjective dynamic to dialogue, operating at a number of levels within our consciousness. In contrast, he defines discussion as a type of noise where real meanings are never fully explored, shared or understood and where the self does not always get an opportunity to express itself authentically. Habermas (1974) suggests that real dialogue is essential to the process of reflection in order to ensure an objective evaluation of self, where there is no room for self-deception. Real dialogue should have these components if it is to lead to



new understanding; otherwise it is merely a form of didactic engagement with no worthwhile learning outcome. Furthermore, dialogue that is adversarial and sets out to destroy the other's arguments will have the same negative effect. Again, Brockbank and McGill point out that '*reflective dialogue should make explicit the social power relations between the parties ... the teacher must create a process that enables rather than disables*' (1998:60). Intentional reflective dialogue must therefore be an explicit feature of the learning space if the learner is to develop his potential for critical being. So, how is this intentional reflective dialogue to be generated within that teaching space?

One of the ways identified by Brockbank and McGill to create intentional reflective dialogue is modeling. Modeling is a means by which the process and the intent can be established clearly and named. This process will enable student learning. Modeling the process explicitly provides the opportunity to fully explore aspects of the relationship between teacher and learner.

Once we have described the process, we can then engage in discussion and analysis of process that is metaprocess. This is one aspect of what we mean by reflection on our practice-reflective practice.

(1998:64)

The teacher must be conscious and intentional about modeling his/her process as this allows the student to imitate the process. Understanding this process as a teacher is not simple. According to Barnett (1992a), there exists within the concept of process an element he refers to as the 'black box'. He describes the black box as '*a collection of*

*intentional and unintentional happenings oriented towards changing the student in various ways'* (1992a:99). Any of these happenings may be invisible and the only way to identify them is to engage fully with teaching in an intentionally reflective manner. Examples of these invisible elements within the black box include: the values a person may hold; how we use power; the extent of our own levels of learning and the impact they have on our students; the position taken by teachers and students towards themselves and each other; and issues of power between teacher and student at an institutional level. Many of the activities used in this research attempt to develop these elements, with the intention of enhancing the higher mental functions of participants and activating the practice of critical being. Barnett (1997) argues further that the key invisible element in the black box relates to the personal stance taken by teachers and students in the process. It is about both the content of what we learn and the context that both parties bring to the learning process. This stance needs to be understood subjectively and can be achieved through genuine reflective dialogue. Here again we experience a constructivist model of making meaning, but one that places the teacher at the centre of the process. This concept of reflective dialogue can be used as a significant criterion in evaluating data gathered in this research.

### **Adult Education and Lifelong Learning**

This study focuses on a particular group of adult learners and their specific educational needs. The literature on adult education theory is extensive, and this has led to a significant debate among educationalists about the nature of adult education and its

function within an increasingly globalised society (Jarvis 2004). Jarvis points out that the language of adult education has been redefined as our understanding of adult learning needs becomes more complex. So, what is the current thinking in this area and how does it relate to this research?

Knowles (1986) opened up this debate in the late 1970s with his theories of andragogy and his proposal that a different approach to teaching adults was required, based on specific needs. Education for adults, he suggested, is not about transmitting what is known, but is about the process of exploring the unknown. While others had expressed similar views before this, Knowles' framework offered teachers a structure and a model for teaching that seemed both appropriate and relevant. He defined andragogy as the '*art and science of helping adults learn*' (1996:83). He outlined adult learning needs as being specific and unique in terms of four assumptions. First, the adult's concept of *self* moves from that of a dependent personality to a self-directed human being. Secondly, the adult's accumulation of different experiences becomes a huge learning resource. To an adult, his experience *is* him. In Knowles' words, '*an adult is what he has done*' (1996:89). This goes to the heart of the adult's self-worth as a learner: to reject his experience is to reject him. Thirdly, the adult learner seeks to learn things that will be of specific benefit to his social roles. Again Knowles points out that '*education is a process of improving their ability to deal with life problems they face now*' (1996:93). Finally, the adult's learning needs move from a subject-centered to a problem-centered perspective. The challenge for the teacher is to create a 'teachable moment', and to achieve such a moment the curriculum must be timed to meet the developmental task of the adult.

While Knowles' model identifies many specific androgogical components, his adult education theory would also resonate with Vygotsky's view of the teacher as the conduit for moving the learners from their Zone of Current Development (ZCD) to their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and, more importantly, to expand their higher mental functions. This issue, and the significance of Knowles' androgogical framework for the practice of teaching (my own, in particular), will be addressed in more detail later. For now it is enough to state that all of these elements are woven into a process in which the adult learner must involve himself in planning his or her own learning.

Subsequent research (Jarvis 2004) in adult education has challenged some of Knowles' andragogical assumptions and redefined much of the terminology. Jarvis (2004) begins his book on adult education and lifelong learning by placing it in the context of current global trends and suggesting that because of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), information is no longer the primary domain of the teacher. The nature of knowledge and how it is transmitted has become of major importance. Jarvis sees information as objective and transmitted in written form, whereas knowledge is learned and accepted, but not necessarily factual. Knowledge is always personal, but may often appear to be objective because many can learn the same information, therefore commonalities emerge that lead to networks and communities of practice.

Jarvis goes further than Knowles by placing adult education at a macro level within the context of the knowledge society, where the emphasis is on scientific and artificial

knowledge because the powers that control society's superstructure demand it. The consequences of this development for higher education and adult learners are significant because if these modes of knowledge and evaluation are outside their experience, that creates a barrier to further development. While re-evaluating some of the key terminology in the adult education arena, Jarvis also acknowledges many of Knowles' (1996) fundamental assumptions, i.e. that adults can learn at any age, that learning is an internal process and that in the adult context certain conditions of teaching and learning must exist. This is another feature that will contribute to this research in relation to understanding my practice.

### *Education*

The first term that Jarvis unpacks is 'education'. Today, education is seen as a journey that is not about arriving at a particular destination but rather is about travelling with a different view. Education has progressed from the front-end model (Boyle 1982), in which it was traditionally assumed to be about the preparation for adult life. Jarvis describes education as '*any institutionalized and planned series of incidents, having a humanistic basis, directed towards the participants' learning and understanding*' (2004:42). He notes that this can happen at any stage during the lifespan of a human being. As adult education is self-directed, Jarvis argues that it is humanistic in nature and leads to greater self-actualisation for the learner. Education is therefore a moral activity, and teaching and learning become a moral interaction as a result. Dewey also makes the

case for the humanistic nature of education because *'it liberates human intelligence and human sympathy'* (1916:230).

Barnett's (1997) model of critical being certainly endorses the humanistic role of education and his views on the role of higher education going forward sit comfortably within much of Jarvis' educational framework. However Barnett, like Vygotsky, makes no claim to a moral dimension in the context of education. Yet the nature of critical being and its emphasis on the self does imply a value-driven dynamic at an implicit level, which will have moral implications for the learner. Mezirow's (1990) model of education for transformation does have an implicit moral dynamic; this will be explored in more detail later. In this research, however, Jarvis' redefining of education will be useful in contextualising the study and identifying significant learning and change of a qualitative nature among the participants.

### *Learning*

I want to look at the concept of learning as it relates to this work. Jarvis points out that while the learner is the key player in the learning process, the teacher's role is complex and even his or her presence is not a guarantee or always a requirement for learning to take place. By this he means that learning can occur without the teacher; even when the teacher is present, learning may not take place. However learning may not be educational according to Jarvis if poor teaching techniques are employed, or if the learner's humanity or experience is not allowed to surface. Mezirow endorses this when he says that *'no*

*need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experience'* (1990:11). In this study the participants exploration of their own experience played a significant role in developing their critical awareness as learning becomes a process of transforming experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and emotions. Either way, it is clear that the teacher is dependent on the learner being there, either virtually or in reality, if there is to be any hope of learning taking place. While this may be stating the obvious, it also informs our definition of learning and highlights the importance of the teacher as an effective facilitator of education if the learner is to experience transformation. This presents an even more significant challenge when dealing with non-traditional adult learners because many will enter the learning space with distorted meaning perspectives brought about by previous negative learning or life experiences.

Mezirow (1990) divides learning into two distinct categories. The first he describes as instrumental learning. This is a technical rational type model of learning, where problem-solving is measured primarily by productivity, performance or behaviour. This has been traditionally valued by the natural sciences, where empiricism dominates. The second type of learning is communicative learning. This, Mezirow suggests, is concerned with understanding the meaning of what others communicate concerning values, ideals, feelings, moral decisions and concepts like freedom, love and democracy. Clearly this type of learning operates within a more qualitative and interpretive paradigm. It incorporates a critique of the values and beliefs mentioned above and, unlike instrumental learning; the goal is to achieve coherence of meaning, not control. Learning

communicatively involves two processes. The first is searching for meaning intuitively, through themes or metaphors, so as to bring the unfamiliar into a clear meaning perspective or, as Mezirow puts it, *'so that an interpretation in context becomes possible'* (1990:9).

The second process is reflection, which is critical in terms of creating time to interpret the new meaning perspective and assimilate it into a changing consciousness. Mezirow argues that *'we are all trapped by our own meaning perspective; we can never really make interpretations of our experience free of bias'* (1990:10). To understand the meaning of an idea or a sentence, one must understand under what conditions it is true or valid. Mezirow adds, *'in communicative learning there are no empirical tests of truth: we rely on consensual validation of what is asserted'* (1990:10). Expressed ideas must be exposed to 'rational and reflective discourse' if they are to be objectified. For Mezirow, this ultimately leads to a process of perspective transformation, which involves other elements that will be discussed later in this chapter. Jarvis makes a similar case in relation to knowledge, and both theorists define learning and education in a qualitative and interpretive context.

### *Adult*

Jarvis also debates the meaning of the word 'adult' in the context of adult education. He makes the point that as adult education has evolved in western society since the 1960s, the definition of adult and what constitutes adult has been expanded and redefined. External criteria, such as age and related levels of maturity, have been used in the context of government policy guidelines and various entry requirements in different jurisdictions.



However, Jarvis suggests that we need to define 'adult' within a more subjective and introspective context. He begins by looking at the word in terms of 'personhood'. This he divides in two: the body, and the self. The former is made up of different elements, but the central physiological component is the brain. While the body declines physically, the capacity to learn may not necessarily do so at the same rate because motivational factors, along with good health and increased life expectancy, have lengthened the adult's learning potentialities. For Jarvis, this changes the dynamic of adult learning and raises significant questions for teachers and higher education programmes.

The second element of personhood is more complex and multi-dimensional. The self is in fact made up of numerous selves, all of whom transcend the biological '*reaching out to the socio-cultural environment and responding to pressures from it in a dialectical relationship in order to create a sense of meaning*' (2004:69). Apter (1989) identifies three senses of self: personal distinctiveness, personal continuity and personal autonomy. He suggests that from these we construct and learn our own biographies. Jarvis points out that we also continue to '*construct a biography, our personhood, throughout the greater part of our lives*' (2004:71). In a sense, the self continues to recreate itself into new forms that are transformational and informed by experience and meaning perspectives at any given time. By examining the participants' thoughts and writings from this viewpoint in this research, it may become evident that significant transformation has occurred.

### *Lifelong and Experience*

The last two words that require examination at this point are 'lifelong' and 'experience'. In many ways these two are linked almost symbiotically for the adult learner. As already mentioned, the adult learner's experience defines the adult and as the potential lifespan for continuous learning expands, the learner's experience becomes more significant. Dewey stated:

Since life means growth, a living creature lives as truly and positively at one stage as at another, with the same intrinsic fullness and the same absolute claims. Hence education means the enterprise of supplying the conditions which insure growth, or adequacy of life, irrespective of age.  
(1916:51)

While Dewey's contribution to education is not immediately associated with adult learning, this comment anticipates much of the subsequent literature in the area. It captures the relationship between experience and change in a way with which Knowles (1986), Mezirow (1990) and Jarvis (2004) can identify and which leads to the achievement of a rich life, where self-actualisation and transformation become more likely the longer the learner stays engaged with formal learning. Dewey's notion of experience in learning was a process of making growth explicit. Experience initiates thought and the situation generates action, which in turn provides data for reflective thought. Dewey described these opportunities as *'methods which are permanently*

*successful in education ... depend for their efficiency upon the fact that they go back to the type of situation that causes reflection'* (1916:154). Experience that leads to reflective thought in a communicative learning model changes meaning perspectives and can lead to transformational change. Thus 'lifelong' and 'experience' become complicit elements in the learning process.

### *Knowledge and Knowing*

Finally, having explored some definitions in relation to adult education I would like to address the question of knowledge and how we come to know because it is a question that may have a significant bearing on some of the participants in this research. Belenky *et al* (1986), exploring the issue of knowing in the context of women's experience of coming to know, defined seven types of knowing (within five broad classifications). Using an open-type interview, Belenky *et al* (1986) observed patterns of thinking and attitudes among a group of women of mixed ages, selected randomly. Their contention at the time was that many studies in this area, including Perry (1970), had a distinct gender bias within what they perceived to be a male-controlled education system. On the basis of their research they argue that women need different types of support in terms of learning and they question assumptions made about cognitive similarities between men and women. While the seven types of knowing identified do not constitute a specific series of developmental stages, they do make the point that women who do not challenge themselves educationally or try to move out of socially disadvantaged backgrounds rarely progress beyond the earlier stages. The seven stages identified by Belenky *et al* (1986)

are: Silence, Received Knowledge, Subjective Knowledge; the inner voice, Subjective Knowledge; the quest for self, Procedural Knowledge; the voice of reason, Procedural knowledge; separate and connected knowing and Constructed Knowledge; integrating the voices. Each of these types of knowing defines how women view themselves and how they make meaning. The research challenges these women to examine how they see truth and reality and the origins of knowledge and where they see themselves as participants in the process. Belenky *et al* state that these questions '*affect our definitions of ourselves, the way we interact with others, our public and private personae, our sense of control over life events, our views of teaching and learning and our conceptions of morality*' (1986:3). This research was conducted to help ordinary women find their voice and take control of their lives. In Chapter 4 the significance of this work and its connection to the male and female participants of this study will become evident as I will suggest that many of these ways of knowing can also apply to some degree to the male participants. Finally a further issue emerges in relation to Belenky *et al's* work. Critical being has been presented here as a higher mental function to use Vygotsky's terminology (1978). This raises a question as to the relationship between critical being and the level of knowing required to practice critical being within the Belenky model. Early indications would suggest a required level of knowing needs to exist within each individual before the practice of critical being manifests itself. This will be a significant issue for discussion later in this study.

## Conclusion

Reviewing literature and theories in the context of academic research is a standard practice and places the research in an appropriate and relevant setting. This chapter has set out to do just that and to signpost the way for the reader in terms of a theoretical and philosophical framework. It establishes that Barnett's model of critical being is derivative of Dewey's (1938) framework and can be compared on some levels with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of learning and development. It is informed by Mezirow's (1990) model of communicative and transformational learning and can be evaluated within these frameworks along with the Belenky *et al* (1986) schema on ways of knowing. In placing critical being against these frameworks, it appears to operate in a linear and one dimensional manner. Certainly questions about the flexibility and range of critical being as a learning model have emerged. A visual construct that might help to clarify this framework (figure 2.0 below) is that of a house where critical being is the roof or macro vision at institutional level defined by Barnett. In this context the other models dealt with here act as a foundation to provide a mechanism to activate, analyse and evaluate the nature and extent of the practice of critical being among the participants of the study.

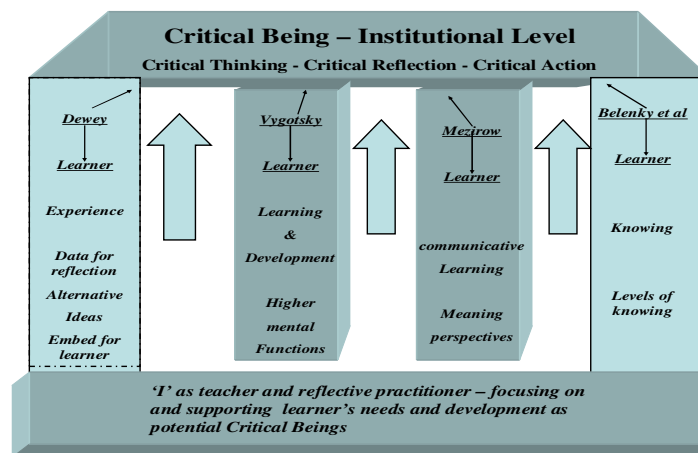


Figure 2.0. A visual construct showing the analysis framework for the research study

The process of contrast and critique of critical being as set against these frameworks mentioned above raise questions about its capacity to engage and transform learners at a micro or teaching level. This may not be the case and in chapter 4 I will analyse the data that has emerged in the context of these frameworks to evaluate the capacity of critical being as a potential model of learning and development in the classroom. It has also highlighted the following points and directions for the research:

1. Dewey's theories of reflection and Vygotsky's model of development of higher mental functions may provide the overriding theoretical framework for this research as questions about the capacity and range of critical being emerge.
2. The word 'critical' has numerous layers of meaning, all of which will play an important role in the analysis framework of this research.

3. The concept of 'being' is a challenging notion that is constantly experienced in the present and may influence how data is evaluated.
4. Reflection is a complex process that may be best suited to a communicative learning model (Mezirow 1990).
5. The reasons behind the choice of actions taken by the group during the RAP activity may have a more significant bearing on the analysis framework than the actions themselves.
6. Emotional learning and critical self-reflection appear to play a significant role for the learner in practicing critical being.
7. The opportunity for reflective dialogue between teacher and learner enhances the development of the self and may contribute significantly to the practice of critical being.
8. Dialogue as an ongoing conscious and unconscious stream of meaning can find useful expression in communicative learning.
9. Intentional dialogue can be enhanced through the use of modeling (Brockbank and McGill) and the 'black box' (Barnett).
10. The activities and dialogue processes used in this study are designed to enhance the practice of critical being and are distinct from the research tools employed.

Chapter 3 will address issues relating to research methodology and outline what the author believes to be the most effective approach to this research.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The primary objective of this chapter is to identify the main research methodologies that will be used in this research. This choice is based on the nature of the research and the types of outcome being sought. In addition, the type of research paradigm chosen should reflect and illuminate the questions posed during the research process. The end product will lead to what Gilbert Ryle called ‘thick description’ (1949), where the widest possible range and depth of meanings are explored. In the context of this and the questions posed in chapter 1, I also wish to distinguish clearly between the research methods used to analyse the emerging data and the teaching methodologies employed to develop and enhance the capacity of participants to practice critical being. The primary sources of data to demonstrate evidence of change will come from comments and writings of participants throughout their journals and taped interviews; the other activities used will allow me to examine my practice as a teacher explore how these methods stimulated the kind of thinking and reflections that Barnett (1997) espouses. In this respect the reflection action project (RAP) has a dual purpose as it provides the opportunity for participants to respond in writing in the moment while simultaneously offering valuable data for analysis. This is an important dynamic that will be teased out in this chapter. To begin I would like to comment on the various research paradigms to identify the most appropriate model to follow in this study.



The interpretive paradigm is the first model I want to discuss in relation to its application in this research. I would like to begin by making a few general comments on this paradigm, then broaden the discussion to include ethical considerations and the characteristics of qualitative research. I will then look at the specifics of the interpretive paradigm and of the second model that will define this work which is action research.

Cohen and Manion (1994) have described the interpretive paradigm as anti-positivist because it '*is characterised by a concern for the individual*' (1994:36). This model is subjective in nature and recognises that reality is not a single entity that exists outside of human experience. According to Guba (1990), subject and object exist in interaction with each other. In this study I am looking for a set of theoretical frameworks to explain my findings rather than trying to fit data into a pre-constructed theory, as is often the case in the positivist model (Merriam 1991). In *The Paradigm Dialog*, Guba states:

... realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent [for] their form and content on the persons who hold them.

(1990:21)

The parallels here between Guba, Merriam and Fromm are worth noting in terms of defining realities and experience. In Fromm's framework the *having* mode objectifies human experience and alienates the individual from himself. If education perpetuates this

model, then transformational and emancipatory learning become virtually impossible because the subjective context is never fully explored. In contrast to this, interpretivism could be defined as a paradigm that operates in the *being* mode. Many of the comments and writings of participants in this study represent such multiple constructions that are driven by experience and social contexts and are unique to the individuals involved.

### **Ethics and research**

It is necessary to address this issue briefly in this context in order to identify the ethical parameters within which this research operates. As both a researcher and a participant I have worked closely with my research group in a very interactive and personal way. Many of their writings and statements are of an intimate and often revealing nature, which means there is a need for clarity and transparency around ethical codes and practices. Within the positivist paradigm there is less emphasis on ethical issues because of the objective, non-interventionist role of the researcher. Robson (1987) also observes that within this paradigm the degree of inconvenience or emotional involvement experienced by the researched is given neither ethical nor practical consideration. In this research the need for trust and positive relationships is vital if participants are to commit to the process fully and an ethical code '*makes researchers aware of their obligations to their subjects and also to those problem areas where there is a general consensus about what is acceptable and what is not*' (Cohen and Manion 1994:381).

The interpretive and action research paradigms require a more rigorous and explicit approach to ethical issues. These paradigms seek to understand the researched in a very subjective manner and to investigate issues very implicitly. One has to find a balance between the researcher's right to pursue 'truth' and the rights of the participants, who might feel threatened by this research. Cohen and Manion describe this as the '*cost/benefits ratio*' (1984:347). The purpose here is to expose participants to specific teaching methodologies and practices that might lead to significant change in their thinking and behaviour. Part of the challenge for me is to hear the 'voices' (of the participants) and yet maintain the role of researcher and preserve a level of objective discernment. Ethical issues in research are not simply about practice and protocol but also about subjective interpretation, bias and sustaining a 'real' or at least a partially objective view of the world in which these people live. Maintaining mutual respect, avoidance of coercion or manipulation of people or data and creating some reciprocity of benefit to participants must also be observed (Guba, 1990). Robson poses the appropriate question: '*what responsibility do investigators have for the knowledge that they have acquired?*' (1993:31). Concerns about participation, confidentiality, negotiation frameworks and rights of withdrawal must therefore be addressed explicitly.

While the particular focus of action research revolves around the reflective practice of individuals, its brief has much wider implications for social structures and education in general. Accordingly, ethical practice and considerations should always nurture empowerment and promote involvement. One issue that also emerges here is that of the power and authority of the researcher and the dynamic generated by this both in the

classroom and during the taped interview. In the former context, my role was facilitative and as unobtrusive as possible. During the interviews I had to be very aware of not prompting or managing responses and all the interviewees appeared at ease and extremely honest both in their comments, tone and general body language. I believe my values as a teacher of building positive supportive relationships in my classroom was of significant benefit to the process. The danger is that they may say what they think I will want to hear so as to maintain this relationship but again the comments and tone of the interviews suggest this was not the case. These are significant issues within the educational community, but within this paradigm theories must be validated through practice and not independently of it (Elliott 1991). The debate among researchers is ongoing, but for the purpose of this research many of the issues raised are important but the dynamics of qualitative research and its implications need further examination.

### **Qualitative Research**

According to Holliday (2002), quantitative and qualitative research paradigms provide distinctly different ways of looking at the world. Whereas the former is generally normative, with the purpose of mastering and understanding through statistics and experiment, the latter is interpretive. This suggests that research can only take us so far in terms of understanding. It builds gradual pictures that are only approximations of reality. Holliday points out that they are *'basic attempts to represent what is in fact a much more complex reality – paintings that represent our own impressions, rather than photographs of what is really there'* (2002:6). The metaphor used here is an excellent one: paintings

capture a particular moment in time and no two paintings, or settings, are exactly the same. The notion that quantitative research is less subjective is therefore erroneous. Subjectivity exists to some degree in all research, and quantitative research can often involve luck, guesswork and random accidents. Qualitative research responds to the setting within which it occurs, therefore each research design will be different. This requires freedom to explore creatively the best possible approach and to account carefully for every move that is to be made (Holliday 2002). Achieving this balance is part of the challenge presented by qualitative research. The purpose of this part of the study is to outline the qualitative settings and frameworks that I believe will provide the interpretive infrastructure that will be unique to this work. However, understanding the setting and cultural framework within which qualitative research exists will offer further insights.

Much of what we do in everyday life involves some form of qualitative research. This may relate to evaluating situations and behaviours or assessing a variety of cultural and social contexts. The challenge is trying to see these situations in a new way or to view them in a different framework so that alternative meanings can emerge. The scientific qualitative researcher is attempting to make '*the familiar strange*' (Holliday 2002:13). The participants in this research all live in a very familiar world, experiencing common social situations, interactions and cultural practices. They have many shared experiences of education that are both positive and negative, despite a diversity of age, gender and location. The researcher is also part of and influenced by similar factors or meaning distortions (Mezirow 1990). While the researcher will experience many of these contexts in a subjective way, he must also find a way to step back from the process, to keep a

stranger's eye on it and at the same time be open and adaptable to changes and new possibilities as they occur. This dual role of the researcher locates him in a different place from the traditional researcher within the quantitative or positivist model. The question is: how does the qualitative researcher go about achieving this?

Holliday (2002) divides the research process into three distinct stages. The first involves determining the area or topic to be researched. This can be initiated by an experience, a previous concern or even a question. Whatever the trigger, it is an invitation to explore any setting from the perspective of *'making strange, conventions which usually seem perfectly natural to people'* (2002:31). This study was generated, for example, by a question about the practical application in the classroom of a conceptual model of thinking and being. The second stage is establishing or determining a research question(s).

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research requires a different type of precision in its questions. The emphasis of questions in this model is on expanding, not controlling, the variables involved. Qualitative research may produce several hypotheses in an action research framework and these may be reformulated throughout the research. Holliday points out that the *'precise nature of the research questions cannot be really determined until the social setting has been determined and the research encounter has begun'* (2002:37). Again, this has been the experience of this researcher. The questions posed initially have not remained static because the process is evolving and different issues and settings are emerging continually.

The final stage of Holliday's taxonomy is determining the research setting in terms of locations and boundaries. The setting must have clear boundaries, provide a variety of interrelated data, have sufficient richness for analysis and be accessible and not too large. Classrooms offer great opportunities in this regard because they meet all the above criteria and allow teachers to be both researcher and participant in a very reflexive and focused setting (McNiff 1990). The classroom may also offer a reliability and replicability that other settings may not have. In this research the classroom has provided a focus for much of the learning, but also a framework for actions taken outside the learning space and for feedback to be presented. The classroom is not, therefore, simply a static location, but rather a living conduit encapsulating a range of activities, ideas, reflections and cultural conventions. The participants in this research cross three different classroom settings on three different Personal Development programmes. While the content and methodology are similar, the dynamics and engagement for each individual and within each group present a wide variety of experiences and perspectives. This creates more possibilities for analysis and exploring the familiar as strange (Holliday 2002). One part of the challenge of this research will be to establish a framework that can separate the core from the periphery actions, ideas and reflections. The other part of this challenge, for me, is to find an appropriate balance between the dual roles of teacher and researcher caused by the wide variability in qualitative methods and the need for the researcher to become part of the idiosyncratic individual's social world (Guba 1990).

## **The Interpretive Paradigm**

In many ways the interpretive paradigm is at a very different point on the research spectrum to the positivist approach. Reality is subjective and is based on the perceptions, motives and understandings of the individual in a given, specific situation. Carr and Kemmis point out that in applying this approach, *'the researcher began to work with the teacher to interpret the motives, intentions and purposes of classroom practice to grasp the subjective meanings'* (1986:90). This implies that the researcher is not 'outside' the research process; he becomes a participant because within this paradigm is a recognition of value judgments and contextual factors. From this particular situation the researcher attempts to generalise. Melrose points out that researchers *'are concerned with who teaches, who learns, and how 'attitudes' and 'values' as well as a knowledge base can be learned'* (1996:53). Narrative enquiry and life history have developed out of this interpretive process. The 'story' of what happens in the classroom becomes significant. Connolly and Clandinin observe that *'the two narratives, participant/researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the enquiry'* (1990:5). According to McNiff (1988), this paradigm finds its origins within the social sciences, specifically Anthropology and Ethnography. The result is an emphasis on the integrity of people individually and in social groups. While there is a greater sense of co-operation and interaction within this model, the researcher remains in control and the teacher's autonomy is extended only marginally.



A major methodology used here is the 'case study'. In developing this model other methods of data collection also take place, such as interviews (formal and informal), observations, discussions and recording of data. This process is then concretised by a triangulation procedure, in which an objective observer can examine the data and validate the findings. Within a qualitative research model this procedure can take different forms (Holliday 2002). Within the educational research community, views differ widely as to the value of the 'case study' model. Some (McNiff 1988, Carr and Kemmis 1986) believe that 'case studies' lack the full rigour of research methods and can be vague and ill-defined. To have validity, interpretive accounts must be coherent, have a consistent framework and *'be able to pass the test of participant confirmation'* (Carr and Kemmis 1986:91). But McNiff also points out that *'the concept of education, however, is more than the sum of its parts'* (1988:17) and therefore if the case study is rigorous and thoroughly validated, it is a significant tool in the armoury of educational research. Other issues of controversy surrounding this model involve replicability and researcher bias. 'Understanding', rather than action, is central to this paradigm, but what level of understanding is applied and who makes this decision? Furthermore, these levels of understanding change throughout the research process because as data is collected and analysed, decisions are made about what data needs to be collected next (Robson 1993). Uncertainty around methodology may lead to uncertainty around results. One of the key research models that will help frame this process is referred to as action research.

### **Action Research**

The Action Research paradigm is a practice-driven research model whereby the researcher is an integral part of the process and is engaged in examining the impact the research is having on the participant and on the researcher. It is a cyclical model that requires a large degree of reflection-in- and on-action. Action research employs a variety of research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, in an applied context that allows greater flexibility to the researcher (McNiff 1990). In other words, action research uses both positivist and interpretive techniques, where relevant, because they allow the researcher to address both the subjective and objective elements of the process. This has led to much discussion and debate on the merits of action research within the research community in relation to its reliability, applicability and academic rigour (Guba 1990, McNiff 1990, Cohen and Manion 1994). As this research can be both qualitative and quantitative in nature, a more comprehensive examination of the nature, structure and context of action research techniques is necessary.

The main focus of research within this paradigm is to bring about a change in one's own practice, in one's understanding of one's practice and the circumstances in which that practice takes place. This procedure involves:

- (a) I identify a problem in relation to my practice;
- (b) I imagine a solution to this problem
- (c) I set about implementing this solution
- (d) I evaluate the results of my actions to solve this problem
- (e) I reformulate my problem in the context of this evaluation

In action research the process does not end here, however. It continues in a cyclical and transformational fashion because changes in practice are developmental and ongoing. McNiff points out that *'action research is never static'* (1988:21), highlighting the constant need to be receptive to change and to be accountable. Advocates of action research (McNiff 1988, Lomax 1986, Carr and Kemmis 1986) argue that the positivist and interpretive paradigms do not go far enough in changing individual practices or the structures that support them. Action research forces the teacher to engage in a process of reflective practice, leading to greater autonomy and participation in the research process. Whitehead states clearly that *'what I do in my own educational research is to attempt to embody my values in my practice and to clarify their meanings in the course of accounting, in various public fora, for their emergence in enquiries of the kind 'How do I improve my practice'?*' (Whitehead 1996:9). This question and the significance of the 'I' will be revisited in chapter 5.

Unlike the other research paradigms, democracy, collaboration, participation and self-evaluation are fundamental elements of action research. Ethical issues as discussed earlier are paramount. The researcher (often the teacher) is a participant in the research and does not remain objectively outside it. Since Kurt Lewin (1946) first coined the phrase, action research has evolved and fragmented to some extent. Today it is possible to identify three distinct strands. First, there is the critical theoretic approach, which is supported by Carr and Kemmis (1986) and has been developed in this way, particularly in Australia. Secondly, John Elliott (1991), among others, has developed a more interpretive approach to action research which in the context of this work has gained greater

significance and value for me as a practicing teacher. Finally, there is the 'living theory' approach (Whitehead 1989, McNiff 1988, Lomax 1993), which identifies the research process as generative, leading to a concept of '*educational research*' as distinct from '*research into education*' (Whitehead 1989). Feminist research, which rejects the hierarchical nature of other paradigms, has found the democratic nature of action research appropriate to its philosophical and methodological position.

The methodologies employed in action research reflect the emphasis on qualitative data. Questionnaires, diaries, surveys, interviews, case studies and observation are also used to varying degrees within the other paradigms. The key difference is the researcher's and participants' roles in the process and the reflective nature of the paradigm itself. Richardson points out that '*experience is educative only with reflection*' (1990:12). Furthermore, the action researcher must engage with the research process in a deeply committed manner. McNiff states that the action researcher '*will not be satisfied with a given system if he sees elements of the system as unsatisfactory*' (1988:50).

Criticism of this paradigm has been explicit. Cohen and Manion describe action research as a '*small scale intervention in the functioning of the real world ... is situational ... is concerned with diagnosing a problem in a specific context and attempting to solve it in that context*' (1980:186). In recent years the scope and potential of action research has developed greatly, as evidenced in the work of McNiff *et al* (1996). Other concerns have arisen around the question of the role of the researcher. Is a participant/practitioner capable of carrying out effective educational research? Robson quotes Popkewitz (1984),

who held that *'Schools are complex social contexts. There is little time for critical reflection. Their social and political values are often anti-intellectual, anti-democratic and anti-educational'* (1993:440). Could the same be said of higher education? Winter (1989) argues that the conceptualisation of the action research process is not fully developed because it is initiated only when a problem is identified: the results of the enquiry often necessitate further enquiries, leading away from the initial question. The cyclical process of action research is never a final answer, but rather a phase in the cycle itself. McNiff would challenge this, however, by saying that by engaging in the process of action research and reflective practice, a teacher *'rises above the role of technician and becomes an educator'* (1988:50). Furthermore, she adds, this allows the teacher to *'make autonomous and independent judgements within his own professional sphere. By adopting a thinking, critical attitude towards his own practice, and testing his research findings against public opinion, he will be qualified to give reasoned justifications for his actions'* (1988:50–51). Finally, the ethical considerations discussed earlier in the chapter, which need to be explicit because of the nature of this research, are embedded implicitly in this paradigm.

### **Choosing a conceptual framework for this study**

The purpose of this section is twofold: first, I want to outline why I think using an interpretive and action research approach is the most appropriate model for this research and secondly, I want to explain the mechanics of the conceptual framework and how it will work in terms of procedures and methodology. In the previous sections I have

explored some of the ethical and philosophical concerns that surround these paradigms and at the heart of this discussion are the issues of setting, cultural contexts, subjectivity, ethics, flexibility, reflective opportunity, teaching and change. The process of teaching and research that I have engaged in with my students requires this range of possibility. I am not attempting to prove an exact hypothesis, but instead to explore the possibility of change that a particular type of teaching might engender and to evaluate the merits and the level of change that has occurred, if at all. The conceptual framework that I need to create must reflect this.

The conceptual framework refers to the main elements of the research. It establishes the presumed relationships and *'forces you to be explicit about what you think you are doing'* (Robson 1993:150). As qualitative research is ideologically driven, it cannot be value-free or bias-free, so the framework must place the researcher in relation to the research. I began this process in Chapter 1. Teaching as a process, not as an outcome, and as a catalyst for transformational possibilities is the ideological impetus that has led to and informed this research. This position defines the process, influences the methodology and impacts on the setting and those involved. The methods can therefore stem from the research question. Holliday notes that *'The major point is that it is in the writing of the research that sense is made of how the research is crafted to suit the question and the setting, and how the rigour of the process is then made clear and accountable'* (2002:22). Yet the researcher must strive to write as if a stranger to the process, to take nothing for granted and to be adaptable. The methodologies employed as part of the framework need to be addressed at this point.



## **Methodology**

Some final thoughts are needed here to link the research tools and the teaching methodologies specifically with the research questions posed in Chapter 1. In attempting to find out how the practice of critical being (Barnett 1997) might be taught in a real way to adults, why did I choose these particular teaching methods and research tools? Why do I think that the use of qualitative methods within the interpretive and action research paradigms is the most appropriate way to address this issue? In Chapter 2 I addressed this issue from a philosophical perspective, relating Barnett's theory in the context of Dewey, Mezirow and Vygotsky, and explored some of the challenges and opportunities that existed in relation to his theory in that context. What emerged from that discussion was a realisation that Barnett's theory of critical being operates at a very abstract and cognitive level and less so in relation to the affective and pragmatic learning domains. Furthermore, Barnett talks about critical being as a macro concept, arguing that it is the direction that should be taken in higher education. If it can work at that level, the case can be made that it should be achievable at a micro level, translating his aspirations for higher education into a day-to-day reality for students. The higher education classroom is a starting point where the concept of critical being could be explored and ways found to embed it within the learning process. To test its applicability and value as a theory in that context this study sets out to identify a methodological and research framework that could be used to test whether critical being as a practice can be taught or encouraged in the learning space. The concepts of critical thinking, critical reflection and critical action, which are implicit

components of critical being, can be monitored in the classroom in a qualitative manner because only then can the real subtleties and understandings of critical being emerge.

The teaching methodologies employed here have a number of functions. First, to generate thinking that is both a critical and creative. Secondly to develop reflection-on- and in-action (Schön 1983). Thirdly, to structure actions that are linked both to thinking and to reflection and that require each participant to seek connections and evaluate critical development in themselves. This can only be done, in my view, through qualitative methods and analysis. Each methodology used in this research therefore addresses a different component of critical being in a qualitative way. The questionnaire on the reflective journal process, the reflective journal entries and the taped interview are research tools that contain quantitative elements, which categorise specific challenges and opportunities and provide data in relation to student experience with critical being. The reflection action project (RAP) acts both as a teaching methodology and a research tool because it originates within the classroom as part of the module but offers a unique opportunity for the participants to reflect on the activity as they are experiencing it thus providing valuable research data. Figure 3.0, below, graphically demonstrates how the model was constructed and operated.



<b>Teaching Methodologies +Research Tools (TM + RT)</b> 	<b>Learning Autobiography (TM)</b>	<b>Critical Incident Exercise (TM)</b>	<b>Metaphor Analysis (TM)</b>	<b>Reflective Journal Questionnaire (RT)</b>	<b>Reflective Action Project (RAP) (TM+RT)</b>	<b>Reflective Journals (weekly) (RT)</b>	<b>Taped Interview (RT)</b>
<b>Elements of Critical Being</b> 							
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	Allows students to build a critical picture of their lives to date and question aspects of it in a constructive manner	Links past and present with revised critical thinking	Right brain activity challenging students to think alternatively about a familiar situation	Chance to critically evaluate process of writing and its immediate impact. What evidence emerges to demonstrate critical thinking in action?	Critical thinking in terms of planning each activity over the five days Is there evidence of critical thinking here?	Are there indicators of changes in critical thinking?	Questions and prompts to challenge thinking and seek deeper analysis and revelations Are there indicators of higher mental functioning, ways of knowing and critical thought at a personal and societal level?
<b>Critical Reflection</b>	Generates reflection and opportunities to compare past and present circumstances	Chance to reflect critically on a previous event and examine why action was or was not taken	Completed metaphor acts as a stimulus for reflection from an alternative perspective Reflections on values and assumptions	Structured reflection on work completed and an opportunity to review progress Is there evidence of critical reflection leading to change?	Reflection in and on activities throughout the process. Does evidence of critical reflection emerge here?	Ongoing opportunity for critical reflection on a weekly basis Indicators of changes in critical reflection	Reflection in action as students reply spontaneously to questions and prompts Have perceptions changed through self talk and dialogue? Is this applied to ill structured problems? Is there evidence of critical reflection as self realisation?

<b>Critical Action</b>	May impact on future actions or decisions	What action(s) would be taken now?	How might metaphor change in the future?	Will I continue keeping a reflective journal in the future?	Acting in the present and the implications of this for future actions Is there evidence of critical action linked to critical being?	Chance to review actions and decisions and make changes. Are there indicators of movement towards critical being here?	What do I need to do now? Is there evidence that I am aware of changes in my thinking and actions?
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Figure 3.0: Qualitative framework for research.

### **Teaching methodologies and research tools employed**

The range of activities covered by the group was diverse and continued over a period of six months in total. Initially, each member of the group participated in reflective writing as part of the Personal Development module. From this process and through dialogue in class relating to specific topics, a concern emerged surrounding their capacity to engage effectively with critical thinking and reflection. This concern became my concern, too, because I believed it to be a prerequisite if they were to continue successfully in higher education. They all expressed the view that these concepts were not addressed explicitly in other modules, but agreed that they were implicit in many of the expectations required of them by tutors. There was a strong belief that they did not know how to apply these skills or even understand them fully. It was this common concern that prompted me to take action.

As referred to briefly in Chapter 1, the action I chose involved a number of teaching elements which remained ongoing throughout the process. The group was also asked to complete a Reflective Journal Questionnaire (research Tool) to respond specifically to the writing process and its impact on them individually. Once the three groups had been identified and asked to participate, the structured sessions took place. The activity sessions took place with each group separately, allowing for opportunities to evaluate and modify as I went along. The sessions involved a number of methodologies that are outlined briefly below.

### **Teaching methodologies**

#### *Learning Autobiography*

The purpose of the Learning Autobiography is to help the learner to plot his/her own learning journey through the identification of a personal metaphor. This metaphor allows the learner to encapsulate the various significant elements of this journey in one image or concept. The process of describing, drawing and refining the metaphor further enhances critical thought and imagination as it is primarily a right-brain function, encouraging the learner to explore his/her learning journey in a creative and uninhibited way. Mezirow defines learning as *'the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation and action'* (1990:2). Learning Autobiographies help learners to redefine 'meaning perspectives', which Mezirow describes as a *'structure of assumptions within which a new experience is*

*assimilated and transformed by one's past experience during the process of interpretation'* (1990:2), and this leads to the creation of new understandings. In this research participants used the metaphor to redefine their 'meaning perspectives' through the process of re-interpreting previous experiences, leading to changes in subsequent understanding, appreciation or action. Evidence of these changes will be made clearer in Chapter 4.

### *Critical Incident Technique*

Brookfield (op cit Mezirow *et al* 1990, Chapter 9) develops this technique as a way of challenging assumptions among learners. He describes the Critical Incident technique as '*recognition and analysis of assumptions*' (Mezirow 1990:177). The process involves three integrated stages: first, identifying assumptions that underpin our thoughts and actions; secondly, comparing these with our own experiences of reality; and thirdly, '*reconstituting these assumptions to make them more inclusive and integrative*' (Mezirow 1990:177). Brookfield defines 'assumptions' as our common-sense beliefs or taken-for-granted ideas that are hard to become aware of. He says that trying to identify them is like '*trying to catch our psychological tail*' (Mezirow 1990:178).

The application of the Critical Incident technique is relatively straightforward. Learners are asked to think back to a Critical Incident that occurred in the past six to twelve months that left them feeling angry or outraged at the injustice of the situation. That situation could be educational, political, cultural or otherwise, but not personal. In

reflecting on this incident, learners are then asked to identify the main values and assumptions that drove their emotional response and that challenge their significance in the context of their experience. This phenomenological methodology addresses two central elements of the learners' understanding: the incident allows them to explore their existential realities and creates a non-threatening environment in which to do so. By analysing the underlying values and assumptions, learners are required to apply critical thinking and reflection to a situation that moves from the specific to the general, focuses on the learner's own experience, emphasises peer learning and reduces the possibility of groupthink (Brookfield *op. cit.*, Mezirow 1990). The process also forces critical reflection on realities that make sense to adults. In the context of this study, it is another explicit way to engage adult learners in critical thought and critical reflection.

### *Metaphor Analysis*

While similar in some respects to the Learning Autobiography process, Metaphor Analysis has its own unique features and characteristics. David Deshler (Mezirow *et al* 1990, Chapter 15) sees it as a way to develop critical reflection and transformational learning. He quotes Bartel's definition of metaphor as '*any comparison that cannot be taken literally*' (Deshler *op. cit.*, Mezirow 1990:297), which is appropriate for the purpose of this research and resonates with Holliday's characteristic of qualitative research, i.e. observing the familiar as strange. For Deshler, metaphors for adult learners fall into three specific domains: the personal domain, where the emphasis is on family, gender, sexuality, career and so on; the popular culture domain, which addresses art,

music, architecture and literature; and finally the organisation domain, which covers all areas of business, social and educational life.

In the context of this research, this format was used primarily as a group activity, focusing on the organisation domain. Participants were asked to explore a group metaphor to symbolise a group dynamics assignment that had to be completed. The aim was to find consensus around an agreed metaphor that reflected the experience of the group. This generated a lot of dialogue and critical thinking, forcing each group to find consensus around values and assumptions. Each metaphor had to be explained clearly and labelled. The range of metaphors that emerged was diverse and challenging in terms of meaning, and all three groups that worked on this activity found it very demanding and that it generated new 'meaning perspectives' (Mezirow 1990). As Deshler points out, metaphors '*exert forceful, immediate, unobtrusive influence in our lives*' (Deshler *op. cit.*, Mezirow *et al* 1990:310). I mentioned earlier that metaphors engage the creative side of the brain but also provide an alternative way of naming the world. By naming the world in this way it becomes an explicit act of critical thinking and critical reflection and is an exertion of power that leads to transformation and emancipation (Deshler *op. cit.*, Mezirow 1990).

## **Research tools**

### *Reflective Action Project (RAP)*

The Reflective Action Project (RAP) is the key element of this research. It provides the original component to the process and offers a unique way to explore how adults learn and come to know. It presents, in my view, a method of ‘operationalising’ the practice of critical being (Barnett 1997) because it allows the learner to practice critical thinking, critical reflection and critical action in the context of a single, carefully defined activity. Furthermore, it engages all three of Barnett’s stated learning domains—self, knowledge and the world—in equal terms through the dynamic of the Personal Development module. It also acts as a research tool as mentioned earlier as it provides significant data that can be explored in a qualitative framework as students respond to the actions and the impact of those actions on them individually. The process of implementing the RAP is very simple. During the module students cover a component entitled Personal Effectiveness. This section covers topics such as self-awareness, self-image and self-esteem, assertiveness, stress management, goal-setting, time management and conflict management. Each student chooses a component or skill within one of these topics on which he/she would like to work. The student normally bases this choice on an area of perceived need. The student is also free to choose an alternative area to work on—as evidenced by the responses of Martin, Kel, Una and James. For five consecutive or separate days they practice implementing this element into the texture of their daily lives. While this is taking place they engage in reflection-in-action during the process, and reflection-on-action at the end of each day (Schön 1983). At the end of five days they

write an overall reflection of the experience and try to identify the learning that has taken place.

The RAP is an attempt to embrace a number of significant elements that exist within the literature in relation to reflection and experience. Dewey (1933) suggests the need to reflect on the process of experience in order to develop meaning. Kolb's (1984) experiential cycle identifies reflective observation as the second stage in this cycle, which leads to reshaping experience and 'meaning perspectives'. Habermas' (1987) concept of 'emancipatory knowledge' is brought about by a process of reflection and experience that leads to political liberation. Freire's (1970) notion of praxis demands the need for reflection leading to action leading to further reflection, and so on. The RAP, while simple in construct, manages to offer scope to all of these various models; the evidence that has emerged offers support for this claim.

#### *Reflective Journal writing and questionnaire*

Each week students would respond to various activities and topics by writing a reflective journal. The purpose was to clarify thinking and reflect on how these activities were impacting on their learning and thinking. Following this I asked the participants to complete a questionnaire on the journaling process to elicit data relating to their experience and whether their thinking was changed as a result. Again these two elements provided an immediate response through the journal and a measured evaluation later through the questionnaire. Research on the use of such journals particularly in the field



of nursing has generated rich qualitative data on the nature of nursing and student response to various elements of the profession of nursing (Holliday 2002). I hoped for a similar result and much of the data generated was worthwhile and valuable.

### *Individual taped interview*

The taped interview was the final part of the research process and it brought together all the elements described above and allowed both the participants and myself the opportunity to reflect, through dialogue, on the experience and to integrate the various strands of their narratives in the different activities. It was also a natural conclusion to this type of qualitative action research paradigm. Again, the process was straightforward. Based on data already gathered, I prepared two sets of questions for each participant. The first set comprised general questions designed to establish, in broad terms, participants' current thinking with regard to critical thinking, critical reflection and critical action. The second set was drawn specifically from data provided by each participant, with the aim of probing for deeper learning and evidence of change (Cohen and Manion 1994). Each interview averaged approximately forty-five minutes, with some lasting sixty minutes. By taping and transcribing each interview I had the opportunity to analyse each text closely which was very informative.

As part of any research process, qualitative interviews are challenging and open to interpretation. Cohen and Manion (1994) suggest three distinct purposes of the interview as a research technique. First, it may be used as a means of gathering information.

Secondly, it may provide a means to test particular hypotheses or suggest alternative ones. Thirdly, it may be used in conjunction with other research methods as an opportunity for deeper analysis, or to follow up on unexpected results. In the context of this research, the latter purpose would prove to be of greatest significance. Cohen and Manion (1994) also outline four different types of interview that can be used in the research process: the structured interview, the unstructured interview, the non-directive interview and the focused interview.

While the first two are relatively self-explanatory, the non-directive model is very open-ended and the subject is free to explore subjective feeling in a therapeutic manner. The focused interview seeks the interviewee's responses *'to a known situation in which she has been involved and has been analyzed by the interviewer prior to the interview'* (1994:273). This latter format has been particularly useful in this research, but I have also tried to maintain some of the flexibility of the non-directive model throughout.

### **The Johari Window**

Ingham and Luft (1955) have also explored a model of self awareness that will act simply as a metaphorical representation to help contextualise this research. It is not a research tool or a specific methodology but is a model presented within the PD module to help students place themselves within their current stage of self awareness at any particular time. It provides a visual picture of the individuals self awareness at a specific moment (*see* Fig. 2.0 and 2.1). I wish to use it occasionally as a comparator to illustrate a change

that has occurred within a participant's thinking or sense of self or as a representation of growth<sup>1</sup>.

As the individual grows in understanding and self-knowledge, he chooses what to reveal or not to reveal to others. Transformation therefore includes a self-regulatory mechanism that is an implicit part of the self-awareness process. As the blind self reduces for the learner, it can clarify distortions in their meaning perspectives, and so what is revealed is proactive and deliberate rather than reactive and accidental or outside the individual's control. It is an enabling tool that allows the learner to identify change and growth in a very specific context. The Johari Window is a significant model in teaching Personal Development in terms of how learners can observe changing meaning perspectives in a tangible and real way.

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to as the Johari Window, after its authors, it is presented as a transparent pane of glass in which each quarter reflects a different aspect of self that is known to the individuals themselves or to others or both (*see* Fig. 2.0). The first pane refers to the self that is known to others and to oneself. The second, or 'blind', self is that which is known to others but not to oneself. The third refers to the 'façade' or that part of the self that the individual is aware of but others are not and often keeps hidden behind a 'mask'. The final pane is the most significant in this model. It refers to the self that is unknown to others and also unknown to oneself. The key to self-awareness and transformation is when the known self expands introspectively to take over the entire space and the other three panes are continually reduced (*see* Fig. 2.1). This does not necessarily mean that the self becomes transparent to others in its totality or without the individual's knowledge but that greater self knowledge gives the knower greater control over what others are allowed to see.

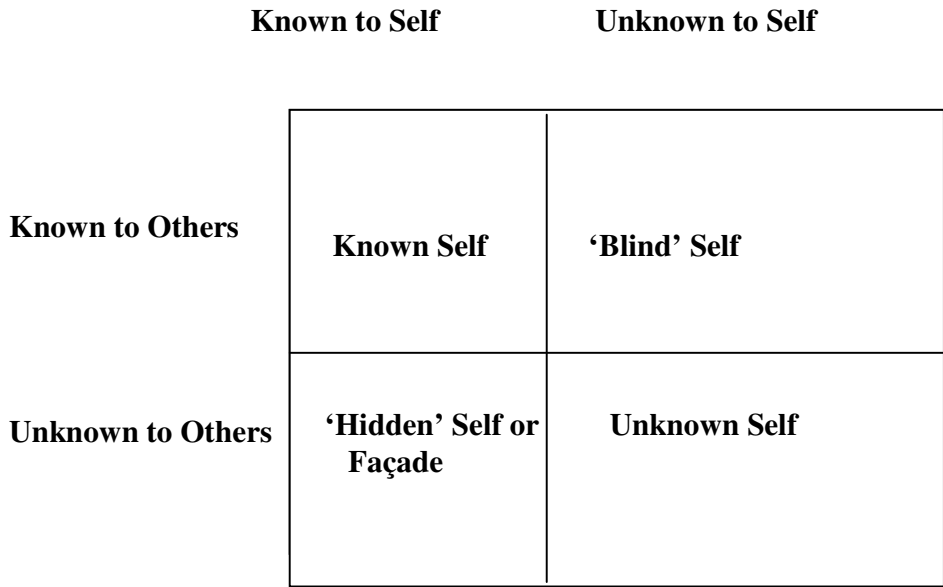


Figure 3.1: The Johari Window before learning or transformation.

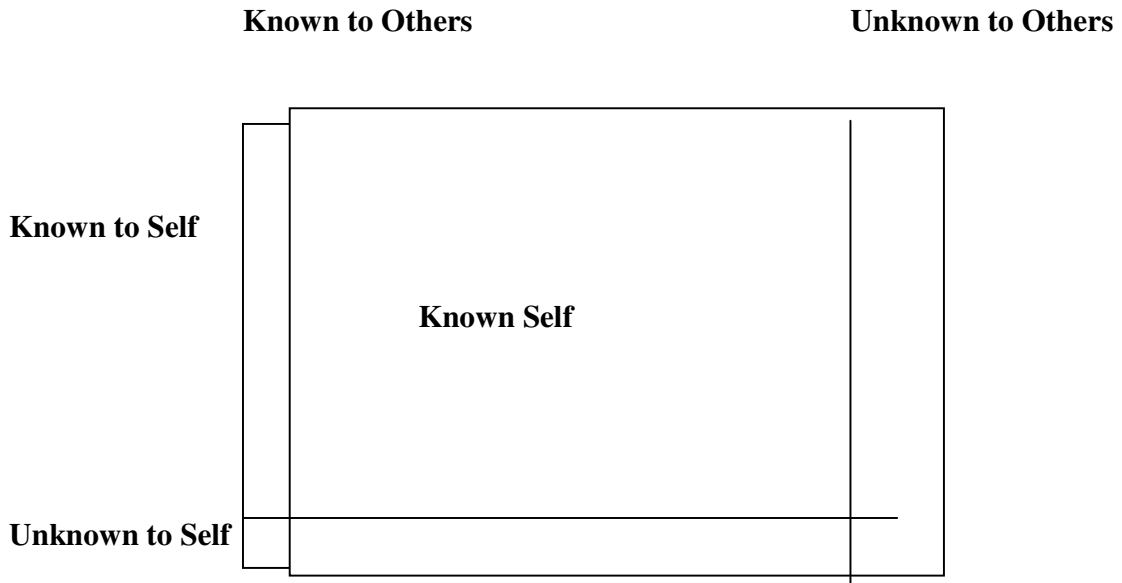


Figure 3.2: The Johari Window after learning and transformation.

The Johari Window can reflect learning at many different levels, from instrumental learning to communicative learning, giving the learner the opportunity to create coherent

meaning and explore perspectives from various contexts. It also provides a useful visual model for presenting the adult as a self-directed learner who can take control of his learning through active self-awareness and reflection.

### **Presentation of Data**

In a qualitative research study such as this there are a number of ways to present a data analysis framework. The choice is defined by the type of study and by the view taken by the researcher as to the best way to present findings, a way that is both enriching and allows the opportunity for substantive analysis, or refers to the detailed account of field experiences in which the researcher makes explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context. This is what Gilbert Ryle refers to as 'thick description' (1949). Comments and writing (along with metaphors) presented by the participants in the research must be understood within the social and cultural context of the classroom and interpreted explicitly in relation to the practice of critical being. There is also, of course, the matter of personal style and preference and what will be most appropriate for the reader. Holliday (2002) observes that in qualitative research the data gathered in various forms is a representation of reality and should not be confused with the social reality that inspires the research. Data can therefore be manipulated, whereas culture and setting cannot. The data-gathering process has already removed me as a researcher from the experiential reality, and the writing will add another layer of separation. From the early stages of the process to the final written document, a balance must be maintained between all stages so that it is clearly demonstrated how the research

was constructed and so that the report of findings is structured in a faithful and sincere way. The manner of representation becomes important in terms of being authentic to the reality as it was originally experienced and ensuring that the reader gets a genuine sense of that experience.

According to Holliday (2002) there are a number of ways to present findings within a qualitative analysis framework. Whatever form the structure takes; it must be one that serves the argument in the written story most effectively. The first possible option is to organise the data in the order in which it was collected and evaluate it in a sequential manner. This can provide a very chronological structure to the analysis, presenting findings as they occurred and giving the argument and thick description a very linear framework. Another approach is to take categories from the same structure that governed the collection of the data and put them together under collective headings for deeper analysis. Again, the result will be a sequential structure and this simple reporting model can be very useful, particularly in a sociological context. However, if a substantive analysis or thick description is to be achieved, it must involve relevant extracts of interconnected data that are supported by discursive commentary and placed clearly within the central argument of the thesis. According to Holliday, thick description cannot be fully achieved '*until the interconnections are fully articulated in the written study*' (2002:113). He also suggests one other approach that I believe will be best suited to this particular research.

A thematic approach to presenting an analysis framework will serve this research very well because the nature of this research requires a more eclectic framework. Each thematic heading attempts to capture key elements of the argument that runs throughout the different data-collection procedures. For example each theme will show links between comments made in interview, journal reflections or writing in the reflection action project (RAP) that indicate evidence of one or more aspect of critical being in practice. Evidence of this change can be noted when participants clearly demonstrate a shift in their capacity to think critically and their reflections and subsequent actions suggest a similar critical function. Some participants express these more explicitly than others. Other conceptual frameworks referred to such as the Johari Window and the MBTI inventory are used to provide a wider backdrop to understanding the nature of change within the context of the Personal Development module. They are not research tools as such in this study. The teaching methodologies examined under each theme will also provide some insights and understanding into the teaching process that took place and these will be explored further in chapter 5. Themes are conceptually driven, not chronologically driven, as each theme observes a different facet or relationship within the overall pattern of the research. The construction of themes is unique and original to each researcher and is therefore subjective in nature. Construction of text is creative and dependent on the *'ingenuity of the researcher as the architect of meaning'* (Holliday 2002:120). Emergent themes will help to reshape and reform the argument as the process continues and even the thematic headings should be an indicator of the substantive nature of each individual section and should contribute to the thick description required.

## **Analysis framework**

A recurring concern of this research is the need to establish a qualitative framework to evaluate the data that has emerged from my work with this group. Earlier in this chapter I suggested the research paradigms that I considered appropriate. The research tools referred to above will address the question of whether there is evidence to suggest that the practice of critical being is, in fact, taking place and how extensive it is. At this point I also want to revisit one model in particular, which I examined as a theoretical framework in Chapter 2: Vygotsky's theory of learning and development. I believe it will offer possibilities that will allow me to examine the data gathered in Chapter 4 and address the research question from a qualitative perspective, as outlined in this Chapter.

Vygotsky sought a 'history' of mental development, not a science (Turner 2005). Turner's argument is that a scientific approach to understanding Vygotsky's notion of development is of little value in the educational context. There are layers that are experienced by teachers and students in classrooms that cannot be revealed by a scientific methodology. This makes the application of Vygotsky's theories very difficult in the educational context and, as Turner points out, *'in Vygotsky's sense a historical approach rather than a scientific one is crucial to finding a psychology that is applicable to education'* (2005:1). A qualitative approach to understanding learners and how they learn may be of use here. The data gathered in this work offers a history of these students' development as much as anything else. Vygotsky's desire to study process, not outcomes, and not necessarily in chronological sequence may also be helpful because in Vygotsky's



reckoning to study something historically is *'to study it in motion'* (Rieber 1997:42–3, *op. cit.*, p.2), which may have similarities with the concept of being and understanding experience as a continuous phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, this research is simply a snap-shot in the development of a group of people with only one thing in common: their desire to learn and re-educate themselves. There is a sense of this being a study *'in motion'* or a development in progress.

Vygotsky's primary concern was to develop the higher mental functions of learners. Unlike lower mental functions, higher mental functions are distinctly human. They have a cultural component and also involve the use of tools, such as symbols and language. For Vygotsky, the education setting was the best place to develop these particular functions. The challenge for education is to enable students to master these higher mental functions through developing the individual learner in a holistic manner, using a variety of cultural tools. These functions appear first in the public and social space and then *'are internalised as personal and private knowledge'* (Turner 2005:5). These concepts and skills that make up higher mental functions must therefore first appear in a cultural and social setting before being internalised. Vygotsky suggests that the main higher mental functions include attention, memory, concepts and will, but Turner would also add to this list reflection, professional judgment, construction of justification and arguments, and the sifting and selecting of relevant data and evidence.

If Barnett's concept of critical being can be considered a higher mental function—and as a concept it could be—then many of these categories could be considered indicators of

development in the context of the Barnett model. These categories are first adopted through the culture in which we live, and can therefore be taught. They are then internalised and integrated into the fabric of our conscious awareness, which in turn means the teacher's role becomes central because it is the teacher who nurtures and guides this process. Education must be about more than teaching students how higher mental functions work and how they should be used; it must also be about mastering one's own higher mental functions and, as Turner says, '*directing attention, remembering, analyzing, proving, reflecting and by internalizing cultural signs and tools so as to transform ourselves*' (2005:8). Developing higher mental functions in this way recognises the importance of the self in the process and the self becomes a catalyst for this transformation. Each learner will internalise these functions differently, so the teacher must adapt accordingly.

Turner's own internalising of Vygotsky's theory has also added insights into how this research might be evaluated. By looking at each individual participant's contribution through the qualitative research process, evidence of the development and transformation of the higher mental functions may be gleaned. From this I believe there is a very clear link to the concept of critical being and Vygotsky's theory because both involve thinking, reflection and action or response, even though the latter would see the process occurring in a dialectical manner. Furthermore, if the data reveals evidence of 'mediation' by the student (the student modifies the stimulus as part of his response to it), then the possibility of transformation and the practice of critical being may become very real indeed. All of these elements will provide the criteria upon the data can be evaluated and critical being tested. A further criterion will relate to the Belenky *et al* (1986) model

of knowing. As mentioned in chapter 2, a correlation may exist between constructed knowledge and individual capacity to practice critical being. If constructed knowing is evident, then critical being may be evident also.

I have also tried to personalise the participants' experiences and to give their learning reality a greater sense of humanness and connectedness. This is important in a qualitative process because it gives value to the cultural and social settings in which they live and emphasises the impact of this on their educational development and the enhancement of their higher mental functions. As a tiny moment in their experience, this research snapshot is both revealing and limited by time and setting. It is important to remain aware of this as we move into a detailed analysis of their learning and my teaching experience.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter has been to outline the key research paradigms relevant to this research and present a conceptual framework that would reflect this accurately. In doing so I have highlighted a number of ethical considerations that impact on this research and have also explained why a qualitative methodology is the only way, in my view, to elicit real insights into the level of change, or otherwise, experienced by participants throughout the process. Research can capture only a brief glimpse of a particular situation at a very specific time, offering nothing more than a pen portrait of a particular set of circumstances or practices. This research is no different, but in drawing attention to this brief moment it is my intention to observe human learning and attempt to

comment on its value and merit within the broad landscape that is adult education. Qualitative research is not haphazard or random, though it can be focused on a very small area of study. Accountability must therefore lie within the workings of the research (Holliday 2002). This research, while emic in nature, must also recognise the role of the teacher in the process and offer some insights into the practice of teaching that may be of value to other practitioners. This work has chosen different pathways and methods, all leading towards the exploration of the same basic set of questions and towards eliciting a 'thick description' (Ryle 1949) that is meaningful and enriching. It is my belief that the combination of action research and the interpretive model will provide this opportunity.

# CHAPTER 4

## ADULT LEARNERS AND THE EMERGENCE OF CRITICAL BEING

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the data that has been gathered and to articulate the outcomes that have emerged. In Chapter 2 I outlined the premise for this research, which was to establish if Barnett's model of critical being could be developed among adult learners through a particular teaching approach that was participatory, interactive and involved action and dialogue. I also suggested that Barnett's model has drawn upon the work of Dewey and that Vygotsky's theories on development and learning would provide a framework in which to analyse the findings. Furthermore, it is my belief that the work of Mezirow (1990), Schön and Argyris (1974) on transformational learning, reflection and reflective practice, along with the work of Belenky *et al* (1986) on how we come to know, will provide a subsidiary framework to support the primary findings. These concepts will be used to evaluate the qualitative changes that the participants have identified and to measure to some degree the extent to which the practice of critical being is evident as a result of the learning that has occurred. As the methodology has been qualitative, the evidence will be presented in this context in a discursive manner where significant themes will emerge upon which the argument will be supported with relevant extracts from the data gathered. While each element will be examined closely, the chapter

will be broken down into small sections and subdivided into each participant's response, which will be examined in detail.

### **Emergent Themes**

The following themes are central to understanding the research questions established in Chapter 1 and will present a structure for the analysis framework of this work. Quotations and data extracts used in this section are presented verbatim as transcribed for authenticity and in order to enrich the humanness of the experience for the participants in this research. At the end of each theme I will comment on the relationship between this theme and my teaching. These observations will then be further discussed in chapter 5

#### ***The nature of thinking; thinking about thinking***

I would never have given my own thought processes much thought.  
(Martin, taped interview, Q.2, p.2: Appendix 7)

To begin this section with an oxymoron is quite appropriate and highlights the journey made by Martin and others as the research process evolved. Martin's observation denotes a starting-point for many of the members of this group, regardless of gender or background. Engaging in the process of thinking became a priority, and a deeply reflective one at that. But there was also a recognition that they had not really been thinking up until now, and some railed against the very idea of thinking for its own sake.

Thinking was a problem-solving activity that led to a specific outcome, but unlike Dewey's view it was not a postponement of action (1938). It was objective and operated within limited parameters and remained outside of and removed from their daily lives, activities and relationships. Thinking as a process was a new concept. For three of the group in particular (Martin, Kel and James) the nature and examination of thinking in itself became very significant in a number of ways.

There was an avoidance of thinking, recognition of the sudden discovery of thinking and a use of thinking as an introspective analysis of self. For Martin, Kel and James, however, it was thinking at a critical level in that it was an exploration of their relationship with the world and themselves from a new perspective. Martin's initial reaction to thinking in this way was one of skepticism and caution, as his comment above suggests. Martin began to realise this change, particularly during his work on the Reflective Action Project (RAP). Up until then, thinking was almost a form of weakness or an avoidance of responsibility: if I don't think about it, then I can blame somebody else. It suggested a low level of reflective judgment (Kitchener and King 1994) and an unwillingness to engage in or activate his higher mental functions. The first noticeable change was a realisation that alternative views exist and do not have to pose a threat. He began to make choices about his own thinking: *'I can choose a subject to think about ... I talk it out at a conscious level'* (Martin, taped interview, Q.5, p.9–10: Appendix 7). A growing confidence emerges in his ability to think critically and objectively and to allow thinking to evolve in its own time:

There's an understanding that something can suddenly click into place after you've talked to the subject for maybe a couple of minutes ... hours ... couple of days ... then something just slots into place ... and this has happened on more than one occasion.

(Martin, Taped interview, Q.5, p.11: Appendix 7)

Thinking about thinking has made Martin redefine his world and engage in a new type of praxis. Critical thinking has led to development and learning that is flexible and multi-dimensional and that is clearly moving in the direction of critical being. For Martin, thinking is no longer an abstraction or something external to himself, but a journey towards a new, internally constructed reality where will and memory are challenged.

For Kel, the exploration of critical thinking was a discovery that had a childlike quality to it in that it helped her to find a new way to examine the world and herself. The first revelation was the dynamic of the class and the equality that existed between teacher and student. Despite having an undergraduate degree, she had never before experienced this type of learning environment. A very vibrant and energetic dialogue replaces Martin's reserved language in this interview. Kel's repetitive use of the word 'want' on pages 1 and 2 reveals a passion for learning that she had not experienced previously:

I was reading it because – this is actually interesting, I want to learn this, I want to better myself, and it's actually one of the first classes I ever actually ever wanted to do it in.



(Kel, Taped interview, Q.1, p.2: Appendix 7)

What was happening to prompt this desire? Kel answered this in her own question: ‘*Who am I?*’ (Kel, taped interview Q.1, p.2: Appendix 7). The physical process of writing in the reflective journal kept this question to the forefront of her consciousness throughout:

I was putting pieces together and I’m ... I’m learning from it and I see why I react to people in different ways, whereas before I might have just cast my one filter on them and kind of went, look I don’t like that person or I do like that person, but I never asked myself why.

(Kel, Taped interview Q.1, p.2–3: Appendix 7)

Kel is using critical thinking as a form of self-analysis, broadening her filters, exploring communicative learning through seeking intuitively for patterns of change (Mezirow 1990) and moving into constructed knowledge by searching for greater internal integration of the self (Belenky *et al* 1986). In a similar fashion to Martin, Kel’s critical self-questioning has led to questions about her perceptions of others and the motives of others towards her. Critical thinking as an active element of higher mental functioning is evident here as she applies the process both to her personal and professional life in a constructive but critical manner.

James’ experience of thinking exposes another dimension of criticality. His approach is predominantly reflective and retrospective in nature. He sums this up at the beginning of the taped interview: ‘*I suppose the one word that would come out of the whole thing was*

*reflection ... and developing that consciousness'* (James, Taped interview, Q.1, p.1: Appendix 7). His attitude in early life was to *'please others'* (Reflective Action Project (RAP), p.2: Appendix 6), therefore the critical dimension was underdeveloped. Upon becoming a parent, James' worldview changed in that he realised his responsibilities but did not question his role in any critical way. The Reflective Action Project (RAP) prompted him to explore some bigger questions, such as *'what is the purpose of my existence, what is it all about?'* (Reflective Action Project (RAP), p.4: Appendix 6) and from this he moves to a more introspective area of trying to understand *'the me in me'* (Reflective Action Project (RAP), p.5: Appendix 6). James' journey to critical thinking is a process of moving into the present and seeing critical thinking as a tool for self-discovery:

Well, what it means for me is ... to have an awareness about the quality of thinking outside the box. To have a consciousness of what has been taking place in your life. To be able to think of a moment and think back and by doing that it puts you more into the now.

(James, Taped interview, Q.1, p.1: Appendix 7)

Critical thinking and critical reflection are interconnected in this model; one acts as a catalyst for the other. James uses past experiences to generate critical thinking and to resolve current concerns and problems. Like Martin and Kel, James has moved to a conscious awareness of critical thinking and has given it specific parameters and functions as it helps him to understand his world. Critical thinking is only one element in

this process, but represents a conceptual shift for James. While critical thinking is a lower order process for Barnett, it is a necessary component if the practice of critical being is to exist. How has critical thinking impacted on the other members of the research group?

Una's concept of critical thinking is:

... not accepting things at face-value. You know, questioning motivation, questioning, em, process, questioning outcomes, you know, that it's, it's quite, you know, that, that, that what ... how one ... that the values one has are kind of brought to bear on the question in hand, so it's not ... it's not a, you know, reflection isn't sort of facile, it's, it's actually, you know, considered, that it's, you know, that, that the underlying, let's say, you know, things can seem to be one way and really be another. And I think critical thinking or critical reflection is about seeing how things really are and not how they seem to be.

(Una, Taped interview, Q.1, p.2: Appendix 7)

Una's awareness of terminology is very academic and informed and is about challenging and questioning current realities. Unlike the others, Una detaches the self from the process and uses critical thinking in a more pragmatic and abstract fashion. Now she is looking at critical thinking as a conceptual framework that allows her to investigate real ideas and values. What is absent here is any self-questioning or introspection. Why is this so? Una is driven by a need to engage in external action. Critical thinking has allowed her

to align her practice with her values and she *'wants to be part of the solution rather than the problem'* (Una, Taped interview, Q.6, p.5: Appendix 7). Una's sense of self is well grounded and had already been affirmed by a successful career before coming to Tipperary Institute. Therefore, she views her growing awareness of critical reflection, critical thinking and the conceptual framework she has discovered as applying to the world, and not to the self. Una used the Reflective Action Project (RAP) to consolidate this framework by choosing to explore her own learning:

I was kind of actively exploring, I suppose, how I learn ... more intensive and more focused I suppose and, ah, more exploratory or something. More in depth, you know, deeper, deeper sort of addressing the issue. You know, 'cause it was, it was going, you know, it was practice You know, it was, it was repetition, it was doing something, you know, kind of trying to get something more fluid, you know, more fluid with something.

(Una, Taped interview, Q.9, p.7-8: Appendix 7)

The Reflective Action Project (RAP) became the critical action employed to examine her internal learning process and to develop her higher mental functions through mediation.

Other members of the group experienced thinking and the process of thinking critically in a more everyday context. Betty saw critical thinking as a way of objectifying situations and standing back from direct involvement and ensuring that she was *'not muddled up with feelings'* (Betty, Taped interview, Q.6, p.5: Appendix 7). Despite this, Betty found it

difficult to separate thinking from feeling, and this was a distinct challenge for her. Anna, on the other hand, saw critical thinking as a deductive process requiring the participant *'to listen out for what may not be true'* (Anna, Taped interview, Q.2, p.2: Appendix 7). While critical thinking was not a new concept for Anna, the participation in the study and engaging with the activities had made her more acutely aware of its value. Furthermore, Anna acknowledged that her thinking had taken on a more multi-perspective dimension: *'In the past I have become entrenched ... I would find myself a little more open now'* (Anna, Taped interview, Q.2, p.3: Appendix 7). There is clear evidence here that Anna is constructing knowledge and integrating it with the self as she recognises her own changing perspective (Belenky *et al* 1986). This was further enhanced by her realisation of the inevitability of conflict in human interaction: *'I had never really looked at it that way before'* (Anna, Taped interview, Q.4, p.5: Appendix 7). Her thinking now had another perspective to take into account. While quiet and reflective by nature, Anna has displayed subtle yet significant changes in the manner of her thinking and the level of criticality with which she engages. Critical thinking has become embedded and integrated more explicitly in her higher mental functions.

While Noel and Aiden demonstrated an awareness of critical thinking and its impact on their understanding, there is a sense that thinking about thinking held less interest for them. Noel, who is in his fifties, was cautious about revealing himself, being shy and reserved by nature. As a result, I sensed some resistance from him as I tried to probe and explore elements of the work we had covered. Critical thinking for Noel was about not accepting *'things blindly'* (Noel, Taped interview, Q.2, p.2: Appendix 7). Despite this, Noel seems to deal with issues in a very resigned and passive manner, accepting what life

puts in front of him. However, in Part 2 of the taped interview his view on his own critical thinking is more illuminating:

I think if you write something down, you have to think more critically. Whereas if you're just thinking and not writing something down, it can be a bit woolly, whereas once you start writing you ... you've got to sort of get to the heart of the matter more, you know, the wool sort of dissipates, you know.

(Noel, Taped interview, Q.2, part 2, p.11: Appendix 7)

Noel is aware of the process and is engaging with it, but finds it difficult to acknowledge the change in himself or his capacity. This may stem from a lack of confidence, an unassuming personality or low self-esteem. There is an unwillingness to embrace a new way of thinking, but he would like to: *'I want ... I wanted to change, but I'm still, eh, influenced by old habits'* (Noel, Taped interview, Q.3, part 2, p.12: Appendix 7). The act of writing helped Noel to separate the process of thinking from the self and his lack of confidence in himself, and at the same time forced him to engage in a new way of thinking. While not thinking about thinking explicitly, evidence of a growing awareness and application through writing is apparent. Unlike Kel, however, Noel's use of the word *want* is not driven by the same need to act or to challenge his thinking as an ongoing process. This was evident from his tone and manner of speech. The comment reflects a resignation and an opportunity missed but with Kel the context or 'thick description' (Ryle 1949) clearly indicates forward planning and determination. However, in this

context change should be measured in terms of degree rather than intensity, taking into account personality type and age.

Aiden brings a slightly different perspective to the nature of thinking. He sees thinking in very pragmatic terms and doesn't explicitly separate critical thinking and critical reflection. He doesn't distinguish between critical and reflection during the process and is uncertain of the language to use to describe his experience: *'I don't see it as so much critical, but it's just thinking about yourself and your actions'* (Aiden, Taped interview, Q.2, p.2: Appendix 7). However, it has impacted on his actions in terms of organisational skills and his approach to learning. Sometimes an action may be a non-action, as long as a critical decision is involved; this links with James' notion of creating a 'stop'. Aiden has also become more conscious of others' perception of him. He wants to be a more consistent communicator and recognises that achieving this will require a more critical and reflective approach to situations and contexts: *'I'd nearly think about two steps ahead ... so if I'm going to say it, I'll stand over it'* (Aiden, Taped interview, Q.6, p.9: Appendix 7). Aiden sees a clear link with the work we have done and a change in his thinking (p.8). Like Noel, there is not a clear picture of Aiden integrating the different critical elements into a complete practice around thinking; instead what is evident is a growing awareness, which might manifest itself more clearly in another context.

As a qualitative theme, thinking about thinking has highlighted some interesting developments for the participants as a whole. There are clear indications of change and development in terms of critical thinking and critical reflection. Many of the participants have demonstrated the use of Brookfield's (1987) phases of critical thinking; trigger

event (teaching methodology), appraisal, exploration (through journals, reflection action project (RAP) and interview) and integration through changes of attitude and practice. There is also a stronger sense of self emerging, which is apparent in terms of their personal development through narrative and dialogue and acting critically in a way that leads towards a better life confirming the range within the Vygotskian model in the context of human development and adding value to Barnett's schema. Many have acknowledged a greater sense of autonomy in terms of managing and directing actions that are more consistent and considered. They have begun to look beyond themselves and examine their relationship with the wider world through real critical thought. Evidence of 'mediation' and higher mental functioning is apparent in terms of conceptual development, selectivity, will and clarity of judgement. All of this existing within a 'historical materialism' that is not necessarily scientifically measurable but evident nonetheless within a clear cultural setting. However it is also clear that each participant is engaging with critical thinking in a different way; some implicitly and related to self; others more explicitly with their world. The range of change and development has varied in relation to the application of critical thinking. To what extent this has to do with methodology, personality, age, gender or learning style remains to be seen. Subsequent themes discussed will, I hope, add value to these early indicators and provide a clearer pattern of development. But first a word about this theme and my teaching.



*Implications for my teaching within the context of this theme*

This theme also presented challenges for me in relation to teaching. Encouraging participants to engage with critical thinking through an interactive process of methodologies and dialogue required me to change my practice, listen carefully and facilitate rather than inform. It raised issues for me in terms of the nature of power and control in the classroom. Critical thinking requires a very democratic and open learning environment; it requires a great deal of trust and flexibility if students are to really feel free to think and explore that thinking creatively; it requires time to challenge and examine alternatives; it requires organisation, planning and building positive relationships. I realised that transformation cannot just be teacher driven; it must be stimulus driven and allowed to occur at its own pace. This involves thoughtful classroom management and clarity around objectives. During the critical incident and metaphor analysis activities, I had to allow for variations of pace and dialogue; I had to accept the reality of a ‘messy’ and ill structured environment and recognise that my role became secondary to an energy that replaced it in terms of engagement, individual autonomy and exploration. In this group there was a desire to be pushed and extended beyond themselves to varying degrees. My practice had to take account of this. The implications of these changes will be discussed in chapter 5 and in relation to subsequent themes throughout this chapter.

### *Managing change and degrees of change*

Change and degrees of change that occur in people's lives are difficult to quantify in very specific terms. The major indicators that I offer here involve actions taken by participants resulting from their involvement in this process, observations made through my own journal work, comments made by participants and dialogue with them. The latter two may need close analysis in terms of emphasis and intensity of observation. Change can be seismic or subtle and can also be interpersonal or intrapersonal, as experienced by Martin and James in relation to thinking.

Kel's fourth attempt to pass her driving test occurred during her participation in the research and while studying the Personal Development module, and it proved to be a significant moment for her. Despite being a qualified microbiologist, Kel's confidence and self-image were poor when she began the programme. Some of the comments on her reflective journal sheets are revealing on this point: *'Few more joined the class, think we are up to six now. You [are] already noticing that you are getting quieter. The larger numbers are getting somewhat intimidating. Well Kel, you're just going to have to get over it. Adapt, learn and adapt'* (Reflective Portfolio, 6 November: Appendix 8). Later on in the portfolio, when writing about her self-confidence, she states:

Personally I am finding that self-talk is my biggest downward drag at the moment. Yet it has always been that way. There is very little that can burst my bubble in life except myself ... I am realising all this only now, I feel a

little sad to look back now and visualise all the missed opportunities I had. All the chances I let go, simply because I didn't think I was good enough, strong enough or worthwhile.

(Reflective Portfolio, 20 November: Appendix 8)

The biggest block to Kel's self-esteem is self-acceptance: *'I know it is only recently that the idea of maybe, just maybe I am worth something rather than just passing through life'* (Reflective Portfolio, 27 November: Appendix 8). All of these comments, in different contexts, paint a picture of a young woman who is bright, outgoing, qualified professionally yet repressed by her own lack of self-belief. In the context of the Johari Window model, Kel's 'blind' self—known to her but not to others—is beginning to retract as she discloses part of herself to others thus acknowledging a change of perception and a growing confidence to manage change openly and enhance her self esteem. This required courage and trust in the process. The driving test became a catalyst for her acceptance of this part of herself and empowered her to change it.

In December 2003 I received a phone call from Kel informing me that she had passed her driving test after three previous failed attempts. This event is not major in itself, but how she succeeded in achieving it is of great importance because she applied a model of thinking and practice that was central to the work we were doing. My personal journal records the incident in detail. In the previous attempts, *'she collapsed completely on the day; her nerves got the better of her; she forgot everything and allowed her fear to overcome her capacity'* (Personal Journal, p.94). The change on the fourth occasion was

spectacular: *'She passed the test because, by her own admission, she focused on a positive outcome, practiced relaxation exercises, prepared well and refused to allow her irrational beliefs to get the better of her'* (Personal Journal, p.94). In my assessment of this event I commented:

She has engaged in very explicit critical action on two fronts. To do this she has entered into a state of critical being that is informed by knowledge, understanding and action. This reflection, self-awareness and skill development has allowed Kel to question her values in a critical way, overcome her fears and allow her values to find expression through positive action. She has moved towards becoming a 'fully critical person'.  
(Personal Journal, p.94–5)

While these comments were noted after the conversation as immediate reflections, there are some points to note that are pertinent to this research. This process provided Kel with the chance to challenge her underperformance, lack of fulfillment and unhappiness with the work she is doing. By managing change in this way, she is developing her higher mental functions and increasing self awareness. In her taped interview, Kel's comment on the test was that *'it proved to me that I could change, that I could develop myself'* (Kel, Taped interview, Q.4, p.8: Appendix 7). She also began to apply this process of managing change to her job by not allowing it to undermine her newfound self-belief any more: *'I can stay in this easily for as long as I want ... whereas before Christmas I just wanted to get out of there, I wasn't able to handle the situation ... but now I've total*

*control*' (Kel, Taped interview, Q.6, p.11: Appendix 7). In managing change Kel has acknowledged her own growing reflective capacities and recognises many of the 'triggers' that have inhibited her development in the past and which she is now addressing through this research process and the PD module. The Reflective Action Project (RAP) was Kel's opportunity to tackle issues in relation to her job and to begin to assert her identity in a clear and distinctive manner.

Kel chose to carry out her Reflective Action Project (RAP) on her work-based relationship with her laboratory supervisor because she felt intimidated and unable to function effectively in her supervisor's presence. Whilst the supervisor is about the same age as Kel, she speaks with Kel only when giving orders; there is no working relationship of any sort. As a result, Kel describes her work environment as *'a place I spend much of my life and yet it is a place where I feel terribly insecure'* (Kel, Reflective Action Project (RAP), Preface: Appendix 6). Despite being a qualified microbiologist, she believed herself to be incompetent, lacking in confidence and out of place in this environment. Using the Reflective Action Project (RAP) as her focus, Kel decided to put the principles of assertiveness studied in the Personal Development module into practice. She chose to concentrate particularly on eye contact; positive body language and challenging her negative self-talk. This was done over five days, with each day focusing on a different aspect of the assertiveness technique or a combination of them. Each day Kel attempted to change the nature of her relationship with her supervisor and to improve the quality of her day-to-day work experience. She set out to do this by applying the techniques and reflecting on their success or otherwise afterwards. This process was very dynamic and

the changes it brought in Kel herself and in her relationship with her supervisor were transformative, to say the least. Kel's determination and motivation were evident when she wrote:

I have to stop this cycle for my own self esteem if nothing else, it is slowly eating at me and I don't like it.

(Kel, Reflective Action Project (RAP), Preface: Appendix 6)

Dewey (1938) suggests that the key to effective education is to embed learning in the learner's own experience but not every experience is educative—only those that generate data for reflection can be tested against theories and further experiences. The Reflective Action Project (RAP) as a mechanism allows for this to occur. Furthermore, it allows the learner to evaluate past experience, apply a new approach to new experiences and then test it, through reflection, for new understanding. As mentioned in chapter 3, it acts both as a research tool and a learning methodology. This is exactly what Kel attempted to do. On day one of the exercise she decided to engage positively with colleagues while doing her lab audits in each department. This involved engaging in conversation, smiling and making eye contact. This may appear straightforward and natural, but Kel's perception of herself in work was as a '*weak, shy, stuttering Buffoon*' (Kel, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 2, 28 November: Appendix 6). While this was an enormous challenge, Kel returned to her desk feeling very pleased with her efforts, despite the pain she could feel in her chest. Such was Kel's excitement that her lab colleague commented on her 'chirpiness' and good humour: '*In the lab I felt more relaxed and in control, more like the*

*Kel I want to be ... Life in work might not be so bad. I might not be so bad'* (Kel, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 2, 28 November: Appendix 6). In her taped interview Kel's comments on the Reflective Action Project (RAP) capture the emotional and the physical transformation that was taking place:

Whereas this I had to physically bring it out in my life, that was scary like, whereas the projects at the end of the day that was just kinda just for class, not just for class but you know, you, I do it at home in my room at night. But this thing, I had to physically work on it during my working day physically put effort into it. It was [emotionally] a 24/7 thing, do you know, instead of a half-an-hour after class once a week, it was draining, a lot more draining, a lot more physical, a lot more emotionally everything draining like.

(Kel, Taped interview, Q.8, p.16: Appendix 7)

This process engaged Kel at a deeply visceral level, to a point where her whole being was participating. It was a complete learning experience where thinking, reflection and action were happening in the moment. Days two to five of the Reflective Action Project (RAP) brought more change and self-growth for Kel.

The subsequent days challenged Kel to address her lack of confidence when communicating with her colleagues and confronting her own self-talk in a specific manner. She attended a company social function and forced herself to engage in

conversation with managers and senior staff. In work, Kel deliberately initiated conversations with her supervisor, joined coffee-break conversations and observed her colleagues' behaviour in terms of assertiveness, aggression and passivity. All of these actions had a profound effect on Kel's well-being and self-image, while at the same time causing her a lot of emotional and physical stress. She describes the constant pain in her chest as she tried each new challenge and the feeling of absolute exhaustion each evening after work. In her final section of the Reflective Action Project (RAP), reflecting on the five days, she observes:

From now on I am going to have to learn to challenge my perception on things. Challenge them as soon as I see them impacting negatively on my life. Ironically, the driving test I have coming up soon will be the proof of the pudding ... The main point that the Reflective Action Project (RAP) made me understand was that it is all well and good for me sitting at home reading and learning off what should be done in a situation. But I found the actual physical practicing of the methods and guidelines is a much more effective (even though exhausting) way to learn something.

(Kel, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 3, 7 December: Appendix 6)

While recognising that learning by doing is in itself no great revelation, what is revealing is the journey Kel had to make in order to reach this realisation. Despite a third-level education, Kel had to endure a painful journey to critical and emotional consciousness



initiated by the catalysts of critical thinking and critical reflection. Kel's way of knowing was now being constructed and there was an integration of voices. Constructed knowers, according to Belenky *et al* (1986), are articulate and reflective women who '*confront the pieces of the self that may be experienced as fragmented and contradictory*' (1986:136). Kel wants to hold on to different points and perspectives and is no longer afraid to live with conflict or contradiction within herself because '*all knowledge is constructed and the knower is an intimate part of the known*' (Belenky *et al* 1986:137). However, Kel came to the process with a desire to change, albeit lacking the skills and understanding necessary to do so: '*I definitely wanted to change, I knew it was in me to change*' (Kel, Taped interview, Q.5, p.27: Appendix 7). Before doing the Reflective Action Project (RAP) her perceptions were very defeatist and negative. But the critical action embedded in the Reflective Action Project (RAP) offered her a mechanism by which to challenge that perception and transform herself. Furthermore, the process of writing reflectively allowed Kel to access her inner self. The weekly journal prior to the Reflective Action Project (RAP) was the preparation ground for this:

I know now that if I had have followed the set layout I would not have been so honest or relaxed in my writing. I would have kept up the formal approach of 'this must be factual and realistic, there are grade and marks involved here'. Hence by default my reflective action project would not have been so blunt. I needed the prior practice of the weekly reflective sheets to break down my training, and allow me to access me and not what I had read or studied.

(Reflective Journal Questionnaire, Q.5, p.3: Appendix 2)

Invoking the terms of the Johari window, this allowed Kel to safely access her 'blind' self (known to others but not to self) and expanded the 'known' pane. While this model is not a research tool, it does offer a metaphorical image of the nature of change taking place. I therefore believe a movement towards critical being, though painful, is evident here.

Change was not exclusive to Kel nor the difficulty associated with it. Betty engaged with critical thinking and critical reflection in a very conscious, deliberate and objective fashion, but found it challenging emotionally, as mentioned earlier. It led to realisations about her perception of others and to being more cautious about reading situations. Like many of the other students, Betty found that the act of writing reflections and exploring those reflections through different methods provided useful learning and development insights. Change for Betty was gradual. She needed to find a way of managing her emotional response to situations and become more objective. Critical thinking and critical reflection provided that mechanism. This allowed Betty to assert herself with others and to establish her priorities: *'I'm able to stand back now ... that's real learning for me'* (Betty, Taped interview, Q.6, p.5: Appendix 7). Learning and development have come together here in a new context, leading to different actions. Changes occurred for Betty through actions arising from the Reflective Action Project (RAP), and they were transformative.

Betty focused on changing her way of managing her relationships through addressing skills such as anger management, stress management, assertiveness and listening. Two

key moments of change occurred—both involved family circumstances and both required Betty to change her approach, thus generating a different outcome. In the first case, Betty decided to change her response to a family member's request, to which she would normally acquiesce. Demands were being made on her time and she asserted her right to say 'no'. The impact of this was quite dramatic:

It went like a dream, I will have to do this more often. I could even enjoy it. I honoured myself and I also honoured the other person and I was not submerged in guilt. My approach was right and my tone of voice indicated firmness without domination. It felt natural.

(Betty, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 2, 17 April: Appendix 6)

The second incident, two days later, involved listening. At a family dinner Betty decided to listen carefully to her family's conversations without interfering or passing comment. She found it very rewarding and felt like the '*wise old owl*' (Betty, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 2, 18 April: Appendix 6) that hears all and says nothing. Through this action Betty created an opportunity to reflect critically on an important part of her personal life and to detach herself in a positive and objective manner. It enhanced her sense of self and indicated a confidence to step back from her family and not feel the need to play her motherly role or try to dominate the situation. There was recognition of change occurring in her, but no fear attached to this: '*I am aware that I have a lot of work to do on myself and I like doing it*' (Betty, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 3:

Appendix 6). Betty has reached a point of comfort at least around the process of engaging with the practice of critical being.

Martin used critical thinking and critical reflection to initiate change in his actions and his views of others. While thinking about thinking, he also began to examine the nature of his relationships with others. More importantly, he began to put people ahead of tasks and now works long hours out of choice rather than to avoid thinking: *'There's a sense of reason that you have to bring to a thing'* (Martin, Taped interview, Q.5, p.33: Appendix 7). Initially, when he was writing in his reflective journal, he used the structured part because he could do so without thinking and didn't believe it would impact on his feelings (Reflective Journal Questionnaire, Q.5, p.3: Appendix 2). This changed gradually as the process of writing began to challenge him and he started to use the unstructured side. The reflective journal slowly became a catalyst for thinking and reflection. It evolved into a type of Vygotskian tool for monitoring development and change. It gives *'coherence of thought during a period of reflection'* (Reflective Journal Questionnaire, Q.10, p.7: Appendix 2).

Change for Martin has involved standing back from the issue and trying to apply a process of thinking and reflection to it. Kel used the reflective process to generate and experiment with change; Martin used the process to create the time he needed to stand still and look closely at his life and personal relationships. Through the Reflective Action Project (RAP) Martin came to address areas and people in his life that were oppressing him and found a way to manage this and establish a new pattern of behaviour. Martin has

demonstrated evidence of a growing sense of critical being and engaging in a self-dialogue at a higher level of mental functioning. He has also expressed a sense of liberation and emancipation as a result of these activities.

In terms of action, the Reflective Action Project (RAP) also led Martin to change significantly the manner in which he related to his children. His reflections on thinking, or the absence of thinking, related very specifically to his relationship with his father. This relationship was typical of its generation (the 1960s in Ireland) in that it was functional (father and son working the farm together), but lacked real communication and intimacy. As an adult Martin developed a difficulty with carrying out explicit commitments he would make in certain areas of his life. While doing the Reflective Action Project (RAP) and exploring this, he realised that this concern with commitment stemmed back to a single incident involving his father and the issue of choosing farming as a way of life. Like most teenagers, Martin didn't want to commit to farming as a livelihood; he had other plans and that upset his father. The topic came to a head one day during a car journey. Martin remembers nothing of the trip itself, just the conversation:

He was a strong person to argue with, and it finished when he made his position clear and made me promise that we would have a good life out of the farm. The promise didn't work out for a number of reasons ... It was a promise that couldn't be fulfilled and probably shouldn't have been made. And yet it was a promise made in desperation. He was from an era when your goal was to build up your farm and pass it on to your son. Here he was, after nearly forty years of hard work

and sometimes bitter disappointment, to be faced with the bitterest pill of all—a son who rejected his whole life’s work. So in desperation he made a promise he couldn’t keep. And I’ve been trying to keep every promise I make since. In a piece of adolescent self-programming, done with all the arrogance and self-confidence of a teenager, I decided that I wouldn’t be like him.

(Martin, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet p.3, 26 December: Appendix 6)

The conflict of an adolescent promise to not be like his father and yet do everything like him lies at the root of Martin’s sense of self. Through extensive use of critical thinking and critical reflection, the Reflective Action Project (RAP) has allowed Martin to explore his experience and find understanding. This was not an easy journey: *‘this sort of self-examination is not pretty or flattering. It leaves me feeling somewhat ashamed and uneasy’* (Martin, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet p.3, 26 December: Appendix 6). In the taped interview he adds:

You can’t do critical or critical reflection without looking at the down side as well ... I would not have been happy with my own behaviour in the past, I would not have been happy with my reactions, but usually I reacted that way anyway and thought about it afterwards, do you know. Ah but never with the same coherence or never with the same extended fear of reflection involved.

(Martin, Taped interview, Q.7, p.17: Appendix 7)

This is significant in that an activity set by me led to real development and growth, using experience as part of the process to gather data and to fix understanding in a very critical way, leading to emancipatory knowledge where interpretation and integration of ideas and experience have taken place leading to a transformed consciousness (Dewey 1938, Habermas 1987). The result is individual empowerment and the management of will along with a critically constructed justification of his new position.

Martin's approach to his children is very different now as a result. They are on the farm with him all the time and he engages in a more physical and emotional intimacy with his son: *'I've had to separate my actions, my conscious beliefs that govern those actions and my own convictions'* (Martin, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet p.4, 30 December: Appendix 6). Martin has found a way through this action to counteract the adolescent promise made and to be constructive in his own world. He wants to assert his own identity through his relationship with his children, yet he doesn't want to lose the integrity that was part of the fabric of his father's world. He has come to rationalise and understand the often contradictory nature of familial relationships, particularly those of parent and child. He observes this paradox when he writes: *'I wonder if this is how sons love their fathers, by being fathers who love their sons'* (Martin, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet p.6, 7 January: Appendix 6). Through the Reflective Action Project (RAP) Martin has transformed his own thinking and is operating at a different level of being. He has come to value understanding and process over knowledge itself:

I would understand the value of understanding to me. I would understand now why ... why I want understanding, why I need understanding as much as or more so than knowledge itself ... So the process and the understanding would be two very important and I would understand now, why they're important, do you know, why they ... why they have value to me more so maybe than the actual knowledge itself.

(Martin, Taped interview, Q.7, p.17: Appendix 7)

Yet despite this change in his level of critical thinking and mental functioning, Martin has not shared any of this work or development with his wife. On an intellectual or educational level, this is not something he needs to do; knowing this himself may be enough. Does this mean that the practice of critical being need only operate introspectively? Measuring its existence therefore might become rather difficult and if this is the case, how can it be incorporated into general educational practice? Martin's experience may be transformative, but it requires an intense level of tuition that is feasible only in a small class group context which has significant implications for education at higher level where externally assessed learning outcomes and instrumentalism dominate.

As with thinking about thinking, change for Anna was more subtle and less dramatic. This involved, in many instances, confirming what she experienced or sensed ontologically. The research process sharpened her focus and made the changes justifiable. For example, being an intuitive personality, Anna is naturally reflective. However, the



difference between reflection and critical reflection has challenged her in a new way and she accepts that it is alright to be that way: '*it reassures me that it is a good thing to do*' (Anna, Taped interview, Q.6, p.8: Appendix 7). Doing the Reflective Action Project (RAP) enhanced this further. Reflecting at this level was a lot deeper, according to Anna:

But when you've to kind of bring it into your own life outside of college, or be it that it was in college, you definitely have to think way more. You know, so in that sense it was deeper. You know, you kind of had to think it through, you know, you had to think first and foremost, well, what would be a good topic to pick or a good situation that happened me, that I could explain it in those terms. So you're examining your whole life really.

(Anna, Taped interview, Q.8, p.11: Appendix 7)

While Anna understates change, there is clear development taking place at different levels. Her focus in doing the Reflective Action Project (RAP) was on skills such as time and stress management, goal-setting, critical thinking and critical reflection. Unlike Martin and Kel, who explored some personal issues introspectively, Anna kept the focus on external skills and reflected primarily on their impact on her academic life. Yet even here there are some changes worth noting.

Anna recognised immediately the need to address a number of issues, including her perfectionist approach to study, an initial resistance to accepting a psychometric personality-type evaluation that did not fit with her self-perception, time management as

a study technique and managing stress during exams. Anna believed that the common element in all of these identified areas was the need to think and reflect critically on each issue, rationalising the problem in order to reach a solution or a change in practice. This brought about a change in her approach and methodology and recognition of the need to personalise these skills at a deep and thoughtful level. However the process of interpreting these subtle changes can be challenging. Apart from the skill improvements around time management, goal-setting and stress management, the response to the Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) is the most revealing.<sup>2</sup> Anna's self-assessment type was at variance with the reported type on the Introvert (I)–Extravert (E) continuum. She believed herself to be more introverted than extraverted, but the test contradicted this. Anna's response was initially very skeptical and, as she pointed out, she was '*quite bothered by this*' (Anna, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet p.4, 11–14 November: Appendix 6). She decided to apply critical thinking and critical reflection to help her to understand her reaction to the result rather than the result itself. This is the only point in the Reflective Action Project (RAP) process at which Anna engages in introspective self-analysis. This process of reflection and critical thinking lasted for three days and forced Anna to re-evaluate her sense of self. Anna's weekly reflection portfolio elaborates on this journey.

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<sup>2</sup> The Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) is a psychometric personality evaluation based on the teachings of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. Research on the MBTI took place from 1921 to 1971, with the Inventory first created by Myers and Briggs in 1940. It evaluates personality on four different continuums: Introvert (I)–Extravert (E); Sensing (S)–Intuition (N); Thinking (T)–Feeling (F); Judging (J)–Perceiving (P). The test places the participant at a point on each continuum. The point suggests only a preference for this expression of personality and each participant receives a reported type score in the form of a combination of letters from the four continuums (e.g. ENFJ). There are sixteen possible combinations, or 'rooms', and each combination has a range of personality characteristics and observed behaviours. This score may sometimes be at variance with the participants' self-assessment combination carried out before the test is completed. However, the MBTI does have a 78 per cent universal accuracy rating. As a psychometric test the MBTI is also considered to be a very well researched and validated example of its type (Myers, Briggs 1995).

Anna's initial confusion was a result of her certainty that she had assessed herself correctly before the test. She was incorrect about both the Extravert–Introvert (E-I) and the Sensing–Intuition (S-N) continuum, but it was the former that bothered her most. As a mature student, Anna felt she knew herself well enough to be confident about the result. The reality that she had constructed was being challenged and it came as a major surprise to her: *'Being that bit older, I suppose it also bothered me that I got it so wrong!'* (Reflective Portfolio, sheet 11 November: Appendix 8).

In her taped interview, Anna acknowledged that in the past she had been slow to accept that she could be wrong, but that the research process and the PD module had given her the skills to challenge this. A deeper understanding of critical thinking and critical reflection was also enhancing her capacity to adapt to personal change:

I also realise that though I am more 'mature', this doesn't always mean that I know myself inside-out; that I should be more open to other views and not get upset by the unexpected.

(Anna, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet p.4, 11–14 November: Appendix 6)

The process led Anna to realise that the reported type was, in fact, correct on both continuums and she accepted this. Engagement with critical thinking and critical reflection developed Anna's procedural knowledge (Belenky *et al* 1986) and allowed her to integrate disparate realities, thereby enhancing her understanding. Anna also

acknowledged in the taped interview that had it not been for the reflection process, she would not have dealt with the personality issue at all:

If I had written down my reflection sheet that evening it would have been either gobbledygook or it would have been: I'm so upset about this, no not that result. You know, bothered. I might have shut it away altogether. No, it's not that I wouldn't have believed it, but I think I might have just not dealt with it.

(Anna, Taped interview, Q.5, p.18: Appendix 7)

This double acknowledgment, both during and after the event, suggests growth and self-awareness driven by reflection and leading to a greater level of higher mental functioning and reflective judgement.

Change and managing change affected other participants in ways that were not quite so dramatic but which were significant nonetheless. Noel's resistance to the process was difficult to understand. He was engaging with learning as a mature student, but was apprehensive about embracing the personal challenges and change that can often accompany learning at this level. However, in the data collected through the various activities and interviews, some anomalies emerge. Change for Noel came in the form of acceptance of where he is currently in his life, moving away from focusing on the past and living more in the present. In one of his weekly reflective sheets, he wrote:

I think I need to get more involved in life and to do this I need to be able to express my views more forcefully in larger groups. I believe I am far better able to do this than when I was younger, but I need to continue to work at it.

(Reflective Portfolio sheet, 18 November: Appendix 8)

This perception was confirmed in his taped interview, during which he acknowledged the need to become more critically reflective (Q.9, p.8). Up to this point he hadn't questioned or evaluated life or events very much. While the process of writing heightened Noel's awareness, he is slow to see change in himself. Yet there are subtle indications of change. However, the extent to which Noel will take this change beyond the research process is hard to estimate.

For Una, change manifested itself in the pragmatic learning domain. She used the Reflective Action Project (RAP) to develop her study and revision skills and found this to be very effective. In doing so she discovered the value of using mind maps as a way of exploring knowledge from a different perspective. This was a key critical action in the process. However, Una resisted the opportunity to use the Reflective Action Project (RAP) or the other activities to explore the cognitive or affective learning domains. She focused on the process in a very objective manner. This led her to a significant realisation about her career. She was in a dilemma as to whether to pursue an '*active or academic*' life. This distinction related to the difference she perceived between pursuing causes

actively herself or arguing their significance in the context of an academic or discursive environment. The Critical Incident exercise helped clarify the answer.

For the Critical Incident exercise the group was asked to reflect on a recent political event or action that had made them feel angry or outraged. Una identified the Irish Government's apparently ambiguous policy towards the Iraq war: on the one hand condemning the war as inhumane, but at the same time allowing American military personnel to land and refuel at Shannon Airport in Co. Clare. Una felt infuriated by this event, but helpless. As she began to analyse her assumptions and values in relation to this, Una decided that she needed to work in an environment where she could fight battles such as this from the front in a very proactive way. The Critical Incident technique allowed Una to explore her feelings objectively and to plan her actions. However, it also highlighted a challenge for Una; she had come to realise that her inclinations were towards doing and activism; therefore stopping to think and reflect critically had to be a conscious effort/action during the process:

Our minds don't want to take time to review and reflect they want to look ahead. One needs to make time for reflection of any kind, a top priority, otherwise it gets sidelined.

(Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.7, p.4 : Appendix 2)

Unlike critical thinking, which Una believes can happen during the process, critical reflection requires time and space. This process afforded her that space and she felt she benefited from it:

When you're told to stop and write you have to, you know, it's an instruction. You know. Well, I suppose a reminder that, you know, it's a reminder that it's, that it's, that it's a good thing to do, you know. I mean, I suppose I'd be that way even in saying that probably, you know, approaching, say the meditation things like that, I, I'm totally into it. But, my challenge is to actually do it. You know, and that's putting, you know, a halt to your gallop and sitting down and take ... and clearing the desk and doing it, you know. So the, the fact that you're saying, 'okay, do it', meant that you were in a way forcing time for reflection. But in forcing it you were then, you realise that it actually has a ... that it's an important thing to do.

(Una, Taped interview, Q.3, p.13: Appendix 7)

Both critical thinking and critical action were easier for Una to practice on an ongoing basis. Critical reflection involved engagement at a more conscious level. The challenge for Una is sustaining this practice because it goes against her preferred activist learning style.

While Una is slow to acknowledge that she has engaged in critical reflection at a substantial level, her Reflective Action Project (RAP) would suggest otherwise. In focusing on tasks such as mind-mapping, goal-setting and reading techniques, she had to reflect substantially on their impact on her learning style and study practices. Her natural learning style emphasised critical thinking and action, yet she had to place this in an overall context that related to her life and career options:

For me this has been about becoming more efficient and more effective.  
Am I concentrating on the right things and tackling them in the best way?  
I have natural tendencies, which I can enhance or challenge. I want to  
increase my capacity. This reflection has shown me some new skills.  
(Una, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 3, 13 December:  
Appendix 6)

Reflection has thus become critical and embedded in her practice to a much greater extent and in a more conscious explicit manner.

James experienced change as part of a chronological or 'historical development' over time, to use Vygotskian terminology (Turner 2005), and it must be understood in this context. James' journey to find '*the me in me*' is ongoing; this research is just a snap-shot of that process. The journey from the eighteen-year-old who was afraid to go to college to the life-changing role of parent occurred outside this research timeframe, but the experience of engaging in this process has allowed James to understand it, to articulate a



language for it and to build a clearer picture going forward. The learning and intensity of the process has also impacted deeply on him. The Reflective Action Project (RAP) allowed James to examine this change very closely and while he found it draining, it was also very rewarding: *'It's liberating as you internalise life's challenges and become reflective'* (James, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 3, 13 December: Appendix 6). I believe evidence of real transformation exists here and James is very much a practicing critical being.

A further dimension to support this view and to explain the change in James' thinking is his capacity to stand back, or 'stop', before taking action, which developed as part of the process of critical thinking and critical reflection. Taking time to seek alternatives and build information before fixing on a decision is characteristic of Dewey's (1938) model of experience and reflection:

... critical action, ah, this might sound paradoxical, but, critical action to me is to stop. That, I, I can be more effective by critical action by stopping because it gives me time to weigh up the pros and cons rather than critical action of, I suppose previously I would dive in the deep end, ah, and carry on, ah, as, maybe as an outburst or whatever. But now critical action means that the most important part of the action is to think about how I'm going to proceed.

(James, Taped interview, Q.2, p.2: Appendix 7).

This type of processing requires a very conscious application of reflective judgment and a confidence in one's ability to carry out the action and accept the consequences. Living with change and managing change in this way has become an integral part of James' life. This inner awareness or unconscious competence is further evidence within Barnett's schema of critical being in action particularly in the area of the use of will as a function of processing, determining and taking action.

For Aiden, change and managing change came in the form of shifting perceptions, his growing sense of knowing and the way in which he makes meaning. This was particularly evident in how he approached meetings and dealing with different personality types in terms of managing outcomes. As an instructor with the Red Cross, he wanted to encourage the quiet, introverted types to participate more actively. To achieve this he began to speak less at sessions and allow people to talk and comment on what was happening. This action came about as a result of the Reflective Action Project (RAP) and his experience with the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI). During two of the days assigned to the Reflective Action Project (RAP), Aiden chose to change his whole style of working with people, which was extremely challenging for him as an extravert. In the first instance, while chairing a meeting, Aiden began to actively seek out why some members were being rigid and uncompromising. He tried to identify how they were constructing meaning and what filters were controlling their views. Once he had exposed this to them, they were able to address issues more objectively: *'I was able to identify why certain people were being very stuck into their view but by exposing the filter to the person they were able to continue the meeting with objectivity'* (Aiden, Reflective Action

Project (RAP), worksheet 2, December: Appendix 6). Through this understanding and knowledge, Aiden acted in a more critical manner and with more tolerance. But, one must ask, is this evidence of real critical being or developing higher mental functioning?

The second incident occurred on the fourth day of the Reflective Action Project (RAP). At the end of the class he was instructing on first aid, Aiden chose to change his approach and to listen more actively to members' questions, along with encouraging quieter members to participate. He found this challenging:

It was extremely hard for me to stay quiet as an extravert and also because I can guess most questions. However, this experience has led me to believe that the quality of the teaching has improved as I now try to reach all members of the class.

(Aiden, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 3, December: Appendix 6)

Aiden also acknowledged that reflection was clearly embedded in this change, which led to critical action. The process of reflection created a 'stop' for Aiden that generated new perceptions, leading to altered actions: *'I also try to actively change my point of view, role etc if I think it will have a better outcome'* (Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.9, p.6: Appendix 2). I believe Aiden's move towards a critical being is becoming more evident and some further comments made by him may support this view.

In the final part of the Reflective Action Project (RAP), Aiden observes that *'in regards to the "how we make meaning" lesson, I find that this has really come to life and is in action everyday'* (Aiden, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 3, December: Appendix 6). Later in the taped interview he indicates that the Reflective Action Project (RAP) was in some ways 'artificial' and that he would have liked more time *'to make it my own'* (Aiden, Taped interview, Q.8, p.11: Appendix 7). Aiden's responses within the different stages and activities have been contradictory to some extent. Is this due to his age (23), which makes him doubt his own competency, or is he being genuinely critical in trying to give an answer and simultaneously evaluate it in the context of what I have asked him to do? If the latter is the case, then reflection-in-action (Schön 1983) is taking place. Certainly the process has expanded the 'hidden self', as explored within the Johari Window (1955) for Aiden, and there is a greater quietness within him and an awareness of how he wants to be seen by others. These elements may not in themselves suggest any major change, but collectively they indicate a clear change in thinking and practice:

... if I didn't do it in the first place, I wouldn't have been able to manipulate it to my own way because I wouldn't have been ... I would have been unaware of it or I wouldn't even have tried it out. Do you know that kind of way, that if I hadn't been exposed to it in the first place I would have never come up with my own little way of doing it, if you know what I mean?

(Aiden, Taped interview, Q.8, p.13: Appendix 7)

While Aiden may not have engaged with critical being and change to the same degree as Martin and James, an irreversible process has begun that is prompting real reflection and action:

And then academically I suppose it's because, before I used to be the first one to ask a question, you know, no bother at that, whereas now I just take that couple or more minutes to say, 'well, hang on a second', tweaking it around in my head because I wouldn't be the greatest one for thinking in my head, I'd be talking and blabbering.

(Aiden, Taped interview, Q.8, p.13: Appendix 7)

In other words, meaning and the creation of meaning have now become a more structured and mediated process and not merely reactive.

Managing change as a theme in this study has highlighted a number of issues, many of which are referred to at the end of this chapter. Clearly there is evidence of change; clearly there is evidence that it is this teaching and learning process that has initiated and accelerated this change. In opening themselves up in such a personal manner has also highlighted the exploratory nature of the process in the personal development context. In examining change many have looked deep within themselves and have used this new understanding to refocus aspects of their lives beyond just academic study. It confirms the value placed on the self by Barnett in terms of moving towards the practice of critical being. While many of these personal revelations by participants may not be earth

shattering in a purely academic context, they represent seismic shifts in the world of these peoples experience and as such indicate the organic potential within Barnett's model as observed through the lens of higher mental functioning. Change in behaviour and thinking must result from engaging with critical being if it is to have any value as a teaching and learning tool. Subsequent themes will throw further light on the nature of this dynamic and its relationship to the practice of critical being.

*Implications for my teaching within the context of this theme*

A key issue to emerge for me as teacher from observing change was the need to recognise change in myself and have faith in my own practice. There were times when I began to doubt the process I was engaged in particularly after sessions where I found it difficult to elicit comments from participants or the comments made seemed more negative and critical. Teacher expectations can sometimes get in the way of real learning and when I realised that the comments being made were in fact helpful and a way of probing deeply into the process I began to trust the process and myself more. I had to learn to listen carefully and observe the group dynamic that was taking place at different times with different groups of participants. The profile of many of these students was such that they would often phrase something negatively so as not to appear too 'good' but intended to be positive and engaged. This reflected their negative classroom experiences previously and it took time for them to trust me and not feel they were being judged simply by the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of their answers. For me this required a greater understanding and tolerance and the need to stop and think in the moment as the class evolved. I was

conscious that my 'self' as teacher became more reflective and quiet which was a stark contrast to my normal extroverted classroom personality. The third theme to emerge from this study brings more introspection and exploration of the self as learner.

### *Learning and the Self*

This theme sets out to explore the relationship and dynamic that exists in the context of the self as learner and how learning impacts on the development of the self. All the participants of this study came to Tipperary Institute with a relatively clear learning objective. However, for all of them this objective was external to the self and outward-looking in terms of result and where it might lead in relation to employment and career opportunities. This is very consistent with the adult learning profile (Knowles 1986). With the possible exception of Kel, they did not look beyond this. As they began to study the PD Module and join the research process, their awareness of the self and the relationship between the self and the learning process began to change. This became evident in a number of ways. First, in the language that was being used to describe their learning, which became more introspective and reflective. Secondly, many members of the group stopped talking about learning outcomes and began to describe learning as an extension of the self and the process of growth. Thirdly, in a module of this nature the self becomes central to the learning dynamic, not in a selfish or egotistical manner but as recognition that deep learning cannot take place without impacting significantly on the self. This section will examine why this shift in perspective took place and to what extent it provides further evidence of the practice of critical being.

As mentioned earlier, Martin presented a very traditional approach to learning, in which thinking was viewed almost as a activity that was not considered ‘macho’ or ‘cool’ in the context of accepted male priorities. Emer Smith (1999) highlights this as a significant factor in explaining whys adolescent girls perform better academically than their male counterparts in Irish secondary schools. The Government White Paper (2000) on developing adult education in Ireland also cites this as a barrier to men returning to education. Yet he progressed to a very self-focused perspective, acknowledging a deep change within himself through the reflective action project (RAP). While not often stated directly, learning had become an affective process for him. This is partly to do with Martin’s MBTI profile (ISTP) which offers some insight into his personality type. The ‘T’ in the profile, for ‘thinking’, indicates a preference for impersonal reasoning, with emotions and feelings coming as secondary data (Myers, Briggs 1995). The task will tend to come before people and relationships. So for Martin, moving beyond the objective self and examining his affective domain as a learner presents a new challenge. As a child Martin felt excluded in school as a farmer’s son who wanted to be a farmer. There was a perception of stupidity attached to this ambition by other students. As a result Martin separated *Martin the self* from *Martin the student* and learning thus became external. During the research process he found himself confronting this and the affective domain re-emerged in a different way. He had to acknowledge that his attitude to learning was totally embedded in his personal experience and his relationship with his father. The self as learner could not be ignored. Did the self as learner manifest itself in any other ways for Martin?



Deep learning often involves self-examination and for many this is a challenge. The learner realises that objective knowledge requires subjective analysis and understanding. In studying a module such as Personal Development, this possibility is heightened by the nature of the content and the manner and context in which it is studied. As learners returning to education, adults perceive themselves as socially competent and emotionally mature because they have experienced the world of work (Jarvis 2004). In this group, however, that experience cannot be assumed. Failed educational experiences, along with long periods spent doing work that was unsatisfying or lacked opportunity, have led to frustration. Change was approached with fear and trepidation, if at all. Fear of self-discovery is projected onto a fear of knowledge and, in turn, an avoidance of any place or process that involves learning. For Martin, this fear of self-knowledge and understanding blocked his development. The reflective action project (RAP) presented Martin with a challenge to explore one of his deepest fears and take his thinking to another level. He became aware that he had avoided this exploration of self by simply not thinking deeply enough:

And I wasn't, I wasn't going deep enough in the past I was, I was skirting over ... skirting over issues that, that I should have thought a bit more about. I was learning them, but I wasn't necessarily regurgitating them, ah, and, and seeing whether I fully understood them or not.

(Martin, Taped interview, part 2, Q.3, p.29: Appendix 7)

Overcoming this fear was a major step for Martin and an indication of critical action taking place. The complexity of his past relationships, his engagement with the reflection process and overcoming the fear of what this analysis would lead to in terms of understanding of the self has significantly shifted the focus of Martin's priorities. He now puts people before tasks: '*I consider people more important than the result now*' (Martin, Taped interview, part 2, Q.5, p.32: Appendix 7). Learning through exploration of the self has transformed Martin's view of the world, his understanding of it and how he acts within it. During this experience Martin disclosed much to me that he had not yet told his wife or best friend. While this is not uncommon, it highlights the fact that Martin was ready to explore the self and so the reflective action project (RAP), along with the structured processing throughout, simply provided the catalyst he needed to do so.

For the female participants in this study the notion of learning as an exploration of self is revealing in other respects. Kel, Anna, Una and Betty were generally more open about the relationship between their learning and its relationship to the self. All four defined themselves in term of their relationships and where these relationships broke down or were under strain, the impact on the subjective self was transformative as they began to listen in a more reflective and critical way to their 'inner voice' (Belenky *et al* 1986: 77). The use of metaphor and image becomes apparent in their language, which will be discussed in a later theme. One common feature they all shared with Martin was a greater awareness of how others saw them and their reactions to those perceptions as a result of this experience. Kel's emotional growth and development have been explicitly stated in previous discussion. For her it was external, liberating and very exciting. For the others

there was an understated awareness of how this learning affected the self, an awareness that is subtle and introspective. As with Martin, the nature and manifestation of this has as much to do with personality type as anything else, but it occurred nonetheless. The process engendered confidence (Betty), confirmed previous understanding (Anna), or clarified practice (Una). Either way, the growth of the self was central and to some extent ran parallel to their learning journey.

Kel has already acknowledged many changes that have occurred in relation to thinking, but she also experienced a shift in her sense of self and communicating to the world through very decisive actions. The process of writing the Reflective Action Project (RAP) and keeping the reflective journal became a conduit for Kel to reach a significant understanding about the self as learner and human being. She is moving towards Belenky's concept of constructed knowledge and finding a 'voice of integration' (Belenky *et al* 1986:131) where she recognises that she is constructing meaning empowered through the self and not through others. Kel is experiencing an integration of separate and connected knowing:

Through the simple act of musing over thoughts and developing my self-awareness with this critical thinking, I now not only know why I am here but I am learning how to focus myself to get where I want. I am realising now that I might not have to leave the last six years of my life behind.

(Reflective Journal Questionnaire, Q.9, p.6: Appendix 2)

Kel is seeking both a pattern (separate knowing) and the lost parts (connected knowing) of the self and constructing a new model of meaning. There is an integration of conflict and contradiction and a need to find a voice to articulate this complexity as the comment above suggests. For Kel this is a very explicit process, stated in a very extraverted manner.

Anna, Una and Betty express this integrated voice, or constructed knowledge, less obviously. In Anna's case, in particular, it manifested itself in a quiet realisation and recognition of alternative views and the need for reason and debate as opposed to thoughtless opposition to ideas. Betty's journey of self-discovery as a learner had a more painful dimension because for her the learning focuses on developing empathy and sensitivity towards herself and others. As mentioned earlier, Betty tended to separate knowledge from emotion because it was painful for her. However, while engaging with the research process and challenging this fear of emotional engagement, she brought about a significant shift in her understanding of the self as learner. She realised that, for her, the way to greater self-knowledge and understanding would come through exploring the affective nature of her learning. As a result, much of her critical reflection and critical thinking revolved around its emotional impact on herself and others. Betty was aware that this process would '*rattle*' her, but she was determined to confront herself and the learning implications that would ensue. I want to examine three of these moments that suggested evidence of the practice of critical being in action.

The first involved Betty's reflective journal writing and the manner in which the texture and focus of this changed over time. Secondly, Betty's developing awareness of listening, externally at first and then to her inner voice. Thirdly, Betty's growing confidence in her own emotional intelligence and her learned ability to trust its authenticity. This generated an integration of emotion and objective knowledge, which were no longer in conflict with each other but rather had begun to find a harmony, or cohesiveness, within the self. That is not to say that conflict is necessarily bad or should be avoided, but it can be an obligatory phase that is required if congruence between espoused and practiced values is to be achieved.

Betty's early entries into her reflective journal are tentative and filled with comments that are mainly rhetorical in nature. Yet she was clear on the desired outcome: *'I knew it would make me more critically aware and help me live my life in a more purposeful way'* (Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.4, p.2: Appendix 2). There was a natural fear in her ability to be honest, authentic and understood. These fears included writing skills and accuracy of language, but more importantly she wanted to find her authentic voice:

I wanted to detach myself emotionally and present my reflection in a clinical way ... It sometimes takes me a long time to reflect because I want to be accurate and not fool myself by writing some pretentious material.  
(Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.7, p.4: Appendix 2)

These concerns and inhibitions are evident in the early entries, but they were quickly replaced by a quieter and more confident voice. In an early entry she states: *'In my mind I tend to connect failure with a sense of loss and unfulfilled ambition'* (Betty, Reflective portfolio, journal entry, 25 September 2003: Appendix 8). Failure is associated with Betty's self-image in a negative way that devalues her and is not proactive. However, this negativity was replaced quite quickly with a more positive perspective:

Something struck me about myself today – I can speak effectively and reflectively about me without revealing myself – that I felt empowering! I no longer hear my voice jumping back at me. I am not afraid to make a fool of myself or appear silly – it is all part of the growing process for me.  
(Betty, Reflective portfolio, journal entry, 10 October 2003: Appendix 8)

A subconscious shift to a more self-confident, introspective analysis is becoming clear. This develops further when Betty begins to talk about effective communication. Through the reflection process Betty begins to recognise and seek out her authentic voice as a communicator. Up to this point communication was inclusive and prefaced with 'we' and 'us'. Now the 'I' emerges:

I tend to use we instead of I when I am reflecting. Reflecting can be very personal and sometimes it is not easy to put it on paper. Communicating effectively is very fulfilling for me – I know when it is happening and when it is not!!  
(Reflective portfolio, journal entry, 17 October 2003: Appendix 8)

The tentative hesitancy about her own capacity has grown into a confidence and a trust in herself and her communicative learning. This change in texture and focus that is apparent in Betty's journal writing is given greater clarity in relation to her observations on listening.

In communication terms, listening is often underrated, particularly in western society, where individualism and the importance of the spoken, written or visual message are paramount. As a result, the capacity to listen is underdeveloped and an understanding of the skills of listening is rarely explored or taught explicitly in higher education. The PD module attempts to address this specifically. Within the research process for this work, much of the reflective work requires a type of internal listening to the self and a separation of thought processes and conceptual understanding. Betty's thinking around listening focused primarily on relationships and improving communications rather than on listening for knowledge or content as a learner. Consequently, listening becomes about the self and managing information and emotions positively and effectively: *'Not being listened to is an affront to a person's dignity – it can cause great sorrow in relationships. Listening helps to connect us closely to people'* (Reflective portfolio, journal entry, 4 December 2003: Appendix 8). She also came to realise the importance of the words used when listening and the need for non-judgmental language. Both of these realisations emerge from a process of critical reflection and critical thinking, but find expression through her inner awareness of the role of the self in the learning journey. The growth of Betty's inner voice and the ability to evaluate process and experiences in a reflective way brought about a confidence and a trust in herself that had not existed previously.

This new trust in her own emotional intelligence helped provide Betty with a more authentic inner voice and led to a greater integration of emotion and objective knowledge. This integration has come about because of Betty's critical reflection and critical thinking activity and is evidenced by changes in her relationships and practices in her personal life. Goleman defines emotional intelligence (EQ) as *'the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships'* (1998:317). Goleman emphasises two ways of knowing: emotional and intellectual. Developing emotional intelligence (EQ) requires five competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Many of these competencies would be implicitly embedded in the more advanced ways of knowing in the Belenky (1986) model. Furthermore, Goleman see these as separate competencies to intellectual capacity (IQ).

Betty has clearly demonstrated an awareness and understanding of the emotional intelligence competencies and they have accentuated her learning capacities in relation to the self. Betty's sense of empathy and motivation to change her way of managing her life and relationships is particularly noteworthy. Like Kel, there is a development of Betty's way of knowing in terms of constructed knowledge as she uses critical reflection to find a way to articulate her new understandings. Betty's final comment on journal writing confirms this:



It is very useful in helping to discover the parts of myself that I am unfamiliar with. It is only by acquainting myself with the aspects of my mind that are usually hidden from me that gives me a greater insight into who I really am ... it is not just a 'paper exercise'. It is integrated into daily living.

(Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.11, p.8: Appendix 2)

Una is slower to acknowledge a link between the understanding and knowledge gained during the research and the subjective self. This may be due to an inherent independence developed over a twenty-five-year career, as a single woman, along with a habitual practice of rationalising rather than emotionalising her experiences. The self as learner has many facets, ranging from absorbing knowledge and understanding in a very subjective way to recognising how this knowledge can impact on the self in terms of confidence and self-belief. Doing the Reflective Action Project (RAP) and the journal writing certainly developed Una's confidence in a way that surprised her:

Well, it's given me a lot of confidence actually. Because I'm good and I know I'm good. And I didn't know I was that good. In some ways, well in some ways I did know I was that good, but I honestly didn't know how competitive I am. I'm actually quite competitive ... [and] in an academic situation, which surprised me! I do not want to come second, I want to come first. Yeah. And I hadn't quite .... Now! I mean I, I will, I will, I'm motivated to do the best that I can, you know, but, I will not settle for

second, you know. And that, kind of surprised me that I didn't, I wouldn't be just motivated to pass. That is completely ... I have no conception of what that's about. None at all!

(Una, Taped interview, part 1, Q.10, p.9: Appendix 7)

The competitive desire challenged Una to question her motives and the result was not personal ambition but a passion to make a difference in a world where she believes change is essential to human survival. While Una didn't always consciously connect the Reflective Action Project (RAP) with the reflective journal, they both contributed to a commitment to critical action of great significance and life-changing proportions: *'The insights gained are very useful'* (Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.11, p.8: Appendix 2). This process led Una to reflect and think critically on her personal strengths, weaknesses, motivations and the relationship between knowledge, content and real understanding. This, I would suggest, has resulted in the practice of critical being at a very deep emotional level highlighting the role of the self as Barnett suggests as the real catalyst for change.

James' experience of the research process and the PD module identified significant changes in thinking, allowed him to reflect deeply on his personal relationships and to engage in a very introspective analysis of the self as learner and as maturing human being. The opening comment of his Reflective Action Project (RAP) captures this clearly: *'Have I been living a self-aware life or living on autopilot?'* (Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 1, December: Appendix 6). His decision not to go to college at the age

of eighteen and the stillbirth of his first child generated a real journey of self-discovery through the Reflective Action Project (RAP). Aspects of this have been discussed earlier, but James' journey has highlighted another interesting dimension of the self as learner.

On day five of his Reflective Action Project (RAP), James engaged in a philosophical reflection on the relationship between his past, the impact his parents had on his decisions and the growth of his self-awareness and development. He was reflecting on the nature of unconditional love and his son's response to the question: "*How do you know you love me?*" *I saw your car from upstairs. My heart went thump, thump. That's how I know I love you so much*' (Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 4, December: Appendix 6). This led James to recognise the importance of living consciously and proactively in the moment and not on autopilot: '*Life becomes a permanent possibility of sensation when we are self-aware but can be a fearful sensation when auto-pilot coping mechanisms exist*' (Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet 5, December: Appendix 6).

Here is evidence of Vygotsky's concept of the 'historical dynamic' of mental development in action through James' own juxtaposition of the past with the present and living in the now. Within the Vygotsky model, the self is also a key component that generates change when activated as a learning tool allowing the learner to move to a new place through self exploration. This shift in his reflection processes has brought James to a different perspective of the self and offers transformational opportunities:

It's as if, I suppose, I'm looking, looking at it in a filter which slows everything down. I think we live in a really, really fast world, where every aspect of it is, is, is, is taken up at an incredible speed. Ah, and it's as if putting on that filter, it slows things down, and by slowing things down from within you may be able to make different decisions, view things differently and maybe be ... you're able to filter out the insignificant things.

(James, Taped interview, part 1, Q.5, p.3: Appendix 7)

The self for James is now the final filter, or arbitrator, via which real understanding emerges. More significantly, this process has allowed James to trust this filter of the self as learner and enable it to become a type of monitoring centre for critical thinking, critical reflection and critical action. To establish the self in this role has been neither easy nor accidental:

So the challenge of reflection, if you enjoyed it, it wasn't a challenge. I probably welcomed it, you know. You see, I think when you meet the challenge of the self, you go through different stages to meet that challenge, but then having met it, it's a comfort zone, it's your friend, it's, so it's not to be feared, it's to be embraced. So, so it's fine.

(James, Taped interview, part 2, Q.9/10, p.3: Appendix 7)

Through critical thinking, managing change in a reflective way and placing the self in a central role as learner, the opportunity for the practice of critical being has become real for James. The self as learner is very organic and vibrant in James' consciousness. It is multifaceted and embraces many dimensions: parental, dream, spiritual, feeling and emotive.

It's all to do with the capacity from within. And I suppose it's to do with liking the self, I can draw on them at various different times in various different ways once I know they're there. So it's alive, it's a living entity within the self.

(James, Taped interview, part 2, Q.6, p.13: Appendix 7)

In contrast to James, Noel and Aiden seem to exhibit a more passive awareness of the self as learner. As it does for Una and Anna, learning for Noel and Aiden remains objective to a degree. Yet there have been indications of subtle shifts in this perception during the process. It is more difficult to gauge the significance of this in relation to Barnett's (1997) theory. As with Betty, throughout the process, Noel and Aiden have observed in themselves the capacity to listen and to submerge their own opinions in the first instance. Both of them have become more aware and active in applying empathic listening, particularly in social and work situations. This type of listening focuses specifically on the emotional needs of the other person and requires concentration and a sensitivity of response.

Well, I think I've tried to listen to what the person is saying not what I think the person is saying, that I actually try to listen to and, ah, I don't know that you can do any more than that.

(Noel, Taped interview, part 2, Q.4, p.13: Appendix 7)

This fits with Noel's quiet, introverted nature, but is also evident in Aiden's comments, despite his extravert personality. In conversations, Aiden is now listening for the 'why' and not just the 'what':

I suppose when I listen to a person obviously they, it's what they're saying, but then kinda the other side kicks in, it's, it's why are they saying that and ramifications that'll have for me of, you know, are they telling me that I should do this because it's actually good for me or is it good for them?

(Aiden, Taped interview, part 2, Q.8, p.27: Appendix 7)

This type of listening requires a greater awareness and trust in the self to absorb and reflect before responding. For Aiden, Noel and Betty listening has become a tool for critical reflection and critical thinking. Change has clearly occurred, but it is not as evident or transformational as in some of the other students.

In exploring this theme of the self as learner, a number of significant points have emerged. The primary point is that learning and development do not occur

simultaneously and that for each individual the relationship and progression between the two is varied. Secondly, personality factors, age, gender and motivation are significant contributors to this variation. Thirdly, the application of any conceptual framework to the learning context will never result in uniformity; it is the lack of a clear pattern that may be more revealing. In relation to the development of theory, the self is central to transformation in both the Barnett and Vygotsky models. However there are indications emerging in this theme that suggest that the functionality of the self is more flexible within the Vygotsky framework and this highlights limitations in the Barnett model. This may be because the Barnett model operates at a more exclusively cognitive level and doesn't fully embrace the affective domain. The approaches used in this research have highlighted this deficiency to some extent.

Within the specifics of this theme a number of observations can also be made. The process of the research has led each member of the group to reflect to some degree on the relationship between learning and the self. This has ranged from very introspective self-analysis to the development of skills, such as listening, that are self-focused and require critical reflection. Most members of the group have acknowledged that learning and development cannot be separated from the self as learner if deep understanding and change are to occur. The result has been changes in practice to varying degrees, either in terms of learning and the practice of learning or in their personal relationships. Subsequent themes will provide greater clarity as to whether these changes are indicative of the practice of critical being and whether critical being is merely a constituent part of higher mental functioning.

### *Implications for my teaching within the context of this theme*

Building good relationships with students has always been a core value for me as a teacher. This stems from my time in second level where good relationships are essential if real learning is to occur. In the context of this research and the nature of the PD module it was also necessary. Carrying out research and working with a diverse group of adult learners can be arduous and nerves can become frayed at times. However when students are asked to disclose aspects of themselves to others through activities, the teacher has to create an atmosphere of trust that allows that to occur freely and without fear of judgement. As this chapter has highlighted, many of the participants have revealed intimate details of their lives through various means. Building relationships therefore is not simply about receiving this information, but requires a degree of reciprocity that adults will look for as a sign of trust and commitment. I had to be prepared to disclose elements of myself in that context and this had to be balanced with the need to remain objective at the same time. Building relationships of this nature in a teaching and learning environment is very challenging. The 'I' as learner and explorer of self must be equally ready to embrace this type of process.

### ***Women and Knowing***

This theme has been touched on in previous discussions, but it warrants particular reference here. I believe there is a significant link between the practice of critical being



and how we come to know as human beings. The four women in this study have each experienced transformational change that reflects this knowing and that has led to specific insights and understandings for them. For the most part, as human beings we do not spend too much of our time pondering or reflecting on the great universal questions: what is truth? Does God exist? How do I know what I know? However, we often ask such questions within the context of day-to-day experience. When you unexpectedly know the answer to a difficult question and your friend asks, how you knew that, it may elicit a brief reflection or surprise, and then the moment passes. Yet it shapes the way we see the world and our role in it. Such moments *'affect our definitions of ourselves, the way we interact with others, our public and private personae, our sense of control over life events, our views of teaching and learning, and our conceptions of morality'* (Belenky *et al* 1986:3).

For many women, however, when these questions arise in discussion their contribution can be devalued or even ridiculed and as a result they often lapse into silence. The Belenky (1986) study identified 'silence' as the first way in which women come to know. Ironically, many of the women in Belenky's study also linked 'voice' to silence. By using this reference metaphorically, they were indicating that they were being silenced and words were being used as weapons against them: *'We found that women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined'* (Belenky *et al* 1986:18). The sense of self was being denied through silence and there was an absence of dialogue with the self, making any kind of introspection impossible. While Belenky *et*

al demarcate the seven stages for the purpose of clarity in their writing; it is evident that women are experiencing different stages of knowing at the same time in different contexts. As Vygotsky (1978) has suggested, there is no absolute convergence between chronological age, development and the practice of higher mental functions. Barnett's (1997) model of critical being requires a specific level of knowing to function effectively and may be evidenced through actions or statements taken or made by participants. Therefore a correlation may need to exist between a level of knowing and the practice of critical being before real change can occur within his theoretical framework. The four women in this study experienced many of these elements to varying degrees and I would like to examine the significance of this in relation to the theme of women and knowing.

All four women in this research experienced a denial of the self, but for different reasons. Una was denying the pragmatic self in her pursuit of academic excellence. Betty denied her own identity and assertiveness in her relationships. Kel denied her ability and self-belief. Anna denied her personality type as a result of possibly submerging her identity after the loss of her child. In Belenky's terminology, they began the research programme at the level of received knowledge. One of the characteristics of this level of knowing is the need to listen to the voices of others, a need that is often due to a lack of any inner dialogue taking place. In his study of young men and knowing, Perry (1970) referred to this as 'dualism'. There is only one right answer at this level. Initially Anna, Betty and Kel operated at this level, while Una was more prepared to voice her own views when the opportunity arose. This level of knowing is transient and can change quickly. There were, however, indicators of other levels of knowing at work, and in relation to the practice of

critical being this may be important. Does the practice of critical being require a particular level of knowing to exist within the individual before it can be accessed? If this is the case, is Barnett's model therefore inaccessible to many learners and can a day-to-day learning environment accommodate this? These are significant questions and they will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

All of these women displayed other characteristics of received knowers. They use listening as a means of learning how to do the 'right thing' and seek moral knowledge from others. The care and empowerment of others central in their lives is also a priority. Real knowledge and understanding exists outside the self and the notion of 'becoming' and constructing knowledge from within is very difficult. They are defined by the comments of others: *'I wouldn't have had the confidence to let myself be interesting'* (Kel, Taped interview, part 2, Q.13, p.45: Appendix 7). Rapid change becomes challenging for received knowers; the four women in this research experienced this to varying extents. Nonetheless, the writing of journals and the Reflective Action Project (RAP) did allow these women time to develop a confidence in their own knowing, which provided opportunities to experience other types of knowing. These processes became a link and a catalyst between learning and development.

The content of the writing also had a different texture for the women in the group. There was a sense of working things out through the writing that was less apparent in the men's journals (with the exception of James). It represented an exploration of circumstances and feelings rather than an assertion of rights or power. Anna's Critical Incident activity is an

example of this. She was angry at the County Council's approach to issues and the lack of any real consultation process. She eventually processed this by recognising that her own view was only one of many and she began to take a long-term view of this type of development:

But I think I'm more realistic about it, that it's not, it's going to take ages. It's not going to happen overnight. Well, I think I understand too some of the things that prevent the Council doing what they might like to do.

(Anna, Taped interview, part 2, Q.9, p.25: Appendix 7)

In acknowledging that there is more than one answer or outcome, Anna's comment above suggests that she has moved into subjective knowledge and is asserting her own identity in a new way. All the women moved through this subjective stage and asserted a new emerging self: Betty through her relationships, Una through her renewed idealism and Kel through work. Yet these realisations, or truths, were intuitive and subjective in practice and not articulated publicly, except through me in their journal writing.

Truth, for subjective knowers, is an intuitive reaction—something experienced, not thought out, something felt rather than actively pursued or constructed.

(Belenky *et al* 1986:69)

The sense of 'negative identity' was common to all four women at this stage—in other words, defining themselves in opposition to others and against what they are not. Other

stages of knowing also became evident as the research continued. This refers particularly to procedural and constructed knowledge and to what extent, if any, this level of knowing is necessary if the practice of critical being is to occur.

The purpose of this research is to explore the applicability of Barnett's theory and to establish if it can be taught in the context of a specific type of learning environment and through a specific module. According to Belenky *et al*, procedural knowledge has two stages and is defined as a move from subjectivism towards reasoned reflection. Women who make this transition did so only when their '*old ways of knowing were challenged*' (Belenky *et al* 1986:88) and they wished not to be drawn back into a world of silent obedience. The key to making this transition is to find a way to articulate to others the subjectivist inner voice and be understood. This new language is the language of reasoned reflection. The language and thinking must be measured in tone, defensible, must indicate control and must take a multi-perspective view. External forces and objectivism become significant factors in knowing. The presence of knowledgeable people acting as tutors in a formal way also characterises this stage and this will be relevant to my discussion in Chapter 5. This is the first stage of procedural knowledge.

The second stage of procedural knowledge is that of separate and connected knowing and has been referred to briefly under previous themes. Understanding has become a more intimate experience between the self and the object, but requires acceptance and mastery over the object to be fully understood. This can lead to a qualitative evaluation of the object and can help the knower to articulate a new understanding. Kel's attempt to change

her role at work and people's perception of her is indicative of a move towards this type of knowing. There is a need for her to find a real empathy with her knowing, which is also evident with the other women to varying degrees. Una's changed perspective on critical thinking is an example of processing her knowing in both a separate and a connected manner:

I think, I suppose, while I think I understood intuitively what critical thinking was before this year, I now have a more, let's say quote unquote, academic view of [what] critical thinking is, I suppose. So it has informed my previous understanding of it. I wouldn't have seen it in the, in the sort of conceptual framework, I hadn't come across it I suppose in the way it was presented before, but it made a lot of sense when I saw it.

(Una, Taped interview, part 1, Q.3, p.2: Appendix 7)

In objectifying the concept, Una has both separated and connected her understanding in a new way. The use of the word 'academic' is clearly a synonym for objective knowledge. Una's intuitive and academic understandings have been blended in a new and transformed manner. This type of knowing is not unique to women—men experience it, too—but it is often understood only instrumentally, in terms of outcomes and results (Perry 1970).

Other characteristics of separate knowing include doubting, a skepticism about everything, including their own ideas, avoidance of arguments because it can be

personally hurtful and extricating the self from the promotion of ideas and arguments. Both Kel and Betty exhibited many of these elements in managing their personal and work relationships. Connected knowers, on the other hand, must re-engage with the self and others through empathy; women, unlike men, find it easier to believe than to doubt. Women in this mode also refuse to judge, pursue collaboration or use personal knowledge and they try to objectify the process at all times in the pursuit of a single voice. Separate and connected knowing involves a dialectical confrontation between the self and objective knowledge in search of the single voice that characterises constructed knowing. The challenge of the single voice is the harmonising of understanding and practice, the integration of feeling and thinking and the capacity to step outside conventional boundaries and form new models of meaning.

According to Belenky *et al*, constructed knowers are reflective and articulate women. They accept that each human being is engaged in the construction of knowledge and seek the integration of the self and knowing. Many women at this stage feel and develop '*a narrative sense of self – past and future*' (Belenky *et al* 1986:136). They recognise context and the variety of human response, accept diversity and are not threatened by change: '*Answers to all questions vary depending on the context in which they are asked and on the frame of reference of the person doing the asking*' (Belenky *et al* 1986:138). They will probe the very nature and the context of every question. Like Perry's study (1970), very few reach the highest levels of knowing or reflective judgment until their thirties, and not without some element of formal higher education (Kitchener and King 1994). Constructivist women are challenged by conflict and contradiction, are passionate

knowers because the self has become an instrument of understanding and they will use the *'language of intimacy to describe the relationship between the knower and the known'* (Belenky *et al* 1986:143). Finally, constructivist women come to understand that listening to others doesn't diminish their own inner voice, yet may still engage in silence in male company. While moral choices are relative and contextual for these women, they must take into account individual perspectives, feelings and needs. This leads to a moral commitment to action that is complex and makes their world a place that is liveable, where values and ideals must be nurtured and helped to grow. To what extent have the women in this study reached this level of knowing?

Kel and Una demonstrated many of these features as the process of the research unfolded. In relation to Anna and Betty it is less obvious, but there are indicators of constructivist knowing nonetheless. Una's dilemma between her academic capacity and her passionate commitment to action is a prime example of constructive knowing because she has recognised the need to align her values with her practice:

How one spends one's time or what one does or, you know, with the things that one gets involved with, that they're actually aligned to its core beliefs. That, that was, that was something that came through, well, that I really took from this year was, it's sort of, I suppose, the, you know, the urgent, the important sort of, am, you know, dilemma, you know that, once one's values, if what one does is consistent with one's values, then you're on the right, then you can say that you're being effective.



(Una, Taped interview, part 1, Q.4, p.3: Appendix 7)

Una's concern for others is very universal in principle, but there is evidence of a greater empathy for people's needs and feelings. Again the Reflective Action Project (RAP) was a huge influencing factor for Una in terms of crystallising her thinking:

I mean, I would say it was a huge, it was actually, it was a huge help. I would have to say, because it, it, am, it, what I suppose I realised is that I can, I can use, am, say, a single word to trigger other things, you know, that, you don't have to have all your notes there in front of you, you can have one word or one phrase and that phrase is the key to unlock a whole other level of information that you don't have to have, the detailed information.

(Una, Taped interview, part 2, Q.6, p.16: Appendix 7)

While Una is talking specifically about words and mind maps, there is also a realisation of the link between language, objective thought and the self. Evidence exists here of constructivist knowing being translated into action through language as a medium for change. This was reinforced by a later statement relating to the PD module and its level of engagement in terms of language and the importance of *'listening to the subtext of what people are saying'* (Una, Taped interview, part 2, Q.7, p.17: Appendix 7). Becoming aware of subtext is empathy at a very deep level and indicates complex higher mental functions. Clearly some of these elements existed before this research, but the

process has enhanced Una's understanding and level of knowing to a greater point of clarity.

By contrast, Anna and Betty focus the same empathy towards their respective spouses and families, but there exists a similar commitment to action and recognition of difference and diversity. Like Una, Anna developed an interest in mind-mapping as an alternative way to frame knowledge. This provided a new way of thinking and structuring understanding that in turn influenced her approach to many of her personal circumstances. Mind-mapping is creative and unorthodox in nature and was consistent with her use of the blank, open side of the weekly reflective journal:

I could lay it out whatever way I wanted it, but I thought one area was more important to me, than another, sure I had the full page to, I could give two-thirds of the page to that part and a third to the other, or not mention the some parts even if I wanted. Creative, I suppose, is more of the way I'm leaning, yeah. I felt a little bit boxed in and I probably write too much about things anyway, you know, do you know what I mean? And the boxes close me in a bit too much.

(Anna, Taped interview, part 2, Q.4, p.16–17: Appendix 7)

Anna's engagement with critical thinking and knowing was creative and intuitive throughout every activity. She accepted the challenges to her self-perception and adjusted her views accordingly. In addition, Anna's previous acceptance of the inevitability of

conflict suggests a multi-perspective, constructivist viewpoint. She has developed a strong sense of reasoned reflection, acknowledges diversity and her personal experiences have accentuated her levels of empathy.

Similarly, Betty exhibited many characteristics of constructivist knowing, but she also found the experience painful:

I feel that, well, for me, that if I have the courage to look at myself and see what direction my life is heading in and if I see something that's not working for me, that I have the courage to look at it regardless of how painful it is and 'tis in that, 'tis in that pain that the learning, the learning is for me. That there's greater, yeah, greater lessons to be learned during term. No pain—no gain.

*Q: And would that apply to you? Do you think that's an important principal that oftentimes learning comes at a price? It comes at a price and at the same time I don't want to be a glutton for self-punishment either. 'Tis just about striking the balance for me.*

*Q: And when that learning comes, does it change you? Do you feel changed by it? Yeah. I'd have, am, greater insights and deeper insights into, into myself, I mean, primarily, I'm more interested in looking at myself because it's easier at times to see the chip in other people's lives and not see the log in one's own.*

(Betty, Taped interview, part 1, Q.3, p.2–3: Appendix 7)

This self-analysis has led to a changed perspective and a greater empathy for others. Betty's sense of moral conviction is also evident in the biblical reference, above. Linked to her new awareness of the power of active listening beyond the self, this reflects significant constructivist knowledge. The Reflective Action Project (RAP), along with the ongoing journaling, created an opportunity for Betty to objectify knowledge and to stand back and take a different view of the world and be open to real change: *'And it's not that I'm set in my ways, I mean I'd have, I hope that by looking at myself that I'm able to change and willing to change, that sort of, go with the flow rather than being concrete in my ideas and in my way of being'* (Betty, Taped interview, part 1, Q.5, p.4: Appendix 7). Betty's use of the phrase *'way of being'* recognises the ongoing nature of change and a deep psychological awareness of her own transient and diverse world.

As a younger participant, Kel's sense of constructivist knowing expressed itself in a different and dynamic manner. Many aspects of Kel's thinking, reflections and actions have been examined in previous sections. The entire experience of the Personal Development module and the research process was a journey towards knowing for this young woman. Despite admitting to having little understanding of the concept of critical thinking, Kel absorbed its possibilities and internalised its operations:

Now I'd see it as a much more personal kind of thing, taking it from my point of view, not from a book. Knowing the information, but filtering it through me, filtering it through my point of view and then putting it in

how I'll understand it, not how yeah, not how I should understand it, but how I understand it.

(Kel, Taped interview, part 1, Q.2, p.4: Appendix 7)

Kel is moving from procedural to constructive knowing. Up to this point other people had answers and Kel accepted them, often without question. Now she has begun to seek a single voice through her reflections, relationships and actions. Kel has begun to listen more, to be less defensive, to accept other viewpoints and failings and to recognise her own real capacity for the first time: *'I didn't realise I had the skills inside of me to reflectively think, the concept wasn't even put to me before'* (Kel, Taped interview, part 1, Q.6, p.11: Appendix 7). With this acceptance comes real separate and connected knowing and a self-belief that expresses itself both in work and in her relationships: *'Why are you apologising for being who you are, you can't change who you are, you can develop who you are. But the core you is still the same, and there's nothing bad about that'* (Kel, Taped interview, part 2, Q.10, p.38: Appendix 7). There is here a harmonising of values, a clarifying of meaning and a broadening of the 'blind' self, as framed in the Johari Window model. While writing in her Reflective Journal, Kel also became aware of this imbalance in herself. She noted that she had difficulty expressing thoughts and feelings that didn't have a problem-solving dynamic or instrumental focus: *'I had assumed that I'd had a good grasp reality and myself, but looking back now not as much as I had thought. The Johari window was seriously lopsided'* (Kel, Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.4, p.2: Appendix 2). The mandatory and continuous nature of the Reflective Journal aided Kel in this process because it required an ongoing critical

analysis of her knowing and understanding. She began to connect her subjective and objective self in a very conscious manner:

The reflective journal allowed me some re-cap time, some me time that I probably otherwise wouldn't have allowed myself. I do firmly believe that if it wasn't mandatory I might not have written in it every week and hence not have absorbed as much as what I have, which by default would not have made me as effective a person that I am becoming.

(Kel, Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.4, p.2 : Appendix 2)

This self-realisation is further evidenced in a later comment:

I suppose my biggest wall would be my tendency to internalise my thinking, it is the safest place I know and therefore I have the freedom of thought up there, it's safe and secure. But I know I have to change that and I know now I can only do it with help, I know that to make me a whole and efficient person I have to let out my thoughts, even if it is only on paper, but from here I am learning to vocalise them and I feel better for it when I do ... Even if I don't vocalise them to people at the very least I am vocalising me to myself, by writing things down.

(Kel, Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.7, p.4 : Appendix 2)

The sense of knowing and higher mental functioning at a very significant level is emerging, along with the criticality required by Barnett. But is one required to achieve

the other? Is Barnett's model of critical being unique or new in terms of learning and development, or is it that accessing it as a learner cannot be achieved without other elements of understanding and knowledge already being in place? Barnett has advocated that the practice of critical being by students should be an objective of higher education. Is critical being the zenith of this process where reflective judgment, levels of knowing and higher mental functions are incremental stages, or is critical being simply a synonym for all of the above? It is evident that these women have demonstrated significant levels of integrated and constructed knowing. They have also turned this understanding into actions that have changed their thinking and practice, so one might infer that the practice of critical being is taking place.

However, Barnett does not provide an incremental structure to measure the attainment of critical being or outline its stages. He simply presents a linear model of being to which one ought to aspire. He establishes what is wrong, in his view, with higher education and presents a hypothetical alternative. It is my view that many educationalists have presented theories about what education must achieve for the learner, but fail to indicate how this is to be done within the day-to-day classroom context. Barnett proposes that students must be fully engaged in all three domains of learning—knowledge, self and the world—for the practice of critical being to be made possible. He also acknowledges the importance of the domain of self and argues that massification in higher education has reduced the value and opportunity to develop this domain adequately. There is a need for a '*durable self through critical disposition across all three domains*' (Barnett 1997:105). But how is

this to be achieved? Other themes that have emerged will also highlight this problematic concern.

### ***Men and knowing***

It is worthwhile to briefly observe the manner in which the four men in the group expressed their sense of knowing and how it manifested itself in their experiences and actions. Perry's study (1970) suggests that men come to know in a very rational, empirical and linear fashion and that they do not experience 'silent' knowing, as did the women in Belenky's study (1986). Men quickly take on the role of male supremacy and the 'rightness' of their views from an early stage as a norm and expectation (Perry 1970). However, Perry's study was limited to a very specific age group and context. The four men in this study are outside these parameters in age, context, attitude to learning, expectations, culture and experience. They also demonstrate, to varying degrees, levels of knowing that could be validated within the Belenky *et al* (1986) framework. In some instances there is a clear indication of knowing that exists within the affective learning domain. Martin and James attempted to rationalise and explain affective change in themselves through logical analysis and critical thinking. Aiden looked closely at learning from the perspective of the 'self' and its implications for his relationships and making meaning. By contrast, Noel was reluctant to engage at this level and struggled to articulate any development, particularly in the affective domain. All four did demonstrate the presence of procedural and constructed knowledge, however, through both their work and actions. This again raises the central question: to what extent are these models of



knowing and understanding distinctively different, or are they covering the same broad intellectual ground? Vygotsky's (1987) model does offer a wider historical dialectic that embraces learning and development from childhood and provides structures and methodologies that enhance the development of higher mental functions. In addition, Vygotsky places this process within a very fluid and dynamic cultural context. A brief look at the men's experience in this research will validate these concerns.

Martin's sense of constructed knowing was recognised by him as he talked in the taped interview about developing a greater understanding of complexity and tolerance towards positions that hitherto would have angered him, or left him feeling confused. One example was the change in his attitude towards the American soldiers in Iraq and their treatment of Iraqi prisoners-of-war. Initially he wondered why trained soldiers would behave like this and assumed that they had been given orders to do so. As a result of his experience with the Reflective Action Project (RAP) and methodologies used in the PD module, he realised that behaviour such as this may not be rationally understood or blame attributed directly to any one individual. His sense of separate and connected knowing had begun to integrate into a single voice, like Kel and Una, but his actions with regard to his son and others had also been transformed. He was now continually re-evaluating his assumptions and was truly beginning to appreciate the complexity of human relationships and actions:

But I can understand now why that would happen and it would make you suspicious of some of the motives of some, motivations of people. And

why did nobody ever be, were they never actually convicted because I doubt if anyone ever gave the order, they knew damn well what they were doing. I understand a thing like that maybe a little bit. I'd understand now, whereas I, I probably wouldn't even have bothered to think about it in the past. Ah well, I can understand why they did, but I can understand why

*Q: It doesn't mean you condone it but you understand it.*

No, yeah, I can understand it, but I ... I can understand why, I can understand how it was done as well, and that it...they didn't even have to order anyone to do those things. All you had to do was stick them inside the four walls and, and let them off, at it. It was going to happen sooner or later. Do you know that it was reasonably predictable?

(Martin, Taped interview, part 1, Q.4, p.8: Appendix 7)

Given Martin's absolute need up to this point to rationalise situations and find a reason, or a box, for everything, this viewpoint represents a very significant shift in his knowing and mental functioning. He has become challenged and engaged by this process in a passionate and exciting way and this knowing has a deeply affective and spiritual context, as his experience with his father suggests. While these changes were slow to come, they are clear evidence that Martin's mental functioning and critical thinking have moved to a substantially different and improved level of development:

The changes don't come; the changes don't come overnight, like. They do, they do tend to creep into your thinking and your approach to things

eventually. But the more you think of them, the more they tend to creep in and settle in as, as part of the way you do things. Yeah, most definitely and, and, and a lot of my approach to the structure of thinking, through thinking things out, would have been prompted by this, you know. I would have done some of it anyway, but never to, never, never understanding as well. I think now about a subject on a reasonably coherent basis for a period of time.

(Martin, Taped interview, part 1, Q.8, p.17: Appendix 7)

The need to critically reflect and take time to clarify his thinking has become very apparent throughout and Martin's confidence in his sense of constructed knowing and critical being is asserting itself very clearly.

James also began to exhibit another characteristic of constructed knowledge: real talk. Both men, James and Martin, have become very comfortable with sharing their understanding in terms of connecting experience, intimacy and knowing. Both discovered this through their respective Reflection Action Projects (RAP), which involved an analysis of their relationships with their fathers and the subsequent impact this has had on their own experiences and relationships as fathers to their sons. This highlights the emerging connection in this study between making meaning, experience, change in the quality of knowing, criticality and higher mental functioning. As Dewey has observed, real learning occurs through the processing of valid experience by reflection leading to alternative action (1938). The learner must become aware of the importance of the past

and his experience so as to make it a '*potent agent in appreciation of the living present*' (Dewey 1938:23). Vygotsky (1978) also acknowledges this as one component in his concept of 'historical materialism'. Here I think there is a clear connection between the men and the women in the study in relation to constructed knowledge and their practice of critical being as an active, day-to-day reality in their lives. Like the female participants, Martin and James have accepted that moral and ethical choices are both contextual and relative and have integrated this into their social, spiritual and working lives:

You know, that other things begin to, everything begins to gel together after a while, and you can get an insight into, and you find eventually once you've done that for a bit that the alternatives will coalesce down into one or two anyway. Do you know that the decisions can be made for you because, do you know, you've begun to see the reasons why you won't do something in as much as why you will do something. Do you know? So, it's not just, it's a part of learning, it's in using those things that it's now, it's part of life now, rather than just part of college.

(Martin, Taped interview, part 2, Q.8, p.47: Appendix 7)

Martin's openness to change and diversity is apparent, but it has taken time and a lot of courage to accept this new reality and to act accordingly. Unlike the female participants, both Martin and James may focus their energy and passion towards one action or task

rather than a number of them over a given period, while at the same time recognising the complex nature of the situation.

James also demonstrates his constructed knowledge, which allows him to alter his praxis. Earlier sections have already referred to James' growing sense of criticality and an awareness of the relationship between his emotional experiences and the development of his mental functioning and the practice of critical being. Here we can also see an integrating of the separate and connected knowing into a single voice, like Martin, giving him that potent appreciation of the living present, as Dewey suggests. James is also keenly aware of the value of 'silence' as a reflective tool, but unlike the women it is not an implement of oppression or a requirement for obedience:

But it's to get the silences, to get that quiet moment when you allow yourself to link in, so let it be critical thinking, let it be, it's, the space is as important, as what's introduced into the space.

(James, Taped interview, part 1, Q.2, p.2: Appendix 7)

He is allowing time for connected knowing to occur. The silence is a welcome opportunity to explore his knowing and to make meaning. He describes life as a *'permanent possibility ... the incredible wonderment of being aware'* (James, Taped interview, part 1, Q.6, p.4: Appendix 7). Here James is responding to experience in the present, reflecting on it and connecting knowledge in a very diverse and critical manner, as Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1978) have outlined and Belenky's (1986) study supports. In Barnett's model this would represent both of his characteristics for critical

thinking: he is developing his individual criticality and using it to structure his own world and reclaim the 'self'. In terms of constructed knowledge, James has discovered his separate and connected knowing through personal pain and loss. By experiencing these emotions he has come to know joy and love: *'I really do believe that sometimes to experience joy, true joy, you've got to know what pain is. Or to experience true love, you've got to know what loss is'* (James, Taped interview, part 1, Q.9, p.7: Appendix 7). This is a widely held view that is evident in our culture and literature, but James has arrived at this recognition in a very introspective manner that has generated significant critical thinking and critical reflection and led to transformative critical action that operates on a very humane level. He also appreciates the transient nature of joy and love and the moral and ethical obligation to value and nurture them. For James, this is a concern:

I suppose the fragility of life really, and it gets quite fragile ... em ... and because it's fragile I think that it should be cared for like the way you would care for maybe the *Mona Lisa*, you know you'd treat it with ah, kid gloves, but you would treat it with respect and I ... I just think that I suppose, I look around me in the year 2004 and I, and I really, I don't know, you know, that whole sense of caring, that sense of neighbourliness, that sense of community, that sense of not self, and I think we've become this selfish group of people aspiring to attain x, y and z, but it's mainly material, ah, and values have been lost along the way. So, I suppose, that's being more enforced by taking time out.

(James, Taped interview, part 1, Q.10, p.8: Appendix 7)

Finally, in relation to James' sense of knowing, I noted earlier how the 'self' and self-understanding have become his conduit for relating to the world, but he also continues to emphasise the juxtaposition of his past and present as the landscape through which his meaning-making takes place. At one point he is reminded of core values given to him by his grandmother but which he had forgotten, at least consciously, until it came up in the PD class in a very explicit manner:

I remember vividly when we covered that particular thing in values, and just reflecting on what they were. It was amazing, ah, I could picture myself, I'd say I was about seven, in my Grandmother's house and she had the old-style bib on her and she was making bread, and I can picture the whole setting, it's amazing, you know, how the memory cells work. And she was explaining that she had lived a long life and that if she would give me one set of values in life, and that would be that I wasn't to look up to anybody and I wasn't to look down on anybody, I was to treat everybody as I met them in life, and if I was able to attain that I would have a good successful life. And so when we were doing that, that particular one, that memory came back into my mind, and, ah, I found it amazing. So there was a core value given to me at seven years of age that I probably put back into the recesses of my mind for twenty, thirty years, and it just came up as

a flashback when that environment was offered to me in that question about core values. I thought it was interesting.

(James, Taped interview, part 2, Q.5, p.12: Appendix 7)

The link to Vygotsky's (1978) concept of development and its organic relationship to history, along with Dewey's (1938) construct of the past informing the living present, is very evident here. There is also a single, integrated voice emerging that unifies the domains of learning for James and allows the practice of critical being to take place. There is a continuity of thought, experience, reflection and action that is embedded in his whole existence at many levels and that doesn't have a traditionally spiritual dimension, but is very humanist in its application. James uses metaphor quite extensively throughout these conversations and a distinct pattern is emerging that will inform another theme in this chapter.

While James is focused very introspectively throughout this process, he is also mindful of the fact that others in the group are not engaging to the same degree. In terms of reaching or demonstrating at least a sense of procedural or constructed knowing, Noel and Aiden did not exhibit the same level in this regard. This absence and the subsequent limited exhibition of the practice of critical being may support the view that a specific level of knowing is required to fulfill Barnett's criteria. It is also interesting to note that Noel and Aiden are the oldest and youngest male participants respectively, so the question of the relationship between chronological age and development of higher mental functions needs to be examined. What emerges most clearly with Noel is a reluctance to explore



affective learning and examine the 'self'. In Noel's case there is an apparent fear of exploring this domain, a fear that may be driven by a desire not to know. However, I suspect that as he lives alone as a bachelor, it has more to do with an acceptance with where his life is at in the present and an absence of anything or anyone in his life to motivate change. In commenting on his experience of doing the Reflective Action Project (RAP), he observed:

I know I found it very difficult at the time, I'm, I suppose because I don't have a lot going on in my life apart from going to college. You know, I mean, there wasn't really, I couldn't see ways to practice things like, say, assertion or, you know, things like that. I didn't really think about it that way. And as I say, to me it was just writing down my daily activities.

(Noel, Taped interview, part 1, Q.8, p.7: Appendix 7)

In many respects Noel is operating at the level of received knowledge and there is an absence of developed higher mental functioning that could precipitate the full practice of critical being. Characteristics of this level of knowing include the capacity to listen and to seek direction and certainty from others, usually those in authority. Noel exhibited many of these facets. He tended to look to others for self-definition and knowledge, therefore the concept of becoming as a person remained vague and peripheral to him. In effect, he resisted this possibility:

I would have felt that it was the one class that didn't work that well for me, with the mix of students. Because of, ah, the number, like, we're coming from very different places, and something like that, in that area, like we'll say, in something like law or, you know, environmental science or any of those type of subjects it doesn't matter, age doesn't, just doesn't come into the equation really, you know. They're sort of fact-based. Whereas with personal development, you've a lad of 19 and 56, you know, ha, ha. It just, ah, it just didn't work for me for ... I'd say it was more me! Yeah, I would have felt that I was in a different place. There is a bit of self-consciousness, I am not the most outgoing of people ever. So there is an element of that in it, but, ah, no I would have just felt, you know, just from a different place like.

(Noel, Taped interview, part 1, Q.1, p.1–2: Appendix 7)

While this comment may be taken at face-value, there is a subtext here that reflects a deeper concern that has to do with Noel's self-image and capacity to move to a different level of mental functioning. He appears to hide behind his age and the fact that it is harder for him to change habits now than when he was younger. Noel is not strictly dualistic (Perry 1970) because he does acknowledge ambivalence and uncertainty, but he perceives it to be an objective reality, outside himself. There is no sense of integration or constructed knowledge, but there is subjective knowledge in that he trusts himself, albeit only in areas that don't threaten his world-view or motivate him enough to act. This was very evident in Noel's Critical Incident activity. When asked to recall a recent public

incident or event that had made him angry, Noel referred to an interview with a prominent bishop in Ireland about clerical child sex abuse:

One of his responses was that the hierarchy did not realise or was not aware of how wrong the behaviour was. I was outraged at this, coming from a senior member of an organisation that for centuries knew exactly how everyone should live, behave and preached [this] to others.

(Noel, Critical Incident Activity: Appendix 3).

Subsequently, in the taped interview, Noel expanded on this and identified his lack of ‘moral’ courage to do something about it:

And for him to sort of say either that they didn’t know that sex abuse of children was a bad thing. Or that they’re covering it up, you know, and just shunting the abusers on from place to place, that they didn’t know that that was wrong, you know, and these are moral guardians, you know. I couldn’t believe what I heard at the time. Oh yeah, I think if I had had him, that I would have given him a puck! I mean how, you know, in what way could they not know that it was wrong? What I mean is that with, say, with something like that, what do I do about it? I got mad, you know, for that few minutes. But that was it. Nothing! I didn’t sort of dash off a letter to the newspaper, I didn’t try to ring up Joe Duffy and say, like, ‘what the hell is this about’, you know. I did nothing.

(Noel, Taped interview, part 2, Q.10, p.17: Appendix 7)

During the Critical Incident activity and the interview, I noticed Noel was quite animated about this issue, but that he failed to construct an objective action that might have given focus to his anger. Many of us feel this helplessness on occasion and it is not unusual, but in Noel's case there is a pattern of apathy and possibly fear of drawing attention to himself. Noel is defining himself subjectively in terms of his opposition to something rather than constructing an objective view that is integrated and congruent with his values and practice. Due to many factors already mentioned, Noel hasn't established an integrated, constructed way of knowing and there is little clear evidence of the practice of critical being as Barnett (1997) defines it. This may be a further indication that the practice of critical being is dependent on a required level of knowing. The evidence would suggest as much and Aiden's experience might be significant here.

In contrast to Noel, Aiden is young, enthusiastic and constantly seeking active opportunities to improve his personal development skills. While he engages in many activities, there is less evidence of deep reflective thinking such as that exhibited by Martin, James or Kel. In relation to knowing, Aiden perceives the world and makes meaning in very objective terms. He views himself based on how others see him rather than how he sees himself:

I'm definitely more aware of how people might see me ... So I've definitely become aware of myself in situations, I mean again with groups

forming in the, over in the Garda College, I would be much aware of where my position in the group is and shall I say this now and shall I insult this person now or tell a joke now or will I just stand back for ... so I'm definitely being able to see, an aerial view down on myself, you know, a kind of bird's eye-view on myself especially within groups and when at the moment, when between forming and the, from what we're doing at the moment over at the college.

(Aiden, Taped interview, part 1, Q.4, p.6: Appendix 7)

He wishes to present a more singular impression to people, to be clear on his role within group contexts and to present a persona that he is happy for others to see. This is critical reflection at a very objective level, opening up the 'façade' pane within the Johari Window which is known to him but unknown to others. Aiden's perceptions are changing as the filters through which he makes meaning become clearer. He is seeking to observe and identify the agendas and motives of others. There is clear evidence of growth and development, coupled with a higher level of mental functioning. Within the Belenky *et al* (1986) framework, Aiden's level of knowing is consistent in many respects with procedural knowledge. His main focus is on knowing how to manage meetings and situations in his role with the Red Cross. He is interested in '*acquiring and applying procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge*' (Belenky *et al* 1986:95). He is experiencing an increasing level of control within many facets of his external world and this is impacting objectively on his sense of self. There is evidence of recognising and acknowledging difference in others, but not integrating this within the self. This was

noted earlier with his Reflective Action Project (RAP): it was external in nature and lacked any real introspection at a self-reflective or critical thinking level. He was compartmentalising the process and only dealing with certain aspects of his development:

I would carry out conversations or the way I would learn or think or whatever. But that they were only weaknesses and that I was being given sort of the, the tools to fix it.

(Aiden, Taped interview, part 2, Q.1, p.16: Appendix 7).

What is absent at this point is evidence of an integrated or single voice, which is so apparent with Martin and James.

Both Noel and Aiden are reluctant to express their experience with the process in terms of their emotional development or the affective learning domain. This may be due to personality type in Noel's case, or to youth in Aiden's case. It may also have to do with the fact that they were dealing with a male researcher and were reticent about discussing feelings in this context. However, it may have more to do with their level of knowing; in Aiden's case this would be a characteristic of procedural knowing. In their approach, the self and therefore the affective domain are kept at a distance. Without the critical and reflective self at the centre of the process, the question of whether the practice of critical being is possible arises. Again, Aiden's own comment on the development of his critical thinking supports this as he acknowledges change, but not at a deeply affective or reflective level:

You know, so I can kinda look back on it and kinda critically reflect in a way myself and say, well, at least now I know that, well if that was to happen again, I know I wouldn't do it now. And that, and that, and I can just see how one line of a, I had an argument with x, y, or z, that if I was to write about that now, it could be half a page. It, it wouldn't be so much we had an argument, it was like I said this or I felt this sort of, do you know that kind of way?

*Q: So in other words almost, looking back is almost reflecting on reflections already, it's almost like a second time?*

Yeah, with a ... yeah, with a different pair of glasses on because you're looking at it with the knowledge of what we've done, I suppose, over the last while.

(Aiden, Taped interview, part 2, Q.5, p.22–3: Appendix 7)

While there is critical reflection taking place within a regenerative cycle, it remains at an objective and separate level of knowing.

Does Aiden at any time in the research process provide evidence of constructed knowledge or significant higher mental functioning that could be clearly linked to the practice of critical being? If there isn't an integration of the subjective and objective voices, a merging of criticality within the domain of the self, a real articulation of this engagement and actions that are an expression of these elements, then the opportunity and the environment for the practice of critical being are less likely to occur. At no stage

in the process did Aiden fully reach that level of higher mental functioning. There are many experiences occurring in Aiden's life, but few are challenging him at a deep level, mainly because he is not quite ready to engage with these experiences in a really critical way. In his Learning Autobiography he chooses the metaphor of a lake to represent the way his experiences are widening and deepening his world. However, he also recognises a darker side to the lake that he does not wish to explore just yet. One example is his previous relationships with women—this is not a comfortable subject for him:

I suppose the part that contains the pool of relationships with the opposite sex or whatever; I wouldn't be the greatest one to be delving into that pool for a swim or whatever. Now I'd like to leave that, I mean, I know that myself, and only something that's come to light recently and I'd just like to leave that, I suppose, alone or whatever and it happens and it's done and it's there, I suppose, as opposed to being a learning experience or whatever.

*Q: You don't reflect on it?*

No, I suppose, and not yet anyway at the moment yeah, definitely if I'm ... if I ... if I do want to know more about myself, I'll definitely have to start dipping in there.

*Q: Exploring yourself?*

Yeah, and I suppose, I think, when I've, not sorted out, when I explored how I react in other things, or act or react or participate in other things,



well then I'll start to look for a challenge maybe and dip in there, but I know it's there. Em, I keep it fairly well a lid on it even, yeah.

(Aiden, Taped interview, part 2, Q.6, p.24: Appendix 7)

The metaphor of the lake is appropriate for Aiden in this context. He absorbs a huge amount of information, experiences, thoughts and feelings, but there is an absence of any kind of filtering system that could lead to real, constructed knowing. However, unlike a river, a lake suggests a holding tank where more challenging issues may be revisited later in his development. So the capacity to practice critical being may exist and might emerge at some future point. I think the evidence would suggest Aiden is moving towards that point because he is reflecting and thinking critically on many levels—unlike Noel. At the time of this study, Aiden has accepted many of these changes and noticed differences in his own personality and behaviour. He listens more and finds he is *'thinking maybe too much now as opposed to being the extravert that I was'* (Aiden, Taped interview, part 2, Q.9, p.30: Appendix 7). But this is still very much in the context of how others see him, which has continued since he joined the Garda Training College in Templemore. He is beginning to present himself as he is, but there is still a journey to be made:

I'm able to say, well, look lads, what do you think about this or whatever, that I'm able to say, well, look this is who I am and it took, and you know this is why I say things, this is why I'm quiet and I know that myself, you know, that this is why I don't just jump in straight away. This is why I'm a

little bit quieter and it's okay to tell a person that I'm not good at a certain thing or whatever.

(Aiden, Taped interview, part 2, Q.10, p.32: Appendix 7)

I believe this incongruence and uncertainty about how he is perceived and the person he wants to present is, at this point, preventing Aiden from integrating his knowing and becoming a fully practicing critical being.

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that the Belenky *et al* (1986) schema or taxonomy of knowing could provide a valuable measure to test the levels of practice of critical being amongst participants in this research. I would like to return to this issue now. These two themes—men and knowing, and women and knowing—have explored the ways in which the members of this group arrived at their current level of knowing and its significance. A number of points emerge that may have relevance to the findings of this research. First, the participants who have clearly displayed the capacity for constructed knowing have also exhibited a capacity to practice critical being. Secondly, I believe this schema can be applied to men, particularly in the context of mature adult learners. Thirdly, there are parallels between the Belenky *et al* (1986) model and Vygotsky's (1978) concept of learning and development and higher mental functioning. The main parallel is that the Belenky *et al* model also operates within a historical, rather than a scientific dialectic. Fourthly, the Reflective Action Project (RAP) focuses on identifying valid experiences that can be accessed through all three learning domains from which new and innovative actions can emerge. These experiences have stimulated

the critical thinking, critical reflection and levels of knowing among the participants and in most cases have led to change and development in the context of higher mental functioning. These concepts are expanding the capacity of critical being and demonstrating how critical being can be observed in the daily lives and learning of the participants. Is this enough to suggest that the practice of critical being is evident as a result of the work carried out? It is a bit early to say, but I believe it is a real possibility. The final themes to emerge may provide further evidence that will help resolve these questions one way or the other.

*Implications for my teaching within the context of the theme of Knowing*

One of the challenges when teaching a module such as Personal Development is that while there is theory and factual knowledge, the kind of knowing that is explored and really important to learners exists within a very subjective space. If I study engineering, I learn theory and skills that will most likely have a very objective application. If I study the 'self' in the context of growth and understanding, it is difficult to identify explicit actions or thinking that demonstrates change or new knowledge. Equally as a teacher it is difficult to measure or evaluate student understanding and degrees of change. Assessment techniques and criteria have to be creative and graded using quite subjective and flexible evaluation models. Classroom practice becomes fluid and often intuitive as I look for indications that suggest real engagement with thought or feelings. It has forced me to become acutely aware of subtle shifts in thinking and subtextual variations that can occur very quickly in the classroom. In my experience to date and particularly during

this study, this type of teaching requires an ‘authenticity’ and integrity (Palmer 2007) of approach that is intensive and demanding. Otherwise real trust does not exist and genuine dialogue may not take place. The challenge is to maintain a balance between providing a catalyst to stimulate thinking and knowing and offering a counterpoint to responses given without alienating students in what is a very sensitive area of learning; self knowledge and self awareness. This has been a constant learning for me throughout these sessions.

### *Self-talk, dialogue and making meaning*

The process of reflection and engaging with reflection, as both Dewey (1933, 1938) and Moon (1999) have suggested is stimulated through significant experience and embedded in abstract thought. To practice reflection cognitively involves a process of self-talk (an internal conversation with oneself) that may result from action or dialogue, or that is often followed by dialogue or action in a cyclical or regenerative pattern. This is one process through which meaning is created along with social and cultural engagement and mediation resulting in new actions and altered perceptions, relationships or values. The participants in this research engaged in formal and informal dialogue, recorded self-talk through reflective journals and the Reflective Action Project (RAP) and explored all of this in the context of their own personal development by way of articulating a newly defined criticality and world-view. Much of this self-talk and dialogue has already been examined under different themes, with a specific focus in mind. What I want to do briefly under this theme is, first, to examine the reflective nature of this self-talk and dialogue to

determine if real critical reflection is evident. Secondly, I want to compare the nature of the self-talk in the journals and the Reflective Action Project (RAP) with the dialogue in the taped interviews, with a view to establishing consistency and authenticity in the nature of the reflection that is taking place. Finally, I would like to examine to what extent this reflective process has contributed to creating new meaning for the participants and aided them in the practice of critical being.

In Chapter 2 I looked closely at the concept of reflection and the difficulties that arise with its application in a study of this nature. The absence of absolute clarity around defining both its meaning and its value has been highlighted. However, there is substantive agreement that reflection and critical reflection impacts significantly on people's understanding and practice at many levels (Dewey 1933, Schön 1983, Belenky *et al* 1986, Kitchener and King 1994, Barnett 1997, Moon 1999). In applying Vygotsky's (1978) model, real critical reflection might be measured against evidence of the development of higher mental functions, such as deliberate attention, logical memory, verbal and conceptual thought and complex emotions. The last three may be observed in this research through the participants' self-talk and dialogue, mediated within a structured educational framework leading towards instrumental action. Moon (1999) and Kitchener and King's (1994) position that the highest stage of reflection involves dealing with ill-structured problems would, I believe, require the application of verbal and conceptual thought along with engaging complex emotions. If this is the case, then many of the issues addressed by the participants in this research could be defined as ill-structured problems and evidence of real critical reflection should be apparent. Real, transformative

learning and understanding can occur only at this level, so it is important to establish not just that critical reflection is taking place but that it is contributing actively to this perspective transformation. In addition, I would ask: are the participants presenting a critique or an analysis of this change that could be described as critical reflection and is the self at the centre of this analysis, as Barnett would require? If so, there should be evidence of educational reflection, reflection as self-realisation and critical reflection as the key types of reflection within the domain of the self. If all of these elements can be identified and at the level required, then real critical reflection is taking place and one of the main components for the practice of critical being exists.

In relation to Martin, James, Kel, Una, Anna and, to a lesser extent, Betty, I believe real critical reflection is evident within the framework of addressing ill-structured problems. There is clear evidence of Barnett's three types of required self-reflection: meaning perspectives are changing, they are operating at a different level of higher mental functioning and they are reflecting on themselves rather than for themselves. Aiden and Noel haven't quite internalised the process and therefore exhibit an absence of real reflective self-analysis and critique, although for different reasons in each case. How has this manifested itself in the self-talk and dialogue amongst the group?

Self-talk for Martin, as an introvert, comes very naturally and he is more comfortable with this than with talking to someone else. In one journal entry on stress, Martin observes that: *'Talking out the problem helps, but I've always done it with myself. I don't know whether the thought of talking them out with someone else is even more stressful'* (Martin, Reflective Portfolio, and 4th December: Appendix 8). In another entry on self-

esteem he comments: *'There are a lot of very harsh questions in there about my own core beliefs. And some of the answers are uncomfortable'* (Martin, Reflective Portfolio, and 12th November: Appendix 8). The reflective self-analysis evident here is very honest and direct, almost as if he is conversing with himself. This becomes very evident in his Reflective Action Project (RAP) and the analysis and critique of his relationship with his father. I have already examined Martin's Reflective Action Project (RAP) in detail under previous themes, but I want to make some observations here in relation to the language used.

I think and talk out something and then realisations begin to happen.  
(Martin, Reflective Action Project (RAP), worksheet p.2, 23 December:  
Appendix 6)

There is a cognitive and real processing taking place simultaneously, but also the tone and content are similar to the comment on stress and self-esteem above. In Martin's taped interview a similar picture emerges and parallels the critical reflection that is taking place in the other activities. Martin's comments are full of deep analysis and reflective processing. In addition, there exists here a challenging dialectic for Martin: he sees the value of the process, but equally is afraid of the consequences, acknowledging that:

... reflection could be of value or would be of value. Do you know that, that you should put a bit more into it to get a bit more out of it, that there was that, more understanding there? Certainly that sort of depth of

thinking, you can, you can do it to a point, em, on a superficial level, but, you know, you have to, you have to work at it then, and maybe the more detailed approach to it was giving me a chance to go a little deeper into thinking.

(Martin, Taped interview, part 2, Q.3, p.28/29: Appendix 7)

All three elements of Barnett's self-reflection are present and real critical reflection is taking place. Martin is seeking truth and developing as a person, taking ownership of his work and re-evaluating his view of the world, his actions and himself in the light of new understanding.

James and Kel provide greater clarity in their use of critical reflection and its value in the process of making meaning. Their thinking has an even greater focus on the self as reflective learner, in some respects, than does Martin's. Both, for example, make far greater use of the first-person singular in their writing. The 'I' in its various forms appears with consistent regularity in each activity and also in their dialogue, both in class and in the taped interviews. Its usage generally has a very reflective context and mood. James' refrain about seeking out '*the me in me*' is introspective, reflective and reflexive. As it was for Martin, the journey made by James and Kel is challenging but rewarding because a real dialectic exists for both:

Critical reflection? It sounds like I'd nearly put it like a diary. Do you know, initially, when I heard it I was thinking, it's going to be like a



project, you know, put back the information you gave me, but now, it's, I'd nearly say, it's like I take in your information and I process it my way and I put it back out my way, my own feelings on it, my own slant on it. But it's, ah, there's logic trying to it as well, it's not just random, prejudice, thoughts or whatever, there's actually thinking, sitting back, looking at it properly and putting it back together, my version of properly. (Kel, Taped interview, part 1, Q.2, p.4: Appendix 7)

The first person is used thirteen times in the above extract and each time there is a sense of Kel going deeper into a reflective analysis of her learning processes and reaching significant realisations. A processing of knowledge and experience is taking place. The final sentence indicates ownership of learning, self-realisation and transformation in a very critically reflective manner. This pattern is consistent throughout Kel's participation in this research. To get a clearer sense of this journey, I want to go back to the early part of the research process, about six months before the taped interview. Kel was writing in her reflective journal about self-esteem and studying this topic in class. She acknowledged that her self-esteem was low, particularly in relation to work due to her fear of her supervisor (as discussed under an earlier theme). In this entry Kel begins to realise this for the first time and also that low self-esteem is not apparent in other aspects of her life. As a result of a simple labeling exercise, where the student chooses words to describe themselves, Kel writes:

Only in writing the words down did I realise how much work was at me, even though it is not a difficult job ... you [Kel] are so insecure in work you cannot be yourself at all ... looking at the *Six Pillars [of Self-esteem; Brandon 1994<sup>3</sup>]* there is one that does stick out, and that one is self-acceptance ... I know it is only recently that the idea of maybe, just maybe I am worth something rather than just passing through life. At home and with my friends I am outgoing, it has been often said to me: why are you so happy all the time and how come you always know what to do and say? Inside I laugh, if they only knew what I am like when I am on my own.

(Kel, Reflective Portfolio, 27 November: Appendix 8)

Kel is applying a deep and painful critical reflection process that is very self-focused and revealing. It has the texture of a stream-of-consciousness style that is common among writers and artists. In the questionnaire on the writing of the reflective journal, Kel immediately identifies this characteristic of her work: '*Seeing thoughts written in front of me with my own hand brought a form of relief ... it was like a risk-free conversation*' (Kel, Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.1, p.1: Appendix 2). Critical reflection, though 'risk-free' in terms of confidentiality, was for Kel a significant part of her journey towards self-discovery and new meaning perspectives. The self-talk she engaged in through the journal and the dialogue she engaged in through the interview and her class

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<sup>3</sup> Nathaniel Brandon's *Six Pillars of Self Esteem* (1994) has been widely used in teaching Personal Development as a practical tool for accessing and improving one's self-esteem. The Pillars are presented in the form of practices that can be activated and monitored through personal reflection and feedback from others. The Six Pillars include: the practice of living consciously, the practice of living purposefully, the practice of self-acceptance, the practice of self-responsibility, the practice of self-assertiveness and the practice of personal integrity. Many of the participants in this study chose to practice one or more of these Pillars while carrying out their Reflection Action Project (RAP).

work highlight a consistency of critical reflection that demonstrates a growth in real learning and self-understanding.

The pattern was similar for James, but his critical reflection provides a greater certainty and assuredness that is emerging only tentatively with Kel. In a reflective journal entry on self-esteem, James' vision is clear and direct:

Practice outwardly my inward assertiveness ... my principles in life are not up for exchange under any circumstances and I will defend these principles in my daily life.

(James, Reflective Portfolio, 25 November: Appendix 8)

This comparative certainty may be partly due to age and experience, but is also integral to his critically reflective journey during this process. Unlike Kel, James wants to live and focus in the present. He doesn't dwell on the past, but instead uses it to inform his critically reflective analysis of his world and the meaning perspectives he brings to it. It is a confident James that sees critical reflection as a tool to enhance the quality of his life and his relationships. It is critical reflection as a process of being: *'I would hope to have both feet in the present and leave the past and future perspectives to fend for themselves'* (James, Reflective Portfolio, and 22nd September: Appendix 8).

This critical reflection has also given James a clearer perspective on society because it impacts on him directly. He seeks fairness and disregards hypocrisy in any context. This

has emerged because of his growing critical honesty with himself regarding his life and his relationships. In the Critical Incident activity James vents his anger at the failure of democracy to be delivered effectively at local government level due to the power of veto granted to county managers. This core value of a transparent democracy permeates all of James' self-talk, dialogue and his personal life, as observed in his relationships. This goes to the heart of his critically reflective perspective. As he points out: *'A core value so defined is an external umbilical cord and as such is inextricable from the who I am. So whilst I may attempt to broaden my accommodation of others, it will be trying to understand without severing my identity'* (James, Critical Incident Activity: Appendix 3). The critically reflective self is evident in James' harmony of values and practice in his words and in his actions. In direct dialogue, both during the research process and in the taped interview, the critically reflective James is consistently present and there is a conscious awareness of the need to create real time for critical reflection to happen:

It is having more a slow-motion perspective on life, em, and taking this time out of consciousness so that that if I'm in the room writing the reflective journal, that if I go out to travel home, I may actually be aware of the trees. I may be aware of the sky, I may be aware of birds flying across me and it just creates an overall awareness of life. I may see the beauty in my child snoring, you know, falling asleep and that's what I'm saying; is that we live in this world where we don't see, the most amazing things, the most ordinary amazing things, we don't see them because of the

speed of what we're at, so reflective writing, all of that gives you an opportunity to get into this consciousness of the 'me in me'.

(James, Taped interview, part 2, Q.3, p.10: Appendix 7)

Critical reflection is almost a state of being for James and also for Martin and Kel, although to a lesser extent. While the personal focus is different, Martin and Kel would, I believe, identify with James' comments here because they, too, have attempted to take the pace out of their lives and to look critically at their relationship with their respective worlds. There is a sense of all three viewing their world through a sensitised self that is open to knowledge, is conscious of an awakening self that is changing their lifestyles and relationships in distinctive ways.

The experience of Anna, Una and Betty with the process of critical reflection does not, on the surface, appear to reach the same levels of heightened awareness as that of Martin, Kel or James. This is one of the challenges of a qualitative research study such as this: I can present indicators that critical reflection has occurred, but how can I, as researcher, measure the extent to which critical reflection has impacted on the actions or the behaviour of the participants? This question applies to many aspects of the study and the evidence that emerges may not always be strictly tangible, linear or clear-cut. What I want to establish is whether there is a change in the higher mental functions of the participants and if there is evidence that real communicative learning is taking place. In addition, if I take into account the levels of knowing each participant has reached and use these as a gauge to evaluate Barnett's critical being framework, then I believe it will be

possible to measure qualitatively the degree to which the practice of critical being exists among this group, if at all.

Anna and Una tend to critically reflect at a more external level. As I outlined in the previous theme, both displayed different levels of knowing in different situations, but it was erratic in nature; Una's being the more consistent. There is less evidence of the self being explored or facilitated in the critical reflection undertaken by these women. I suggested earlier that there was an absence of inner dialogue with Anna, which reflected a particular level of knowing, and this emerges from her reflective journals. As I read them, the tone and style suggests they are addressed to me as the teacher rather than a real attempt to self-evaluate the process. There is little evidence of any self-realisation or of internalising her understanding in a communicative learning manner. In one reflection on assertiveness Anna writes:

Again today I had difficulty thinking of situations for the writing activities (e.g., when I could have been more assertive). Usually I can just write away! I wasn't alone in this and hope it's just that I am inclined to think about things a bit first. Maybe getting more reflective?

(Anna, Reflective Portfolio, 18 November: Appendix 8)

There is a clear sense here of writing for an audience rather than for herself. To whom is the final question directed? In an earlier entry on self-awareness Anna states: *'The whole subject of our filters, reflection and hierarchy of needs came up. It seems that to be*

*reflective/self-aware that we must be aware of all these things'* (Anna, Reflective Portfolio, and 21st October: Appendix 8). Again the tone is impersonal and lacking an explicitness or focus on the self. If real critical reflection is to be achieved, then a clear explicit focus on the self must occur if Barnett's requirements for critical being are to be met. Anna's self-talk avoids real self-examination at a deep reflective level, but her dialogue offers a little more by way of critical reflection, as some of the earlier themes have suggested. The Reflective Action Project (RAP) did impact on Anna: it led to a change in the way she communicated with her partner; it affected her approach to study and time management; and the process made her stop and think about issues in a different way. This emerges in the dialogue, but does not surprise her for some reason:

In the sense that I might have slightly thought about these things before, but now I was studying, is that fair enough? Is that a fair way to put it? And none of it surprised me except maybe the Myers-Briggs thing and, you know, that was a personal thing.

(Anna, Taped interview, part 2, Q.7, p.22: Appendix 7)

It is a challenge to understand why Anna is reluctant either to embrace or acknowledge change and allow real critical reflection to take place. It may be too painful based on her life experience, as the final phrase suggests, or it may have to do with negative assumptions regarding the research process or regarding me, as a teacher. The use of the

word ‘*slightly*’ indicates an ambivalence that is difficult to assess in terms of making meaning for Anna. Una’s case is different in some respects;

There always seems to be something more pressing to do than reflect.

(Una, Reflective journal questionnaire, Q.7, p.4: Appendix 2)

In her self-talk and dialogue Una tends to look forward, to think in future terms and to consign the past to a far-removed place. There is no sense that Una is uncomfortable with the past, but it doesn’t have much relevance to Una’s next project, whatever that may be. This raises a question about the capacity to engage in critical reflection and the link between personality and learning styles—is critical reflection at the level required by Barnett possible only for particular learner types who have the capacity to view their world in the present or ‘*in the now*’, as James suggests? This will be discussed later, but in Una’s and Anna’s case it is worth consideration, for different reasons. On the issue of self-esteem, Una presents a very disconnected reflection:

Self-esteem arises when one values oneself. One appreciates and acknowledges all aspects of oneself. Self-esteem is not dependent on external validation. One thinks and acts from a realised core that is not influenced by external reality. The strengths and weaknesses one has are understood. One acts with a respect for self and others because one values



the other as much as one values oneself. One is not superior or inferior but equal.

(Una, Reflective Portfolio, 25 November: Appendix 8)

The repetitive use of the pronoun '*one*' (ten times) places a concept that is implicit to our personal well-being in a very external context, as if it existed as an abstract thought and never impacted on day-to-day living. The points raised may be largely accurate, but there is no sense of how Una experiences self-esteem as an organic force in her life and relationships. In an earlier entry on assertiveness, Una links this communication technique more explicitly to her experience. She attributes her own lack of assertiveness as a younger woman to her personal relationship with her father and to the break-up of her parents' marriage. However, it is again placed in the context of other people's circumstances rather than how it is applied to her experience now or how it truly affected her at the time. The self as a real, implicit element in the process is absent and within Barnett's model, the possibility of real learning or self-realisation cannot therefore take place.

In her dialogue with me during the taped interview, Una acknowledges a change in the level and nature of her thinking, as referred to in an earlier theme. Critical thinking has become an explicit part of her approach to problem-solving. However, Una's understanding of critical thinking does involve an element of reflection that she seems unwilling to acknowledge. This may be due, as Moon (1999) suggests, to the absence of a real definition of reflection that Una can identify with so that it becomes absorbed to

some extent into her thinking process. It may also be that Una associates reflection with negative experiences or affective understanding and is therefore more comfortable keeping the process within the cognitive domain. In addition, Una comments on the lack of real time to reflect, but is this in fact the case?

It, it's challenging for me, I mean I work fulltime and study fulltime, so you know, I, time out is something I, I have to really work at, you know ... I mean I wouldn't fight it, I not, I wasn't, you know, I wouldn't be the type of person who would ignore it completely. But I don't know how deeply I went into it, you know because that would require, you know, seriously critical reflection. And that's you know, it's a scarce commodity, I suppose.

(Una, Taped interview, part 2, Q.3, p.14: Appendix 7)

While it is clear from previous themes that Una has made a number of pragmatic changes in lifestyle and has deepened her understanding in terms of thinking, real critical reflection has eluded her and evidence of genuine self-realisation is not apparent. Within the Barnett framework of critical reflection this presents a problem, as the full practice of critical being may not be possible.

Critical reflection for Betty, as for Kel, has a strong affective quality and demonstrates a keen desire to understand the self and develop in new directions. Betty's self-talk and dialogue is very honest, personal and revealing in emotional terms. It is an uninhibited, authentic voice and has been consistent throughout the process. In this respect it resonates with Martin and James and their experience of critical reflection. On her own self-awareness Betty observes:

I believe that if I monitor my emotions more closely, it will lead to a greater self-awareness. There are times when I work on my awareness and it feels very good. I am more in touch with the real me ... However, I am aware of practicing self-awareness because it is the key to a greater personal fulfillment.

(Betty, Reflective Portfolio, 23 January: Appendix 8)

For Betty, the world is understood through the self and learning can only be internalised in this way. This has led Betty to change her lifestyle and, in particular, the nature of her relationships, but is there evidence of a new level of understanding functioning on a different mental plane? There are clearly indicators of change because in earlier journal entries there was a lack of clarity and certainty about Betty's level of confidence and understanding, which has already been highlighted under previous themes. There is a very clear desire to shift her understanding to a different level and to assert herself in new and positive ways in her relationships: *'I am striving to be more assertive in my dealings*

*and interactions with other people. It is the ideal to be attained and by practicing it can be a reality'* (Betty, Reflective Portfolio, and 19th March: Appendix 8). Critical reflection in the form of self-realisation and developmental learning is apparent here.

In the taped interview Betty confirmed the learning and value of the journaling process. While she didn't write everything down, she made choices at a critical level about what was relevant. She didn't rush in with comments, but reflected carefully in a controlled manner, which was a new experience for her:

There was times when I did nothing, I just wanted to write down what was on the surface. I didn't want to go beneath the surface because it was, I didn't want, yeah, I was afraid 'twould be. Of course I was, yeah. I chose not to go there. That's wisdom for me ... 'Twould be because, I mean spontaneity was always a feature of my personality, I'd, I'd jump in rather than, than reflect, so I mean ... more controlled, Yeah, yeah. And cautious.  
(Betty, Taped interview, part 2, Q.12, p.12–13: Appendix 7)

The difference on this occasion was that Betty wasn't allowing her emotional impulsiveness to take over. She was attempting to balance both her affective and cognitive domains and come to a more reasoned understanding:

Yeah, I mean I'm not burying my emotion to be rational. Yeah, and I mean perhaps that has been a struggle for me. 'Tis the dance between the two.

*Q: Ok, so your reflection has helped you to recognise the need to separate them at times so that you can make a better judgment?*

Yeah, 'tis what, it's ... it's what works best for me. Because the emotion, when, when it is any other way it's the emotion takes over and then it doesn't do me justice.

(Betty, Taped interview, part 2, Q.16, p.16: Appendix 7)

This realisation allowed Betty to separate herself a little and reduce her sensitivity to situations on a personal level. She began to distinguish between emotion and real empathy; critical reflection allowed this self-realisation to take place. Betty has acknowledged a significant change in her whole thinking and making-meaning process that is taking place at a different level of mental functioning.

Finally, in examining self-talk and dialogue I want to comment briefly on Aiden and Noel in this regard. Aiden's use of the reflective journal process was limited and scant and while Noel provided more detail, evidence of real critical reflection in Barnett's terms is difficult to assess in either case. As mentioned in the previous theme, both Noel and Aiden demonstrated little evidence of constructed knowing and there was a reluctance to engage in real introspection with challenging personal issues. Their self-talk provides little evidence of self-realisation or of real learning at a deep internal level, yet both

indicate elements of change, particularly in terms of their actions and ways of relating to others. Aiden is happy that his capacity to think critically has improved and that being critical in a constructive manner is acceptable, but he does not apply this critical awareness in a reflective way to real personal concerns. The pattern is similar for Noel, who explains it through the cliché, that '*old habits die hard*'. Aiden's view of critical reflection is of a passive process that is vague and unclear:

In a way, yeah, the reflection I think would definitely be more, is more the sort of the passive whereas I would have put the kind of just the two of them in together about the whole idea just, to me I suppose the critical thing in reflection is a lot more just about questioning, and just about whether you do it now or tonight or whatever, it was still a matter about questioning either your actions or another person's.

(Aiden, Taped interview, part 2, Q.16, p.16: Appendix 7)

In describing critical reflection in this way, Aiden is clearly placing it in a subordinate position to critical thinking and therefore making it less significant in his processing of knowledge and understanding. This devalues critical reflection within the Barnett framework and makes real learning or development in the context of higher mental functioning difficult. For Noel, the pattern and outcomes are similar. As I have commented in previous themes, Noel appears sceptical and cautious in relation to the value of critical reflection and his personal capacity to engage with it. In a journal entry

on assertiveness, Noel observes: *'Another thought is that self talk can be very powerful. For outgoing people it is probably usually positive, whereas for the introvert, it is more likely to be negative'* (Noel, Reflective Portfolio, and 18th November: Appendix 8). As an introvert, Noel clearly approaches self-talk in a negative frame of mind and this reduces the opportunity to learn or come to any new realisations in a critically reflective manner. Ironically, Noel later acknowledges the value of critical reflection in his taped interview and the need for him to do more of it:

Critical Reflection; I could certainly do with doing more of it, what it would mean to me is to look back at what you've, at situations you're in or experiences you've had, and ah to try to evaluate them more and get, and try and get more out of them.

(Noel, Taped interview, part 1, Q.2, p.2: Appendix 7)

In analysing this apparent contradiction, it becomes clear that Noel is cautious about divulging details of a personal nature, but nonetheless sees the intellectual value of critical reflection as something objectively worthwhile. Real critical reflection within Barnett's framework becomes a challenge for Noel because self realisation and deep emotional analysis is not apparent and, as with Aiden, the practice of critical being may not be fully possible in this context.

In concluding this theme it is clear that a number of key points have emerged. First, there is evidence to indicate that the capacity to reflect critically is linked to levels of knowing, higher mental functioning and the practice of critical being. Secondly, participants who have engaged in real critical reflection at this level and who have centered this reflective process within the domain of the self have acknowledged the challenging and dialectical nature of the process at a personal level. The existence of this dialectic has led to greater engagement and change among those who have experienced it and who were prepared to explore this aspect of self-realisation and understanding. Thirdly, gender and age do not appear to be contributory factors in determining levels or capacity for critical reflection in the context of this group of mature learners. Finally, Barnett's assertion that the self must be the central learning domain if real critical reflection is to take place has proved accurate in a number of instances. However Barnett's definition of critical reflection and its capacity within his model is limited and must be viewed in the context of higher mental functions, communicative learning and levels of knowing if change is to be identified and measured. The 'self' as the center of affective, cognitive and pragmatic analysis and critical reflection is a prerequisite for real development. Barnett's conception of self is too constrained within cognitive and logical parameters and this I believe highlights a central flaw in his model. The next theme will continue the exploration of the emerging data for further evidence of the practice of critical being through the study of metaphor and meaning.



*Implications for my teaching within the context of this theme*

Engaging with critical reflection as a teacher is a necessary part of the reflective practice model (Schön 1983). I have always tried to integrate this process into my daily work. During this study I had to reflect not just on my practice but specifically on my teaching style and its impact on the students I work with. Anna, Una, Aiden and Noel didn't fully engage with the different aspects of the process as did the others. I have suggested that this may be partly due to their personalities and personal circumstances and their level of knowing. However in relation to their personalities in particular, I believe that my extravert personality and interactive teaching style may have subdued their contribution in that they may have felt overwhelmed by my energy and enthusiasm. They made no reference to this at any time so I only have a sense of this intuitively but it is often a comment made by introverts who work regularly with extroverts particularly in a classroom context where there is close proximity for long periods. Furthermore as both a teacher and researcher in this context I was always aware of maintaining a balance and a level of objectivity between both roles. Within the Action Research paradigm, this duality of roles is a constant concern (McNiff 1988). The challenge for me is to listen and be aware of both the content delivered by students and the manner and tone of my engagement within this complex teacher/researcher relationship.

### *Metaphor and making meaning*

Throughout this study metaphor has been an important element, both at a formal and informal level. Participants have developed metaphors at group and individual level and also used metaphor extensively in their written and spoken language. While not a research tool and used specifically as a methodology in the class, metaphor is significant in the context of this study. In order to explore this possibility and examine metaphor thematically, I believe that establishing the following will be helpful. First, I want to examine the nature of the metaphors chosen and what they reveal about the participants' levels of learning and understanding. Secondly, have the metaphors prompted change in knowledge or understanding or have they simply helped to clarify thinking at a given stage in the process? Thirdly, I would like to do a comparative analysis of the metaphors chosen to see if any similarity exists that might inform or help to establish a possible pattern in the development of participant thinking, reflection or action at any particular stage. Fourthly, does the use of metaphor as a teaching tool offer a creative gateway for participants to access their own thinking and levels of criticality in a way that might not exist with the use of more traditional methodologies? (This point will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.) Finally, is there any connection between the formal metaphors chosen and the informal metaphors used in self-talk and dialogue that might inform this study? How do comments made about the group metaphor work in the taped interviews or reflective journals compare with values and assumptions identified during the actual exercise and does this indicate any change or development towards critical being? The use and evaluation of metaphor in any context is challenging due to the fact that

interpretation can be ambiguous and varied. Therefore, I would like to briefly present a context for understanding metaphor in relation to this study.

In Chapter 3 I outlined the Metaphor Analysis methodology and explained the function of metaphor in terms of its use with adult learners. One key domain of understanding metaphor with adult learners is social and educational (Deshler *op. cit.*, Mezirow 1990). This, according to Deshler, will lead to critical reflection and emancipatory learning because the metaphors come from the learners themselves and are constructed in a learning context that is creative and has a strong subjective focus. As they are subjective, however, metaphors are unavoidably personal in nature, touching on issues of family, gender, sexuality and career, to name a few. Difficult concepts are often grounded in metaphorical language so as to aid understanding. Metaphor plays a very significant part in everyday language and imagery. In the metaphor work carried out with this group there is an overlap of many of these issues that emerge either consciously or subconsciously through embedded values and assumptions.

Metaphor analysis in any learning context focused on a primary subject can also lead to reflective action (Deshler *op. cit.*, Mezirow 1990). For critical reflection and action to work in this context, the participants must have experience of the same organisation or learning framework. In this way it becomes possible to identify the embedded values and assumptions that exist beneath the surface of the explicit metaphor. All the participants in the study experienced the same module, similar activities and exercises in a strict attempt

at maintaining consistency and thereby aiding analysis. Metaphors define how we make meaning and they exert a form of social control over our lives in many different ways, through art, literature, media and sport. *'They have the capacity to empower and emancipate as well as seduce'* (Deshler *op. cit.*, Mezirow 1990:311). In this respect they are very much part of the fabric of Vygotsky's *'cultural artifacts'* (1978), acting as the catalyst for mediation *'and when the cultural artifacts become internalised humans acquire the capacity for higher order thinking'* (Rozycki and Goldfarb 2000: [www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/vygotsky.htm](http://www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/vygotsky.htm)).

These metaphors therefore have a significant impact on the way in which this group of adults learns and develops and in their capacity to think, reflect and act critically. Metaphors in this study are primarily visual, linguistic and, to a lesser extent, auditory. They offer spontaneous opportunities for the group to respond creatively and in the moment. For some they became an act of power or empowerment, while for others they produced an experience of oppression or uncertainty. Despite individual perspectives, learning and development did take place. Through self-talk and dialogue, metaphorical language was used consistently by most of the participants as another form of creative expression and meaning-making. While this is not uncommon in day-to-day communication, many members of the group chose quite specific metaphors to describe critical reflection and critical thinking, in particular. There is, I believe, a pattern of transformative thinking taking place for many in the group and the use of metaphor provides a way of articulating and understanding this change. These comments occur primarily within the research tools used and it is important to distinguish clearly between

these reflections and the use of metaphor in the classroom. To begin with, I would like to take a look at the structured and visual metaphors and present both group and individual metaphors in table format for the purposes of clarity and analysis:

1) *Group Metaphor Table*

<b>Individual/Pair</b>	<b>Metaphor</b>	<b>Assumptions listed by each individual/pair</b>	<b>Values listed by each individual/pair</b>
a) Betty	<p><b>Titanic</b></p> <p><i>(showing the ship as the group with the individuals as guinea pigs and the iceberg as the project to be completed)</i></p>	<p><i>Thought it (project) would work</i></p> <p><i>No Problems</i></p> <p><i>Nothing would sink our ship</i></p> <p><i>Everyone finding a role</i></p> <p><i>Expectations</i></p> <p><i>A structure being in place</i></p> <p><i>Group/Team</i></p>	<p><i>Naïve</i></p> <p><i>Oneness</i></p> <p><i>Inclusion</i></p> <p><i>Participation</i></p> <p><i>Equality/Worth</i></p>
b) Una	<p><b>Many heads make light work</b></p> <p><i>(all encapsulated inside a single drawing of a compartmentalised human head)</i></p>	<p><i>Finish the project</i></p> <p><i>Co-operation</i></p> <p><i>Everyone holds a different role</i></p> <p><i>Respect,</i></p> <p><i>Participation</i></p> <p><i>Contribute</i></p>	<p><i>Co-operation</i></p> <p><i>Synergy</i></p> <p><i>Individual strengths</i></p> <p><i>Equality</i></p> <p><i>Support</i></p> <p><i>Time</i></p>

			<i>Management</i> <i>Quality</i> <i>Respect</i>
c) Aiden and Anna	House on fire <i>(showing the house, the flames and the fire brigade close by)</i>	<i>House Assignment</i> – <i>Flames – Any problems</i> <i>Fire brigade - Team</i>	<i>Solid</i> <i>Teamwork</i> <i>Causes problems – Fire; cohesion</i> <i>Teamwork</i> <i>Common good</i>
d) Noel and James	A pregnant woman - delivering the baby  <i>Got through the labour pains (based on the Tuckman and Jensen model of Group Dynamics:</i>  <i>Forming – Potential bed fellows</i>  <i>Storming – Foreplay</i>  <i>Norming – Conceiving</i>  <i>Performing – Delivery</i>  <i>Adjourning - Separation)*</i>	<i>No pain/No gain</i>  <i>Productivity</i>  <i>Completion</i>  <i>Satisfaction</i>	<i>No pain/No gain</i>  <i>Empowerment</i>  <i>Bonding</i>  <i>Creativity</i>
e) Martin and Kel	Small creatures and objects <i>(caterpillar, butterfly, bee, rose and egg timer)</i>  <i>The meaning of the metaphor here according to this group:</i>  <i>1. No time for conflict</i>  <i>2. potential for conflict</i>	<i>Easy to work together</i>  <i>Get on well together</i>	<i>Time (lack of it)</i>  <i>Conflict</i>  <i>Pain</i>

Figure 5.0: Group metaphors chosen along with key participant assumptions and values.<sup>4</sup>

2) *Individual Metaphor Table*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Metaphor</b>	<b>Assumptions listed</b>	<b>Values listed</b>
<b>f) Noel</b>	<b>Cat with nine lives</b>	<i>Randomness of life</i> <i>How easy things could go (as in being lost or taken away)</i>	<i>Learn something from every life</i>
<b>g) Anna</b>	<b>Brick wall</b>	<i>It is possible to repair negative experiences but with great difficulty</i>	<i>Praise the many and they will come to you</i> <i>The importance of positive experiences</i>
<b>h) Aiden</b>	<b>Lake</b>	<i>Every experience, positive or negative adds to your growth</i>	<i>Experience is a challenge to thought</i>
<b>i) James</b>	<b>Lifeline</b> <i>(permanent possibility of sensation)</i>	<i>All children need opportunities for positive experience as it stays with them</i>	<i>Look at life positively</i> <i>Be conscious of life</i> <i>Live in the now</i>

Figure 5.1: Learning Autobiography metaphors plus participant assumptions and values.

<sup>4</sup> The Tuckman and Jensen (1965) model of Group Dynamics referred to in the above table by Noel and James is one of the early attempts to understand how group dynamics evolve as a group works on a project or activity. The model has since been modified (for example Oyster 2000), but the original is still considered seminal within the study of group dynamics and organisational behaviour. The link made by Noel and James in this instance is appropriate because it is a group activity, gives a theoretical framework to the metaphor chosen and indicates a very creative linking of theory with imagination and critical thinking.

I will look briefly at each group metaphor separately in the context of the criteria identified at the beginning of this theme. In doing so I will examine them in the context of their own individual significance, link them with the related self-talk and dialogue and, where relevant, with the Learning Autobiography metaphors.

*a) Titanic (Betty)*

This metaphor emerged from a group project that went badly wrong for Betty and her class group. This happened for two main reasons. First, the group did not follow the group dynamic process that had been discussed in class and tried to skip through the required stages.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, tension developed in the group partly because of this and partly due to personality clashes, and this left Betty feeling disappointed and hurt. The choice of metaphor reflects this in a very symbolic manner. The iceberg (project) lay in wait for the group, but as they believed everything was fine (on the unsinkable ship), no attention was paid to the direction in which they needed to go. However, like most human experiences it led Betty to some serious critical reflection about her assumed maturity, ability to cope and self-esteem. In her taped interview Betty says of the experience:

Right, you say leave out the emotion but 'tis, 'twas very hard when I reflect back on it to leave out the emotion, because a lot of the metaphor built around that ... it felt like that, yeah, rudderless, I mean it just, right, I

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<sup>5</sup> As part of the class structure in Group Dynamics, participants are asked to follow a set procedure when doing group work. They should establish a charter of ground rules for the duration of the project, appoint a chairperson and if they choose not to appoint a chairperson, then be clear about roles and boundaries, keep records of meetings and continually evaluate and reflect on the process. This group bypassed all of these and went straight to the performance stage, without any clarity around project aims, procedures or protocols. Sometimes this works, but little is learned by way of understanding Group Dynamics. In this case conflict arose about methodology, roles, outcomes and procedures.



know that's the emotional part of it, but it felt like that, yeah. But we were riding a course for it, ha, ha, ha. Yeah. I suppose, maybe, I felt that we were possibly self-contained on the ship until we hit the iceberg, but I mean, unsinkable, yeah, that was ... that was folly thinking that way. Oh yeah, yeah, a wake-up call. We were invincible and I mean, I suppose, for me, I felt that we were such, we were so much part of this cosy cartel for the year that, here, you know, we were untouchable, that we were going to pull a smart one on you Martin and get it all sorted.

(Betty, Taped interview, part 1, Q.7, p.7–8: Appendix 7)

In Betty's attempt to meet the deadline and get one over on me, the group lost sight of the real purpose of the exercise and failed to evaluate or reflect on what was taking place. Later in the interview, when asked again about the impact of the experience and whether it had changed her, Betty responded:

I would never allow that situation, a situation like that to ... I would never be part of a situation like that again. I'd see it coming. I'd know how to prevent it.

*Q: So the work you did was useful? It might have been painful, but there was learning in it?*

Yeah, it reduced my blind self. Or a part of my blind self.

(Betty, Taped interview, part 2, Q.21, p.19: Appendix 7)

So critical reflection and critical action is evident here in this response. Betty is operating at a different level of thinking and mental functioning as a result of the experience and is processing it through the metaphor exercise. The metaphor allowed Betty to acknowledge and clarify the experience, assess her own self-awareness in the context of the Johari Window (1955) and, most importantly, to plan future actions. It was a creative analysis of a problem that existed within both the cognitive and affective learning domains. While Betty found this exercise challenging and productive, her self-talk in her journal and reflective writing contains little or no metaphorical language. It is direct and to the point, unlike that of some of the other participants.

*b) Many heads make light work (Una)*

Una's group metaphor reflects the cognitive domain quite explicitly and symbolises her way of looking at the world and making meaning. It was a group exercise, but Una came up with the idea that gave it a very specific perspective. The picture of the human head compartmentalised into different sections reflects a very logical and rational focus. Each compartment is named and phrases such as ' $e=mc^2$ ' and ' $\pi=3.14$ ' are fitted around them. Una's values of 'synergy', 'equality' and 'respect' indicate a very crisp and clear demarcation of roles within a cognitive framework. In her response to the exercise, Una's view is a little at odds with her expectations, yet the metaphor is very clear in its presentation. It challenged her to think about teamwork more positively: '*I had some criticisms and felt the team could have been more of a 'team' but the metaphor we came up with was wholly positive, so perhaps my criticisms were not shared by the rest of the group*' (Una, Metaphor Analysis exercise, 2 March: Appendix 4).

Again, Una is reflecting critically in terms of the responses of others rather than any directly subjective viewpoint. There is clear critical thinking, but little critical reflection in terms of the self. For Una, I believe the metaphor brought clarity rather than explicit change; it confirmed her sense of her capacity, but didn't elicit any significant transformative dynamic. Like Betty, there is an absence of metaphorical language in Una's self-talk and dialogue, but for different reasons. Una's language is pragmatic rather than colourful and highlights a deliberate avoidance of personal feeling, even in a context where it might be appropriate, such as reflective writing. Ironically, this is in contrast to Una's learning style, which is a reflector/Theorist profile (Honey & Mumford 1986),<sup>6</sup> and her MBTI (1995) personality profile, which has a strong 'feeling' (F) preference. This conflict is in some way preventing Una from fully exploring the self in a really critically reflective manner and is blocking, to a degree at least, the practice of critical being within the context of learning and development.

c) *House on Fire (Aiden and Anna)*

Both Aiden and Anna present two metaphors for discussion: the '*house on fire*' is the group metaphor; Aiden presents a '*lake*' metaphor as part of his Learning Autobiography; Anna's metaphor is a '*wall*'. The '*house on fire*' phrase is a common metaphorical cliché or proverb used in various contexts, usually to denote an experience or relationship that is going very well. This was the initial intent for Aiden's and Anna's group in choosing this.

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<sup>6</sup> Learning styles such as the Honey & Mumford (1986) and Kolb (1984) inventories are types of psychometric evaluation used in Personal Development programmes to help students develop their self-image and expand their Johari Window framework by reducing the 'blind' self (1955). Learning styles allow students to develop better study techniques and improve learning, thus enhancing self-esteem. Like all such evaluations their value is limited and need to be used only in certain contexts, with specific objectives, as they provide only a narrow view of individual capacity.

However, in this case it came to represent the frantic nature of the work and the intensity of the process, with the group acting as the fire brigade and making sure that the assignment (house) was completed and any problems (flames) were resolved. There was acknowledgment that it was completed successfully and that the group worked well together. While Aiden missed the initial exercise on the choice of metaphor, he did agree with the choice:

It wasn't as if there was destruction or anything, it just meant that there was a little bit of, sorta too much to-ing and fro-ing and cutting across and talking and people getting things a little, slightly mixed, you know, that it was made, not so much that we're all at each other's throats and that it was all, but it was just, I suppose you could kinda say that it, the group, was breaking idle, lost in a maze kind of, but by the time the deadline was up we always ended up scampering each of us out. Do you know that kind of way, that we might all have been looking for our exits out, but by the time the deadline came of, by the time nightfall came or whatever, we all seemed to get all our members out, out the gap or through the gate or through it.

(Aiden, Taped interview, part 1, Q.7, p.9: Appendix 7)

Anna's understanding is slightly different. First, the choice of metaphor was made too quickly, in her view, without enough reflection and this led to a lack of clarity initially as to the focus of the metaphor:

However we probably picked this too quickly and when we reflected on it, it was more complicated than we had thought. We changed our focus from the house on fire and added in a fire brigade to represent the team.

(Anna, Metaphor Analysis exercise, 2 March: Appendix 4)

Later in the taped interview Anna describes the metaphor as ‘contradictory’ and claims that groupthink replaced critical thinking among the group, possibly because they didn’t take it seriously:

I don’t know, somebody came up with the idea that we got on like a house on fire, so next thing the house was drawn and it was on fire and the next thing we realised, well, what, what do we do with this house? So we kind of tied ourselves early on into the metaphor, not knowing what we were developing it into ... and I suppose the fire brigade maybe came out of something that went wrong; what was it, some little thing went wrong, oh em, the deadline had come to hand it in and we only had parts of, when we printed it off, we only had parts of it and somebody else had those parts and we were trying to contact them and there was a time of panic. I think that’s maybe where, if I remember correct, where the fire brigade came from ... We went with the first thought that came into our heads, which was a very positive one that we all got on like a house on fire... I think we all felt that way after it, we kind of, I don’t mean, we didn’t make a skit of

it now, but we sort of said right, well, we haven't done this very well anyway, and sort of didn't get too bogged down about it, just made the best of it. But we had jumped in, yeah.

(Anna, Taped interview, part 1, Q.7, p.9: Appendix 7)

The process for both of them was uncertain and lacked either critical thinking or critical reflection, therefore the result was ambiguous, to say the least. In this case the metaphor itself failed to encompass the issues within it or the group's capacity to use the process effectively.

For both, the Learning Autobiography metaphor was certainly clearer. In Aiden's case, and as discussed earlier, his metaphor of the 'lake' points to areas he is not yet ready to explore. For both, their individual choice, like the 'house on fire', is a solid structure that has limits and boundaries and is neither abstract nor intangible. Anna's 'wall' is very specific and reflects the manner in which she has constructed her life and what she chooses to keep on the outside of the 'wall'. The 'wall' is built very symmetrically and centres on her journey through school and on playing music. The latter is very integral to her life and brings her a lot of pleasure. School seems to have been a positive experience, with the wall's blocks representing incremental learning and positive support, with the exception of maths. In her taped interview it is clear she sees it this way:

Oh God no, I was looking at more as something to build on. Now I'm not very good at art, so I was actually first and foremost relieved that I could

think of something I could actually draw. Do you know, that someone could actually make out what it was? But no, it's not a closed-off thing, it's sort of getting higher and that. No, I meant it totally positively.

(Anna, Taped interview, part 2, Q.10, p.28: Appendix 7)

This is the one blip in her learning that has caused some difficulty over the years, but has been partially resolved through a positive learning experience with maths in college. Like Aiden, there are areas that Anna avoids reflecting on or even referring to, such as the death of her daughter. This fundamental unwillingness to examine these issues may be partly due to a reticence to explore these topics within this research process for personal reasons, and that is their right. However, the result may be an inability to reflect critically at a level of self-knowledge that prevents the higher mental functioning required to practice critical being. In terms of making meaning, there are filters to learning and development here that Aiden and Anna have apparent difficulty moving beyond. The metaphors are also powerful and creative subconscious indicators of levels of criticality and reflective capacity. In his self-talk and dialogue, Aiden puts this block into very clear metaphorical language: *'It's behind another safe door, or whatever way you want to look at it. It's, it's in there, a little bit further'* (Aiden, Taped interview, part 2, Q.6, p.25; Appendix 7). The 'safe door' is the filter that cannot be passed, making critical reflection limited and incomplete. For Anna, the 'wall' may be positive for her, but only within the parameters of her formal learning experiences and music.

d) *A pregnant woman delivering the baby (Noel and James)*

In contrast to the previous metaphors, Noel and James opt for a more visceral representation of their group experience and immediately establish a completely different frame of reference to be explored. Both describe this metaphor vividly, but James, in particular, finds metaphorical language that is quite descriptive and introspective. In terms of values, there is a clear link between emotional pain and growth leading to greater bonding and creativity. The woman and child represent both joy and suffering, which will lead to a specific outcome or product. The choice of a woman also suggests a strong emphasis on emotional and affective understanding as being more significant than cognitive knowledge. Based on previous themes, it is apparent that James is very comfortable with this image and it comes as no surprise that he played a central role in choosing this metaphor. While Noel accepted this choice, he is not quite as comfortable with it. James centeredness around and connectedness to the self is evident in this choice. In describing this in the taped interview he observes:

I suppose it's like, it's like the Irish saying '*Rothar Mór an tSaol*', it's the wheel of life, it's like the river as well, I suppose, in a way, that it has this beginning, middle and end. So it goes from conception to delivery ... em, and I suppose then the other thing is that the, you know, I have a saying, it's just, it's a funny saying, 'I don't want to hear about the labour pains, I just want the baby,' you know, so don't give me the excuses, give me the end result. But I suppose, you know, you can look at it on many different levels, you know 'no pain; no gain,' and all of that. I don't know. . I don't



know that. . . that it has. . . it has any one major resonance for me. Process is very important. No, I think it was always, it was always there, but maybe I wasn't aware of it to the same degree, and you see, it's that autopilot again. You know, I think that's what the course is, offers you, is to get off autopilot. And rather going for the automatic pilot, you're in control, you're shifting the gears, you know, so, I suppose, now I'm more aware of the process, but process would have been important.

(James, Taped interview, part 1, Q.7, p.5: Appendix 7)

James' language is very explicit and rich in metaphorical expression. Phrases such as the '*wheel of life*', '*autopilot*' and '*shifting gears*' describe his journey from outcome to process and its importance in the development of the self. James sees his world outwardly, from a centered perspective that is driven by a need to reflect critically and internalise understanding. The pattern is similar in the Learning Autobiography metaphor. The 'lifeline' (equating with the assumed umbilical cord in the baby metaphor), subtitled '*the permanent possibility of sensation*', is consistent with James' emotionally driven perception of the world. The values of '*living in the now*' and being '*positive*' give the metaphor a sense of a continuous present, where learning and development are constant. Commenting on how this metaphor will evolve he says, '*Age doesn't determine anything really. Look at people in [their] 90s – they live in the now*' (James, Learning Autobiography exercise: Appendix 5). There is a strong sense here that this type of critically reflective processing will be a permanent part of James' thinking into the future.

By contrast, Noel's response to the 'mother and baby' metaphor is less focused. The pattern of Noel's resistance to deep critical reflection is again apparent. In his dialogue, he acknowledges the need to reflect and not accept things 'blindly' or '*being away with the fairies*' (Noel, Taped interview, part 1, Q.3, p.3: Appendix 7). Yet he doesn't fully engage with the process and his memory of the metaphor is vague and uncertain. He comments:

Well I think that it was mainly James' idea! Oh yeah, I thought it was quite good, quite good, yeah ... it sort of reflected the path of doing the project. That the idea is put out there and you have to, it takes a period of time to, for it to come together.

(Noel, Taped interview, part 1, Q3, p3: Appendix 7)

Again, Noel is slow to engage at a really critically reflective level and his metaphorical language reflects that avoidance. In his Learning Autobiography metaphor, Noel used the image of the '*cat with nine lives*' to represent his metaphor. This metaphor symbolises the randomness and uncertainty of life and reflects many of Noel's experiences. Five of these 'nine lives' describe events of a sad nature or ill-health he has experienced, and he believes he has four lives left. These events include things such as almost drowning as a child, some lucky escapes on building sites, bypass surgery and cardiac arrest. Both the 'mother and child' and the 'cat with nine lives' are quite unrelated at any level and Noel doesn't critically reflect or think too seriously about either. Like Aiden and Anna, but for

different reasons, Noel avoids real subjective analysis and therefore confirms creatively the limits of his understanding and development within the context of Barnett's framework.

*e) Small creatures and objects (Martin and Kel)*

The final metaphor is the one presented by Martin and Kel. Like Betty's metaphor, it appeared to start as a representation of a successful piece of group work. However, two things emerged quickly. First, not everyone felt the same way and secondly, no one was able to agree on a single metaphorical representation. The result was an eclectic mix of organic and inanimate elements. The assumptions of co-operation were quickly replaced by conflict and pain. In Martin's view this metaphor highlighted a clear lack of cohesion, misunderstanding people's motives and very disparate thinking. Yet it did generate some relevant insights for Martin in terms of how he relates to others. He talks at length in his taped interview on this topic:

I still couldn't agree with their version of a metaphor. 'Cause they were still trying to make a point. But as I thought the thing ... the thing didn't start off well. Do you know, it was all over the place and it did come to a conclusion, it mightn't have been the conclusion everybody wanted, the others seemed to have a more set version in terms of what they wanted in conclusion. It was still a learning exercise. The conclusion was still a learning exercise. And there was still stuff to be learned at the end of it that did, like, I learned stuff from it.

(Martin, Taped interview, part 1, Q.6, p.12: Appendix 7)

Martin's focus is on the process and less on the relationship, which is also inherent in his Reflective Action Project (RAP) and his relationship with his father. Later he comments: *'But the end of the project, which was the learning ... I explained which was the fact that I picked up an understanding, the butterfly represented more the understanding that we had, that we had gained rather than necessarily handing in the project to you'* (Martin, Taped interview, part 1, Q.6, p.13: Appendix 7). Martin also uses metaphorical language throughout his dialogue and embedded in this is his need for critical reflection and real understanding. He describes his early thinking as very linear, like the *'fox after the rabbit'* (Martin, Taped interview, part 1, Q.2, p.3: Appendix 7). Yet his thinking and critical reflection have moved on significantly. There is a sense now that the 'rabbit' has turned the tables on the 'fox' to some extent and the power relations that previously existed in his view of the world have altered.

Kel's response was consistent with other elements of her development, as discussed in previous themes. The metaphor gave this a clarity that helped her to articulate her growing sense of transformation and her new perspectives on making meaning. First, Kel didn't choose anything and nobody noticed, which reflected her mood and feelings at the time. Kel believed the group was very cohesive, but she had inadvertently left out one individual's piece of the written report and this caused conflict and misunderstanding. Kel was very upset by this and disengaged from the process somewhat as a result:

Yeah, that's what nobody noticed. I didn't choose anything! Because the mood I was in that night, I didn't feel part of a group anymore, I felt so bad. And nobody really noticed ... I didn't pick a metaphor. I joined in as I felt on the others and nobody noticed, which is perfect because I didn't want to be noticed that night, I felt very small.

(Kel, Taped interview, part 1, Q.7, p.13–14: Appendix 7)

As a teacher I didn't notice either and Kel was aware of this, but said nothing, which was a clear indicator of how upset she felt. She never mentioned it at all until the interview, but two relevant points emerged at that stage. First, she acknowledged that the incident had fractured the group, possibly beyond repair, and if she had to choose a metaphor: *'I suppose it would have been something like a rose, bittersweet, something bittersweet would be in it'* (Kel, Taped interview, part 1, Q.7, p.15: Appendix 7). The ambivalent image of the rose as sweet but with thorns to inflict pain captures Kel's sense of self very well at this point. Secondly, unlike previous experiences, Kel had the confidence to move beyond it with her positive self-image intact and stronger, if anything. It taught her to be more observant and to prepare well in advance in order to eliminate occurrences such as this. In her reflection immediately after the activity on the Metaphor Analysis sheet, Kel states:

My metaphor is taking the shape of an eagle shot down. A project in my mind's eye that could have been a masterpiece is maimed and destroyed all

in one swift idiotic movement. On the upside it was completed and could have had a much better outcome.

(Kel, Metaphor Analysis exercise, 11 March: Appendix 4)

Initially this may appear negative, but the eagle symbolises strength and endurance and is the king of all birds. Kel has emerged as a young woman who has tackled her sense of self through painful critical reflection, passed a daunting driving test she didn't think she could pass and transformed the dynamic of her workplace relationships. Wounded, possibly, but functioning at a different mental level and making new meaning in a very critical and dynamic fashion. A strength and purpose exists now that was absent before.

Unlike some of the others, the dialogue and self-talk of Martin and Kel is rich in metaphorical references. This is also true for James and Betty, but to a lesser extent. I would suggest that there is a link here between those who have this capacity—their levels of knowing, their willingness to be critically reflective of the self—and the required levels of higher mental functioning to practice critical being. For this group it is also evident that the metaphors chosen were more embedded in the self and the desire to learn and develop, even if the process was a painful one. For the others, while they demonstrate capacity in some respects, such as critical thinking and critical action, there is unwillingness, for various reasons, to challenge the self in a really critical manner. Their metaphors act more as agents of clarity, but lack deep self-analysis. Again critical reflection and the self are emerging as central to the success of the Barnett framework and this will be revisited in Chapter 6.

*Implications for my teaching within the context of this theme*

Group work and exploring metaphor with students presents a number of difficulties. Firstly in any group activity there is the challenge of keeping everyone on task, ensuring that everyone participates to some degree, managing the group dynamic which may be positive or negative and as a teacher timing one's interjections and level of contribution. In addition when working with metaphor or any abstract concept, there is a greater level of cognitive and creative engagement required. Learners have to think within a very visual and yet critical context and the teacher must sustain a high level of thinking without alienating participants. During this research process it was difficult to maintain this level of activity at a consistent level and simultaneously be aware of and dealing with my role as researcher. Part of the answer as Palmer (2007) points out is to keep the focus on the subject rather than the teacher or the student. If the class is teacher centered, there is too much control and students must meet the teacher's expectations; if it is too student centered then the learning that needs to occur may become diluted. By keeping the focus on the subject that is not done in an objectivist fashion, it recognises every contribution as valid and gives both student and teacher autonomy within the learning space. By approaching group work on metaphor in this way I was able to maintain my dual role and remain authentic to myself as teacher. As Palmer observes; *"when we are willing to abandon our self-protective professional autonomy and make ourselves as dependent on our students as they are on us, we move closer to the interdependence that the community*

*of truth requires*” (2007: 114). As a teacher for twenty seven years, this has been a long but fulfilling journey.

### **The Johari enigma**

In Chapter 3 I outlined the structure and function of the Johari Window (1955), using diagrams to demonstrate how it can be used to graphically illustrate personal change and growth. Its purpose in this research is to simply act as a visual indicator of the learning and development that has been observed and analysed using the previously stated research tools. Initially the model appears straightforward, but is in fact quite complex because for each individual the level of potential transparency and revelation varies. This is influenced by personality types (whether introvert or extravert), by the filters through which we make meaning, by gender factors and by levels of self-esteem. This explains the use of the word ‘enigma’ in the title of this section. In the context of this study it is, I believe, reasonable to suggest that an individual who has reached a level of constructed knowing (Belenky *et al* 1986), engages implicitly with critical reflection, demonstrates evidence of higher mental functioning (Vygotsky 1978) and uses experience to inform action and change (Dewey 1938) is reducing the ‘façade’, ‘blind’ and ‘unknown’ panes within their individual Johari Window framework. Does this lead to the constructive practice of critical being? I believe that with the evidence available under the various themes, this may well be the case. So, to what extent have the participants in this study demonstrated these features?



James, Martin, Kel and Betty have, to varying degrees, opened up their 'known selves' within the Johari Window frameworks significantly. They have all engaged in critical reflection where the self is central to learning and development. In the case of Martin and Betty, the catalyst for this opening has come through the deeper evaluation of their familial relationships, in particular. Betty found new ways to assert herself and establish her identity and place within her family; Martin had to find a way to extricate himself from the promise placed on him by his father. He achieved much of this through the Reflective Action Project (RAP) process. Kel reduced her 'blind', 'façade' and 'unknown' self through redefining her social and work relations in a very explicit way. James' loss of his first child and the exploration of the father-son relationship provided an avenue to his inner, emotional self that forced him to live his experiences in the present and the 'now'. All four describe these happenings in very introspective and revealing language that is self-oriented and subjectively focused. The challenge for all four in exposing these panes to scrutiny is to maintain a level of discretion in relation to disclosure and at the same time articulate these changes and perceptions honestly. The Johari Window model is not designed as a form of public confession, but rather an inner acknowledgment of self that leads to a greater capacity to communicate and build relationships effectively. It should reveal without undermining the dignity and integrity of the participant. This is the enigmatic nature of the model. In this study its role is to provide a metaphorical analogy and reference point that allows me to graphically illustrate these changes.

The other four participants, Anna, Aiden, Noel and Una, also experienced a reduction of the 'blind', 'façade' and 'unknown' self, but this occurred more objectively within the areas of critical thinking and critical action. This subtle shift in emphasis is significant in relation to the outcome of this research and the real potential of the Barnett model. None of the four pushed themselves very far beyond a comfort zone where the self was not overly exposed. Each in their own way, as identified in previous themes, avoided any real critical reflection of the self. Did they choose to hide this, or is it in fact a dimension of the 'blind' self of which they have failed to become aware?

This seems unlikely based on the fact that these concerns or experiences have been communicated or acknowledged previously in one form or another. The alternative therefore indicates a conscious choice not to engage fully in the process. This may be to protect their individual privacy, may indicate a lack of complete trust in me or the process, or a desire to avoid any painful self examination. Either way, the less expanded 'known self' in the Johari Window suggests a reduction in their capacity to engage in critical being at the same level as the other four participants. This has implications for my teaching, for the nature of the research process and for the capacity of Barnett's model to be implemented fully in a broad educational context. The conclusion to this chapter will attempt to gather together the key findings and prepare the way to analyse their significance in Chapter 6.

## Final Outcomes

The first and most significant outcome to emerge is that critical being when presented in a classroom context through the use of specific methodologies, while flawed, has potential in relation to non-traditional adult learners because it engages them at a significant level of critical thought and allows for the development of higher mental functioning because it engages with many of its significant components. However, the question as to what extent it offers a greater understanding of learning and development than Vygotsky's model or whether it adds to Dewey's framework significantly is an issue for discussion later. I would also like to offer Belenky *et al's* (1986) work on women and knowing as a possible schema through which levels of the practice of critical being can be measured and evaluated. To explain this further, I would like to break this down into a series of statements that highlight the key findings:

1. The data indicates the emergence of developing higher mental functions and the practice of critical being to varying degrees among participants which resulted directly from engaging with the teaching and learning process as part of this research.
2. The lack of a dialectical dynamic within the concept of critical being, particularly within the critical reflection element, specifically in the domain of the 'self'—unlike Vygotsky's model of development and learning—may reduce its capacity to impact on real change.

3. The RAP presented participants with a very challenging and unique opportunity to explore fundamental change within the self particularly allowing participants to problematise areas of learning and identify issues of concern in their lives and relationships. This change reflected transformation of a dialectical nature and had a significant impact on the development of higher mental functions such as will, judgement, construction of justification and arguments and reflection. These elements are not explicit in the model of critical being but offer a framework through which critical being can be activated and extended.
4. Four participants (group B) used the reflection action project (RAP) in a very instrumental and objective manner that did not engage the self in real critical reflection or higher mental functioning for various reasons stated thus failing to engage in the core problematically focused area of this model and leading to a much reduced impact on their capacity to become critical beings. The other four participants (group A) approached this task with much greater imagination, creativity and courage fully engaging the self and leading to far more significant results.
5. Metaphor analysis and the abundant use of metaphorical language by the four participants in group A during the taped interviews and the metaphor activity highlight a necessary relationship between conceptual capacity, levels of knowing and the practice of critical being. As a result the exploration of metaphor merits thematic consideration in this section.
6. The thematic headings that emerged in this chapter suggest a change in the human capacity of the participants that reflects the dynamic of communicative learning

- (Mezirow 1990) and interpretive meaning-making, which is central to the Personal Development module.
7. The impact of this work on my teaching suggests a substantial shift in my approach to learning, methodology and understanding of the transformative possibilities of facilitative and participatory teaching techniques.
  8. Point 7 also raises further questions in relation to my role in the process as teacher and researcher and the extent to which my role influenced participants' perceptions and comments. These concerns must be monitored constantly in a qualitative research study of this nature to ensure consistency, clarity and objectivity (Holliday 2002).
  9. As the research developed, the actions engaged in by members of this group (particularly group A) became less important than the process and the problematic areas of concern that emerged.
  10. The nature of dialogue, both internally reflective (self talk) and externally verbalised through conversation and comment, indicates change in terms of accuracy of meaning, levels of reflective judgment and ways of knowing that needed to be enhanced before the practice of critical being could take place.
  11. Gender emerges as an issue in terms of participants' responses during interview and attitudes to the process as it unfolded. There are also gender differences in perceptions and in how meaning and knowledge were constructed as a result of participation.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined some of the findings that have emerged from the thematic analysis of the data gathered during this research. Six significant themes were identified, presenting a very detailed representation of the different activities and the responses given by the participants. Each theme focused on a different dimension of criticality and its relationship to the cognitive, affective or pragmatic learning domain. Each theme highlighted different features of the participants' levels of thinking, knowing, development and learning and the relationship between these and higher mental functioning and the practice of critical being. Each theme examined Barnett's criteria for critical being by looking at participants' critical thinking, critical reflection and critical action in the context of self, knowledge and the world. Finally, through the exploration of metaphor, participants engaged in a creative assessment of their criticality, eliciting informal and subconscious responses hidden within the metaphorical representations.

The results emerging from this chapter provide some interesting findings in relation to Barnett's theory of critical being. First, that critical reflection, particularly in relation to exploring the self, is a pivotal component of the theory if the practice of critical being is to occur. Secondly, the absence of an inherent dialectic in Barnett's theory reduces its capacity to enhance learning and development. This is a major characteristic of other theoretical frameworks, such as Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1978), and using them as comparators in this research is informative. The Reflective Action Project (RAP) did add some dialectical components that gave added value to the full realisation of Barnett's

theory. Thirdly, the issue of applying this theory in practice on a wider scale requires further consideration in relation to time allocated within current educational practice and resources available to service larger numbers. Fourthly, as a qualitative study, finding appropriate measures to evaluate real and significant change must be based on observation, dialogue and analysis of reflective thinking within a narrow snap-shot of human experience.

In Chapters 5 and 6 it is my intention to address these issues more thoroughly in the context of my teaching and the overall value of Barnett's theory as an explicit learning framework that can be applied realistically in a modern, third-level classroom. This will be a direct response to the research questions set out in Chapter 1.

# CHAPTER 5

## CRITICAL BEING AND MY PRACTICE: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR MY TEACHING AND LEARNING

### Introduction

Palmer's (2007) writing on the nature of teaching is full of rich insights and perceptive observations, two of which will have a particular influence on this chapter and on the context in which I want to address the implications of this research for my own practice.

The first observation is that:

Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.

(2007:10)

In the teaching of Personal Development this has a particular resonance. In order to be able to teach this subject effectively, the class must engage in a certain level of mutual trust, both with the teacher and with each other, and be open to reflection and honest communication that may often have a strong personal dimension.

The second observation is that:



Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves.

(2007:11)

Both comments suggest that the teacher must be an authentic presence in the classroom. The teacher's values and practice should be congruent and should reflect a consistency and an integrity that students can identify and acknowledge. Furthermore, the teacher needs to nurture his students' capacity to make meaning that is real and holistic and leads to new understanding that challenges all three learning domains. The ultimate objective is to create a community of truth that respects and nurtures both teacher and student. The level and extent of this community of truth may vary between disciplines but it is clear that striving to achieve this level of authenticity is demanding and in the context of a reflective practice model may only be fully realised sporadically, at best.

In addition to the challenge of teaching a module of this type, there is also the difficulty of being researcher. Within an action research or interpretive paradigm the role and relationship of the researcher with the researchees becomes intricate and complex, requiring clarity in relation to boundaries and ethical procedures for both parties involved as outlined in chapter 3. There were a number of ethical issues that 'I' as a practitioner had to contend with which required sensitivity and trust at many levels. Such issues

included disempowering myself as teacher, playing down my role as ‘expert’, nurturing dialogue that was honest and reciprocal and facilitating the construction of learning and meaning rather than imposing it. Using the methods chosen for this research required an ethical integrity on my part that could not be imposed or forced while at the same time honoured the disclosure and personhood of each individual participant. Maintaining these parameters and at the same time building relationships that will enable disclosure and trust was challenging from a teaching perspective. Balancing these two dynamics provides the starting-point for an examination of my practice and the impact this has had on my teaching style and technique. In doing so, I would like to focus on a number of areas of my teaching that have emerged during the study as significant agents of change and development.

### *The ‘I’ in my practice*

Whitehead (2000) believes that when examining the teacher as practitioner, the concept of the ‘I’ is central. He argues that without this focus, a study of teaching becomes more social science than education. It also justifies the question, ‘how do I improve my practice?’ and allows the teacher to develop his own living educational theories, which are *‘related to an individual teacher’s educative influence with his/her students’* (Whitehead 2000:91). As it is for Palmer (2007), the ‘I’ in Whitehead’s model requires the teacher to adopt a position of integrity and authenticity in the classroom or else lose credibility. In the context of my work as a teacher and researcher in this study, this position is vital. Within the context of the ‘I’ there exists the dialectic between values and

practice. 'I' as a teacher may be a living contradiction. In my experience of this research process I have had to examine this contradiction closely. The first challenge lay in addressing the issue of power and its role in my teaching and how it would impact on the research process.

In my previous role as a second-level teacher, power as a direct model of control was common practice and was embedded in a traditional culture of the teacher as expert and supreme authority. As teacher and facilitator in a third-level environment and working with adults, some of whom were older than me, the dynamic was different. It became less about power and more about influence. In my experience the difference between power and influence is that it is not possible to have influence without integrity. Influence therefore becomes part of the teacher's authentic presence. However, to influence in this way is about facilitation and encouraging critical thinking or critical reflection rather than trying to manipulate people or activities for any reason. This issue has been raised briefly in chapter 4.

This became clear during the study in a number of ways. First, each stage of the process had to be negotiated and agreed—a vital requirement of this type of research process. Participants had to engage in critical reflection of a personal nature and be willing to expose that to scrutiny. Levels of trust needed to exist to allow this to occur freely. Secondly, in order to build trust, reciprocal disclosure was required from me during activities and discussion. To achieve this I had to remove the mantle of teacher and diffuse power as much as possible. Due to the educational history and meaning-making

filters of this group, their experience of power in education had been predominantly punitive, so it was difficult to break down what had become a very ingrained cultural dynamic. I attempted to do so through adopting the role of facilitator, listener and recorder, and succeeded in this to varying degrees. I also had to ensure that there was a transparent congruence between my values and my practice and that my humanness was evident in my relationships with students (Brookfield 1990). Still, the perception of me as teacher and evaluator lingered and their awareness of my power, however reduced or deliberately downplayed, remained implicit. This is particularly significant when working with a group of mature students whose previous experiences of learning may not have been positive. Thirdly, for most teachers their power exists through students' belief in their 'expert' knowledge, particularly at third-level. In choosing to facilitate a negotiated process and underplaying my role as 'expert', I also reduced my capacity to influence in preference for acceptance and disclosure. This created a contradiction that had mixed results, as observations made in Chapter 4 suggest. Power can be used in teaching solely for the purpose of instrumental outcomes, but that would have opposed the intrinsic values I wanted to bring to this research process. In developing my own 'living educational theory' (Whitehead 2000) therefore, I had to address the issue of power directly.

As a teacher, this led me to examine my teaching style and the manner in which I managed dialogue during the research process. Being an extravert and an activist learner by preference (Honey & Mumford 1982), I have always encouraged activity and discussion in my classroom. On many occasions the discussion has been more a one-way

monologue, however, with me talking as opposed to real dialogue. If I was to encourage the group to participate fully, I had to discover what dialogue meant and to disempower myself to some extent in the process.

In Chapter 2 I referred to Barnett's (1992a) '*black box*' and Brockbank and McGill's (1998) concept of '*modeling*'. Real dialogue must avoid self-deception and these two processes helped me to avoid that during the study and to create genuine opportunities for critical reflection. Modeling allowed me to engage in dialogical clarification with each member of the group, both individually and collectively. The '*black box*' highlighted many of the invisible elements of the process, such as student and teacher values, the use of power and the levels of learning and knowing that existed within the group and myself. The different activities made many of these issues explicit and offered me the opportunity to examine them closely. It also forced me to look at my own position in relation to many of the issues raised and demanded a greater tolerance from me as a teacher in understanding and empathising with the group at different times. It brought about a realisation that objective knowledge has real value only when it exists within a subjective framework, which James described as '*the me in me*'. Polanyi states that '*I must aim at discovering what I truly believe in and at formulating the convictions which I find myself holding; that I must conquer my self-doubt so as to retain a firm hold on this programme of self-identification*' (1974:267). I can only maintain power, wonder and greatness through personal commitment. If I begin to look at the world and my work too objectively, I will lose sight of my own meaning and direction. This has led me to seek out an authenticity in my teaching that is honest, aims at consensus, encourages critique,

is based on critical self-reflection and provides opportunities for communicative learning (Mezirow 1990).

### *The 'I' as reflective practitioner*

In constructing a living educational theory (Whitehead 2000) out of this research process, I must also look at the reflective practice framework upon which this approach is built. In Chapter 2 I outlined many of the key aspects of Schön's model, along with some of the difficulties and challenges this model presents for both teacher and learner. Reflective practice is not a model of teaching but rather a way of thinking about teaching. It offers a way of framing and understanding practice within the context of action (teaching) and reflection. Many aspects of this study are built either on implicit or explicit critically reflective engagement for both students and teacher. The Critical Incident and Metaphor Analysis exercises required both 'artistry' (Schön 1983) and structure in their execution for both teacher and student. Activities such as these rely on flexibility and immediacy of response in order to work effectively. As teacher, I found myself playing many roles and reflecting-in-action constantly to ensure continuity and creativity within the group. These activities present problems for students in an ill-structured context and dialogue and compromise are essential for success. They also encourage a very honest response, which makes the subsequent feedback and dialogue authentic and challenges the teacher to respond in a similar fashion. The reflective practice framework allowed me to bring clarity to an unclear situation, while at the same time mentally reflecting, both at the time and afterwards, on ways to improve this activity.

While these exercises were taking place I found myself reflecting on the process and the responses of participants, but also on my own experience at key points in my life and career. I could empathise with many of the feelings and concerns that emerged. I began to re-think and reflect again on these at the same time as I was facilitating the exercises with the group. There was a sense that I was reflecting at different levels simultaneously. Like Dewey, who found truth too dogmatic and inflexible a concept to allow change and preferred the notion of meaning, I too began to find new meaning and perspective as I observed the exercises. To argue the truth of these new meanings with absolute clarity or certainty in the context of my teaching would be difficult, but they do indicate a greater congruence and harmony between my values and my practice. For example, as a result of this work I have begun to listen more to my students—not just in terms of the words spoken but to the sub-textual meanings and the metaphorical colouring being used. Many of the members of the group needed to find a more implicit and creative mechanism through which they could express their critical self-reflection. My capacity to connect with this form of expression and respond to it in the moment was enhanced significantly. There was a growing sense of myself as both a facilitator and interpreter of student response with the ‘I’ becoming less central (Elliott 1991)

There was also a growing awareness of my need to take into account the group dynamics that exist within an adult learning space. This dynamic may sometimes be counter-productive and reduce learning possibilities. In one session with Betty’s group, for example, I had just finished a theoretical input on team-building theory and I gave the

class a game to play as an applied learning exercise.<sup>7</sup> As I observed them working with the clues, I noticed that they didn't apply any of the theory that had just been covered. Had they been listening at all? In fact they had been, but within the group nobody was prepared to take a leadership role and suggest a way of tackling the problem. Rather than have a discussion about this, they immediately opted to simply look for the answers, focusing on the outcome instead of the process. They failed to complete the exercise and in discussion afterwards it emerged that each of them was afraid to apply the new knowledge in case they were seen as being the 'good' student. This was a throwback to former learning experiences and conditioned responses: fear, low self-esteem and lack of confidence were the reasons given. As a teacher I had failed to pick up on this dynamic and therefore didn't prepare them properly for the activity. I had also failed to provide a clear connection for the group that would allow them to overcome the negative group dynamic and weave their own connection to the learning. The 'I' as reflective practitioner did not provide them with the necessary bridge to link new knowledge with their previous experience in a manner that would allow them to make the journey to new understanding. Despite this apparent contradiction, learning did occur for the group. In my own reflective journal I wrote:

In terms of my own practice, it confirmed my belief in applied learning. I need to do this more often. I don't always capitalise on the value of doing

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<sup>7</sup> The game I used in this instance was called 'Murder'. The purpose of the game is five-fold: to identify the murderer, motive, location, weapon and time of crime. To do this each participant is given a set of unconnected clues and they must all work together as a group to solve the case. They are not allowed to show their clues to anyone else and the results must be agreed unanimously. The idea is that the group will come up with an approach using the team-building theory studied and apply it to the game. They are given thirty minutes to complete the game.



activities with groups because I like to explore ideas myself. My own learning style is a significant factor here.

(Personal journal, p.115)

My learning style naturally encourages a preferred teaching style and this can be a barrier to students who don't learn in the same way. As a teacher I need to be open to the other styles of learning so that I can engage with a greater number of students in a way that makes sense to them. My inability to pick up the negative dynamic, along with a teaching style that may not have engaged the entire group, resulted in a less-than-satisfactory teaching and learning experience, but one that still generated new understanding.

To what extent, then, does the Reflective Practice model work as a way of thinking about teaching? If learning can come even from my failure to teach effectively, is there a value in reflecting at all? Reflection, as Moon has pointed out, can be difficult to define, but this absence of parameters does allow every aspect of the process, both positive and negative, to be examined. Teaching is not an exact science, and progress in improving practice may often emerge from negative experiences or poor teacher performance. In the Schön model, it is this very flexibility within the concept of 'artistry' that allows all experiences in the area of professional practice to be accommodated and evaluated for the purpose of improvement. It is in the area of ill-structured problems that the real 'artistry' of reflective practice takes place when dealing with uncertainty or complexity. As a reflective practitioner, the 'I' in my practice can embrace any aspect of my teaching and use it to bring greater understanding and improvement to the overall process in a

particularly interpretive manner (Elliott1991). The technical rational model, which originated from the positivist philosophy of Comte, holds that practitioners must work within a recognised body of professional knowledge, deal with manageable problems and apply instrumental solutions that exist within that body of knowledge. Based on my teaching experiences described here, along with the approaches taken to address the practice of critical being, I believe the Reflective Practice model offers far greater opportunities for assessing change and evaluating my practice.

### *Building relationships*

Many teachers within varied disciplines at third-level see themselves primarily as subject teachers who deliver relevant information to students over the course of a given programme. In programmes where there are large classes, it is difficult to establish any kind of ongoing rapport or to build worthwhile teacher–student relationships that can enhance student learning and development. In a module such as Personal Development, teacher–student relationships need to be nurtured in a positive way that allows the student to participate and feel valued. The nature of this study also required positive working relationships if students were to commit fully to the research process and be willing to confide honestly about their experiences. As a teacher/researcher involved in this process, I tried to ensure, first, that everyone had sufficient opportunity and time to participate and, secondly, that I maintained flexibility and clarity around boundaries and procedures. While only dealing with eight people, the dynamic that existed varied and altered at different times, depending on whether I was doing an individual or a group activity. The

research process also continued over a six- to eight-month period and participants experienced other pressures from living and study during that time. Overall, therefore, maintaining and building relationships was a challenge, and as a teacher I feel I achieved mixed results.

In reflecting on my practice in this regard, I would divide the group evenly between those who experienced significant change and transformation (Martin, Kel, James and Betty: Group A) and those who were less affected by the process (Noel, Anna, Una and Aiden: Group B). In Chapter 4 I suggested reasons why this may have occurred and will return to this topic again in Chapter 6. However, here I would like to explore briefly how I believe the issue of relationships impacted on the overall study and on my role as teacher/researcher.

First, I was dealing with a particular type of adult profile, in this case non-traditional adult learners. This had implications for their confidence, self-esteem and self-image, which have been outlined in Chapter 1 and elaborated on in Chapter 4. Secondly, from a teaching perspective I found it difficult to sustain an equivalent relationship with each participant, allowing for personality traits, age and life experience. I had to try and work with each person individually, taking their concerns into account, and also manage the group dynamic, which generated collective concerns that were sometimes at variance with individual needs. The result was that the students in Group B remained a little outside the process. This may also have been due to the intermittent nature of the research activities and an unwillingness to commit to self-reflection because they needed more

time with me to feel safe, engaged and know there was a sense of accountability (Jarvis 2004). These are significant needs for adult learners to help maintain and nurture dialogue, which was an important feature of the study. I also experienced resistance from Group B at times during the research stage. I have identified possible reasons for this already, but I found it difficult to strike a balance with these students in relation to how far to push the relationship without alienating them and losing valuable feedback. I was asking them to participate in a study in which they had no direct, negotiated input in relation to needs assessment. It was my study in that I set the parameters of the research. These factors may have impacted on the level at which Group B engaged in the process, despite volunteering at the start and declaring their commitment to participate fully throughout.

#### *Methodologies, research tools and my practice*

As stated in chapter 3 with the aid of a structured diagram and explanation, I distinguished clearly between teaching methodologies specifically and the research tools used to establish indications of change in this study. The methodologies mentioned here refer primarily to the critical incident technique, the learning autobiography, metaphor analysis and the reflection action project (RAP) which uniquely acts as both a methodology and research tool because of its critical and reflective framework.

The ways of engaging students in learning are varied and diverse. Teachers will often choose methods that suit their own preferred learning style initially and then progress to

alternative techniques as their practice evolves and they become more comfortable and familiar with classroom dynamics and alternative learning styles. This has certainly been my experience as a reflective practitioner over twenty-seven years. I have always chosen activities and methods that I believed would be appropriate and relevant to the specific needs of my students and would fulfill the stated aims and objectives. I approached this research in a similar fashion.

The methodologies used during this research had a further requirement: to enhance and elicit responses and feedback that would inform the research questions and provide insights into the applicability of Barnett's theory in a classroom context. Each methodology was either chosen or devised to generate critical thinking, critical reflection or critical action. Each methodology created the need for dialogue or self-talk through reflective writing, and each methodology contained a creative dynamic for the student to explore. In addition, each methodology generated a variety of data in different formats: written, visual and oral. The implementation of the methodologies was successful from a practical teaching point of view. Participants were clear on the procedures and objectives and instructions were followed accurately throughout. Each participant engaged to varying degrees with the process, was attentive and forthcoming at all times. The data that emerged was comprehensive and indicated genuine participation and involvement even when comments may have appeared negative or critical.

However, in a qualitative study of this nature the question arises as to the appropriateness of the methods used in relation to the research questions and whether other methods

would have been more illuminating. In terms of the latter, a further study might be required, but in relation to this study I believe that the methods employed proved worthwhile. They provided an opportunity to break down critical being into its component parts and examine their implicit value as a transformative model of viewing the world. Furthermore each element could be observed and analysed specifically through the different activities employed and could be tested against the Dewey and Vygotsky models. In relation to my practice the methods also proved useful. First, each method offered the possibility of both reflection-in- and on-action (Schön 1983). Secondly, as a centerpiece, the Reflective Action Project (RAP) allowed participants to engage all three elements of Barnett's schema. Thirdly, the journaling, questionnaire and taped interview acted as research tools that generated deep critical reflection and critical thinking that in many cases led to significant change or critical action. Finally, the metaphor-based activities provided a creative energy and an alternative way of perceiving situations that broadened capacity and encouraged higher mental functioning.

Looking at this teaching process critically, I would make the following observations. Not all the methods used provided a dialectical dimension that might have engaged participants more critically. Again, the Reflective Action Project (RAP) offered the greatest opportunity in this regard and for Martin, Kel and James, in particular, the conflict created between values and practice initiated significant change at a critical level. Other activities used offered this possibility to varying degrees, the most notable being the Critical Incident and Metaphor Analysis exercises, which allowed for a creative exploration of problem-focused situations. Finding a balance within the taped interview

process between allowing participant's unstructured expression (Cohen and Manion 1994) and channeling thought in a structured manner may have created a lot of dialogue, but it also gave them the creative space to reflect deeply.

The question now arises as to whether all the participants were ready for this level of endeavour. Kitchener and King (1994) suggest that methodologies should not be presented that are more than two stages of reflective judgment above the current level of the learner involved. This was also evident within the Belenky *et al* (1986) schema with Noel, Anna and Aiden and Una, whose level of knowing did not fully reach the final stage. This may partly explain why they did not experience the same level of change as the other four participants, but I want to address that more specifically in Chapter 6.

These concerns must also be presented against the need to engage participants in a challenging and innovative way that would stimulate alternative thinking. Each activity was designed to challenge the participants at a high level of mental functioning and knowing, but also allowed them the opportunity to engage at different levels within their respective groups. Finding a balance between these two conflicting concerns was necessary to ensure honest and open contribution from each participant. This is why I chose not to evaluate or measure capacity explicitly before I began. I believe the Kitchener and King (1994) model is very empirically based and culturally at variance for a group of Irish-based students who would have been suspicious of such an evaluation. I believe that in this research context the Belenky *et al* (1986) model offered a more qualitative and informative way of establishing the participants' level of knowing. It also

proved to be less intrusive. Overall, then, at this point I believe that the methods used did initiate a high level of response and the range did address a multifaceted approach to the group's intellectual capacity.

## **Conclusion**

At the beginning of this chapter I identified two key principles for effective teaching: an authentic presence, and the importance of developing connectedness through my teaching and for my students (Palmer 2007). I then placed this in the context of establishing a 'living educational theory' within my practice, where the 'I' is central (Whitehead 2000). In expressing this theory I have examined my practice in terms of power and influence, developing a reflective dialogical interaction in my class, diminishing my role as 'expert', finding congruence between my values and practice, exploring sub-textual layers within my class, understanding the complex nature of group dynamics, building alternative teacher–student relationships and placing this in the context of an active reflective practice framework. The Reflective Practice model (Schön 1983), while flawed, offers a way of moving towards authenticity that other models may not provide. I have also examined the methodologies used and their impact, both positive and negative, on my practice and on the research process.

The result of this has been to create a new perspective and approach to my work that generates a greater sensitivity to the student–teacher relationship and has significantly impacted on my own capacity to engage with the practice of critical being through my



thinking, reflection and actions. I have become a more reflective teacher, who is extremely conscious of the need to explore further my capacity for openness, honesty and critical engagement with my students in a respectful and authentic manner, particularly in the context of teaching Personal Development. I have also come to a greater understanding of the interpretive nature of my teaching role (Elliott 1991) and its importance in understanding learners and building significant learning relationships. In Chapter 6 I want to look at the significance of this research in relation to the questions posed in Chapter 1, to examine the overall applicability of Barnett's theory (1997) and to identify directions and further research that may be required to fully test the capacity of this model. I also want to place this, finally, in the context of an overview of higher education and to ask whether Barnett's theory has a place in the ongoing evolution of knowledge and understanding at third-level.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

In Chapter 1 I posed a research question relating to the applicability of Barnett's (1997) model of critical being and whether it was possible to employ it in a teaching context as part of a standard academic programme. I wanted to establish whether students could engage with critical being and practice it in their academic and personal life allowing them to develop new meaning perspectives leading to higher mental functioning, as defined by Vygotsky (1978). In this chapter I want to draw together the different elements of the study that have emerged and to evaluate Barnett's theory of critical being in this context. This will involve examining the nature and process of the study, exploring critical being and its real educational value, proposing possible improvements to the model and placing Barnett's work in a wider theoretical context. In addition, I also want to look at the research implications that have emerged, the challenges this might create for higher education, recommendations for the future and outline my original contribution to educational knowledge. While the research group in this case is small, the issues raised collectively throughout the process have, I believe, highlighted the ongoing need to look closely at how adults learn, their expectations of education and the manner in which those needs are managed and developed within the higher education environment.

## **Original contribution to knowledge**

In chapter 1 I outlined what I thought this study would contribute in an original way to educational knowledge. I would like to expand on this here. Firstly my approach to the application of Barnett's (1997) model in the classroom context with a group of adults involved a complex and multi-skilled approach that engaged students in a variety of cognitive, affective and pragmatic activities. Each activity was used to engage with all three elements of the schema. The reflection action project (RAP) was designed uniquely to allow participants to engage with critical being within their own life outside the class and provide an opportunity to respond both spontaneously (in the moment) and reflectively to their experience. It generated transformative learning opportunities as participants, particularly group A, sought to link knowledge with previous experience, discovered patterns and underlying motives and emotions, critically rationalised the experience and implemented change. The reflection action project (RAP) also provided unique data as a research tool to allow me to analyse the degree to which each participant engaged with the practice of critical being and the level of mental functioning or knowing at which that occurred. As a process the reflection action project (RAP) also contains a dialectical mechanism that allows participants to problematise a situation and approach it in various ways. The results can then be recorded and evaluated objectively.

Secondly the Barnett model was presented initially as a way of viewing change and need within higher education at a macro level. This study has attempted to introduce critical being at a micro level in the classroom. My basic premise is simple; if students in higher

education should aspire to becoming critical beings and most of student time in college is spent in the classroom. Then the practice of critical being must be addressed explicitly in that environment. As Barnett provides no suggestions as to how this might take place, this study had to develop its own map to examine this learning landscape. Any approach to this problem will therefore be unique and original. Thirdly the profile of student chosen for this work would not fit into most mainstream categories in higher education. In Tipperary Institute they make up a substantial cohort due to the remit and mission statement of the college. Subsequently they bring specific characteristics and difficulties to the learning space that has been written about in detail throughout this report. If they can engage with critical being successfully then I believe dissemination to a broader and more homogeneous student cohort should be possible. Other issues that would arise with such dissemination are discussed later in the chapter.

Finally the classroom approach taken to this study and the manner in which the findings are thematically framed in chapter 4 offer a qualitative canvas that is unique in that any such study will inherently contain a subjective approach to understanding such a complex area of human learning experience. The nature of both my teaching and research relationship with the participants always attempted to maintain authenticity of teaching and research and the creation of a community of truth (Palmer 2007) where shared understanding and real dialogue was paramount. The merits and weaknesses of Barnett's model along with those of this research process are also highlighted later and indicate an openness and honesty in engaging critically with all the elements of this process.

## **The study as process**

Structuring this study presented a number of challenges. The primary one was finding a way to process and evaluate data and present it in a way that remained faithful to the criteria identified in the research methodology framework. Analysing a conceptual framework that has not previously been explored in this fashion necessitated the devising of a workable and appropriate model of presentation and assessment. As a qualitative study with a strong interpretive focus, the thematic approach I believe, provided the flexibility that the study required, and also allowed me to integrate the different strands that emerged under separate, specific headings. I wanted to be able to look at the different components of critical being individually, to see how each element contributed to the whole and how each element impacted on the learning and understanding of the participants. In doing so I could also evaluate the constituent parts of Barnett's model in terms of capacity to generate a dialectical dynamic and in turn compare this to Dewey's experiential schema (1933, 1938) and Vygotsky's (1978) model of learning and development. Issues emerged in Chapter 4 relating specifically to the workability of Barnett's model, particularly in a larger class setting. Within the qualitative research framework used, the boundaries were clear, data analysis was varied and each theme self-contained. Each component within the model was revealing in its own way.

### *Critical thinking*

Through higher education, students can come not just to inhabit a different universe, but also to be changed as persons.

(Barnett 1997:5)

Barnett's claim is based on the premise that students who enter higher education can achieve this level of change if they experience the practice of critical being. As one of the main components of critical being, critical thinking has already been explored in this work, and its capacity to challenge and question knowledge and understanding at a cognitive level is generally accepted. However, critical thinking may not occur naturally; it may have to be taught as a skill in order to expand intellectual capacity. Barnett has argued that critical thinking has lost its real function in higher education; to generate non-conformity and promote scrutiny while questioning power structures. If it is a skill that can be developed, this must be done in a proactive manner that addresses these concerns. Within the research findings, Martin, Kel, James and Betty certainly used critical thinking as a mechanism to address personal challenges. Each applied critical thinking during his/her Reflective Action Project (RAP) to tackle power issues and to redress imbalances in his/her personal life. While this may not have had the universal dimension associated with Barnett's definition of critical thought, it did create a dialectical challenge for each and forced new meaning perspectives to emerge. All the other activities confirmed this change to varying degrees or further enhanced new thinking. Within Barnett's framework, these four participants did experience self-determination through critical thinking and were changed as persons.

In relation to Una, Aiden, Noel and Anna, critical thinking did not move to this level, instead remaining at a safe and more conformist position. A dialectical dynamic did not emerge for them explicitly; I have referred to possible reasons for this in Chapter 4. If critical thinking has not occurred at the required level for this group, then one of the criteria for critical being has not functioned. In Chapter 4 I mentioned some reasons for this, but the one that seems to have the most resonance here is the level of knowing (Belenky *et al* 1986) required to engage fully with critical thinking. I will return to this, but first I want to examine the other elements of critical being and find out to what extent they have engaged the participants of this study.

### *Critical reflection*

If reflection is to be effective, it must involve more than simply pondering on past issues or experiences—it must also problematise and explore uncertainty (Moon 1999). The dialectical challenges of critical self-reflection lie in the difficulty of reflecting about the self while still maintaining an objective perspective. Furthermore, it also requires a process of reflexivity (Habermas 1971, Van Manen 1991) that generates reflection on reflection. These elements give critical reflection a capacity to challenge and address knowledge, understanding and emotion. Critical reflection as a process should, therefore, enable transformational change for the learner through engagement with uncertainty and ill-structured problems, allowing the self to explore new possibilities and meaning perspectives. Subsequent dialogue and self talk that is reflective can reinforce and embed

new learning and understanding. In exploring this theme in Chapter 4, it provided perhaps the most interesting and revealing understanding of participant change. Those who reflected critically with the self in a reflexive manner experienced the most significant transformation. Again, it was Kel, Martin, James and Betty who reached this level consistently, and it was through the Reflective Action Project (RAP) that real critical reflection occurred.

The key points to emerge for the Group A participants involve the depth of critical self-reflection achieved, the central role of the self as key to understanding and knowledge, high levels of self-esteem and, significantly, the willingness to take risks within their world and their relationships. Through self talk-and dialogue, in particular, there were clear indications of critical reflection that was both reflexive and transformative. All four students were willing to revisit their experiences in different contexts and through different media. At each point there was evidence that new understanding and new meanings had emerged. Critical reflection, as defined by Barnett, took place within a problematic context, with uncertain outcomes, and required higher mental functioning to address this dialectic effectively.

Anna, Una, Noel and Aiden also reached significant levels of critical reflection, but there was less evidence of the self as an agent of direct change, which impacted on other aspects mentioned above. Each member of this group chose not to risk a deeper exploration of the self and his/her relationship to the wider world. They did not exhibit the same sense of reflexive critical reflection in their self-talk and dialogue. As a result, while they all acknowledged degrees of difference and new thinking, it was occurring at a



more objective level, which placed the self outside the process to some extent and thereby allowed this group to avoid any deeper analysis, if they so chose. While this is qualitatively difficult to explain and I accept that each participant has the right to choose his/her level of commitment and disclosure, I have suggested reasons that might explain this in Chapters 4 and 5. The evidence emerging does indicate a relationship between this capacity to reflect critically and levels of knowing, self-esteem and a desire to explore the unknown self. At this level of educational activity, where the self is pivotal, the extent to which real understanding can be fully measured is difficult to gauge, but I am satisfied that within the terms of reference of this research these factors do have a significant bearing on learning and development for this group.

### *Critical action*

The final element of Barnett's model (1997) brings me to the pragmatic aspect of his framework. This involves the capacity to turn critical thinking and critical reflection into critical action that is effective and that reflects a different level of higher mental functioning (Vygotsky 1978). Through the Reflective Action Project (RAP) all of the participants carried out different actions over a five-day period and used this process to engage in critical thinking and critical self-reflection. The results and actions taken were varied and revealing in many ways. The possibilities for action were open and left to each individual to decide the nature and extent of their choice; I placed no restrictions on them. As a result, their choices suggest a critical and reflective disposition that links again to their levels of knowing (Belenky *et al* 1986) and their willingness to engage the self at a

deep level. The group once more divides itself into the same A and B groupings as before. Noel, Anna, Aiden and Una focused their actions in a very pragmatic way, thus reducing the opportunity for critical self-reflection or real critical thinking. Each one took a reductionist approach to the task, despite significant preparation and planning in class. Each one focused on an external task that was objective and instrumental in nature. The result was an absence of any real problematic dilemma and the experience lacked the substance for genuine critical reflection. Without a dialectical component, real critical self-reflection became impossible. The same reasons as mentioned above emerge again, along with one other. Group B approached this task in a manner that excluded creativity or imaginative application. This was evident, to some extent, in their choice of metaphor and the difficulties they experienced during that activity. Aiden missed this activity and offered nothing to it later; Noel accepted James' creative representation. Anna and Una's approach also lacked creative engagement, opting instead to be led by the group. A clear pattern is becoming clear in the context of all three elements of the Barnett model for this group. There is an absence of a subjective self examination, dialectical critical engagement and substantive actions that would allow for the practice of critical being.

The reverse is once again true for the Group A participants in relation to critical action. Through the Reflective Action Project (RAP) each of them displayed a desire to engage with critical actions that required a commitment to critical self-reflection, a substantive experience that had the capacity to sustain such reflection and a level of knowing (Belenky *et al* 1986) that allowed them to develop learning and understanding. Significantly, each of them also brought a level of creativity to the process in terms of

focusing on actions that required the application of new thinking and they were prepared to live with and defend the outcomes. The metaphors were challenging in a similar way and the reflexive reflection was evident in their self-talk and dialogue in relation to all of these activities.

This brings me to a point where there is a definite dichotomy within the group that is not based on gender, age or level of educational experience. I have identified some significant factors that offer distinctive reasons for this division that go beyond a desire to participate fully. Personality type and learning style may also need to be taken into consideration. The Myers Briggs Type Inventory MBTI (1995) would indicate that certain types are less reflective than others and this in addition to being a pragmatic or activist learner may have contributed to group B being less disposed to critical reflection. Half of the group has demonstrated a clear capacity to practice critical being within Barnett's framework; the other half have moved partially towards critical being, to varying degrees. What, then, does this say about Barnett's (1997) model and its value and applicability as an educational tool within the context of higher education?

### **Critical Being and the higher educational context**

The practice of critical being as an aspiration for any student entering third-level education, hinges on a number of factors that need to exist both infrastructurally and in classroom practice within a higher-level environment. The broader systemic issues will

be discussed later in this study, but as a teaching mechanism for developing adult learning and enabling them to face Barnett's 'radically unknowable' world, the results are far from conclusive. The following concerns and outcomes support this lack of certainty.

### *Critical Being as a theoretical framework*

From the outset I have placed Barnett's model within the wider context of the work of Dewey (1933, 1938), Vygotsky (1978), Schön (1983), Belenky *et al* (1986) and Mezirow (1990). These theorists provided a canvas upon which to compare Barnett's model because they had added elements that appear to be missing from the theory of critical being. Barnett's theory seems to lack the implicit elements of reflective reflexivity (Dewey), a flexibility that can incorporate an historical dialectic (Vygotsky), 'artistry' or the capacity to deal with ill-structured dilemmas (Schön) and a transformational dynamic that engenders communicative learning and new meaning perspectives (Mezirow 1990). I believe the methodologies used in this study countered these deficiencies explicitly and therefore contributed to the results that emerged.

The theories of Fromm (1978) drew attention to the need to experience learning and development as a process of being and becoming. A close examination of these different theories in Chapter 2, and as a comparative backdrop to the research analysis in Chapter 4, highlights the deficiencies of Barnett's theory, but that does not make the theory invalid or useless. It does suggest, however, that Barnett's model needs added value if it

is to operate at a similar level to that of its predecessors. What form might this added value take?

*Critical Being, historical materialism and experiential learning*

Both Dewey's (1933, 1938) and Vygotsky's (1978) models present an implicit dynamic for reflection and development that uses experience and cultural artefacts as agents of mediation, which create a learning dynamic that is critical and ongoing. These elements infuse the learning and contribute to the development of higher mental functioning. In Barnett's model, both critical thinking and critical action are static and do not contain elements of mediation, being dependent on external stimuli and energy to generate change. They lack a progressive internal dynamic that can be experienced and reflected on by the learner.

The Reflective Action Project (RAP) and the Metaphor Analysis exercise provided a means by which critical thinking and critical action could be activated. However, the participant's level of engagement was based on the level of criticality that occurred. Martin, Kel, James and Betty (group A) were able to activate real change through the thinking and reflection they each brought to the study. Barnett's framework is dependent on this external agency to create a dialectical dynamic that may or may not lead to critical being. There is no guarantee that it will occur. To achieve this independently and based on the findings of this research, Barnett's model needs to develop the critical thinking and critical action elements if it is to fully incorporate this dynamic implicitly as a real

agent of change. It must integrate within it a framework of mediation that includes reflexive thinking and that utilises cultural artefacts implicitly, leading to inner freedom and the constant possibility of change (Dewey 1933). This expansion of the core concept would give these components fluidity and a capacity that is currently missing.

### *Critical Being and critical self-reflection*

The research study has indicated clearly that this component of Barnett's (1997) model has the greatest potential as an agent of real development and higher mental functioning. Barnett outlined eight stages within the critical reflection process relating to self, knowledge and world, which I outlined in Chapter 2. However, his stages do not have any particular order and are not ranked in any schema that would indicate an incremental framework for learning or development. He does give greater value to the stages of reflection relating to the self, but not in any order or learning significance. There is an implicit dialectical element within the critical self-reflection framework that does allow the individual to problematise his/her experience, knowledge or understanding and present it against current perspectives and meaning-making filters. This emerged very strongly within the analysis framework in Chapter 4. This feature is apparent within the Dewey (1933) model in terms of analysing experiential data through self-reflection and also within the communicative learning framework of Mezirow (1990), where knowledge and understanding must be internalised subjectively before new meaning perspectives can be articulated.

So, has Barnett added anything new to this process? Part of the problem that Barnett has is that his model is inextricably linked to the role of the university in higher education, and his focus is divided between the macro-perspective this creates and the needs of individual students at a micro-level. In addition, he is also concerned with the politics of interdisciplinary relations and the need of each discipline to protect its educational territory in the face of competition for financial sponsorship at the expense of real education and development. He therefore falls between two stools as he attempts to traverse a wide and disparate landscape, where there is little common ground. The result is a failure to address the dynamics of his model at a teaching and learning level and to explore and define the role of the self in the learning process in a more explicit manner. What he offers is a generic framework that does not cater for a learner who is outside the standard stereotype, and even then he assumes a level of knowledge and capacity that may not exist. There is a need, then, to place the self more pivotally within his framework and to offer a mechanism for evaluating the self as learner as development occurs, rather than providing loose categories of reflective possibilities. The fact that Kel, Martin, James and Betty experienced real change and moved to a high level of critical being cannot be explained merely in terms of the impact of Barnett's model as an independent stimulus for development. There is a need to deconstruct the model, giving each element more structure and ensuring the self as reflective learner is at the centre in every context.

While Barnett acknowledges this—'*through critical self reflection, students develop their selves*' (1997:90)—this study suggests that the model does not appear to achieve this fully, for the reasons mentioned above. He also acknowledges that the self and the world

as learning domains have not received much attention within higher education, but his model does not provide a way in which this can be actualised on an individual level within the higher education classroom.

### *Critical Being and levels of knowing*

Another feature to emerge during the research process was the level of critical capacity, or knowing, that the participants possessed and its role in the activation of critical being. Chapter 4 directly connects these two elements because it became evident that participants who demonstrated constructed knowing (Belenky *et al* 1986) were also the ones who showed real capacity to practice critical being (i.e. Martin, Kel, James and Betty). This suggests another requirement that needs to exist implicitly within Barnett's model (1997), but which is not addressed by him directly. The Belenky *et al* (1986) study focuses entirely on women, on the basis that women need a different kind of support in terms of learning and development, although they do not suggest that their categories cannot be applied to men. The application of their schema to the male participants in Chapter 4 produced rich data that indicated much similarity in the way men and women come to know. Furthermore, within the context of a Personal Development module with a strong emphasis on affective understanding, differences in age and gender seemed less significant. The manner and delineation within the two groupings of four also reflect this, given that the gender balance is the same in each. What Belenky *et al* (1986) do acknowledge is that educative change or new transformational meaning perspectives only



really occur at the more complex levels of knowing. This has also been reflected in Kitchener and King's (1994) findings.

Barnett (1997) does not address this issue within his model or schema, however, nor does he suggest a relationship between the practice of critical being and critical capacity. Again, within the wider, higher education context of his model, this may not be necessary, but at a micro level it highlights a problematic concern. If the practice of critical being is to be applied on a day-to-day basis in third-level classrooms, some prior evaluation of students may be required to establish a starting-point for learning and development or, to use Vygotsky's (1978) terminology, to identify the Current Zone of Development (CZD). This raises a further issue of administrating such a process within a large higher-level organisation or national third-level framework. In the context of a small group this may not be necessary, as ongoing work that is relatively intensive and one-to-one would quickly establish critical capacity.

#### *Critical being as an educational research tool*

Up to now in this chapter I have examined critical being in relation to teaching. As an educational research tool critical being has presented a number of points for consideration. Firstly it has proved valuable in exploring the nature of how adults learn and come to understand. By using critical being as a framework to develop adult learning it has become clear that in many respects higher education does not address the needs of this group explicitly. Assumptions made about capacity and expectations are based on

age and experience that may not reflect the adult learner's real needs in terms of critical thinking and critical reflection skills. Secondly at a macro level critical being provides a useful method of evaluating deficits and gaps within higher level disciplines in terms of content, objectives and methodologies. Critical thinking and critical reflection skills are often implicit in many programmes but never stated or taught explicitly. This study has highlighted the importance of teaching these skills explicitly to adult learners. The subdivisions of the three components of critical being could be used to proof many programmes to ensure that these skills are addressed explicitly. However as a model of research critical being is also quite linear in its structure and does not provide an evaluative framework on its own. The components listed as part of each element are simply that. Barnett does not provide the possibility of achieving each stage through any series of steps or actions that can be done. Therefore there is no implicit dialectical dynamic that can problematise issues or concepts in evidence unlike the Dewey or Vygotsky frameworks. I have found the need to support the model with broader dialectical frameworks that elicit more substantive findings and comparative analysis as the house diagram in chapter 2 (page 102) illustrates. In terms of its value as both a teaching model and research tool critical being needs to be supplemented and infused with elements that will provide it with a real educational research dynamic.

### **Value added**

I have identified many of the elements that have emerged from this study, which have raised concerns about the practical workability of Barnett's model and some intellectual

anomalies that could impact on successful application in real time. Now I want to look at what would benefit the workability of the model, based on the findings of this research.

Critical being is a logical construction founded primarily on a triangulation of thinking, reflecting and acting within a specific context of learning and development. While a rational model is required, I would suggest it is not enough. The lack of an implicit dialectic and a central focus within the model would be enhanced by the addition of a creative dynamic. In Chapter 4 it emerged that many of the successful activities contained such a dynamic and were further embedded through the dialogue process. The natural home for such a creative dynamic within the model rests in the critical thinking and critical reflection components or, possibly, in the creation of a new element—creative thinking. How might this work? The capacity to practice critical being based on this research requires a number of factors, some of which I have already referred to and discussed. Common to all of these, and in relation specifically to Martin, Kel, James and Betty and their demonstration of a higher level of critical being, there exists a willingness to perceive actions and activities with an alternative way of looking at things. Each of the four demonstrated a sense of ‘artistry’ (Schön 1983) when addressing each stage of the process. They engaged with critical thinking and critical reflection in very creative ways through their Reflective Action Project (RAP) actions and their metaphor representations. Their level of knowing (Belenky *et al* 1986), or critical capacity, was also a factor. This creative capacity was an important feature in their ability to engage with critical being at a deep and significant level.

This creative trigger is often referred to by theorists (Brookfield 1987, Mezirow 1990, De Bono 1993) as an essential ingredient for the development of critical thinking. De Bono (1993) distinguishes between ‘cleverness’ and ‘wisdom’, suggesting that education focuses only on the former, which he defines as ‘thinking with a narrow lens’. Critical thinking therefore has a more negative function in De Bono’s Schema often seeking fault or identifying what is not working. Wisdom, on the other hand, emphasises thinking with a wide lens, where perception is given a high value: *‘Wisdom depends heavily on perception. It is a matter of teaching perception – not just logic’* (1993:8). In education there is a myth that knowing is enough, whereas in fact real life requires dealing, designing, negotiating and problem-solving. There is a need to involve other people’s views, priorities, objectives, alternatives, consequences, conflict resolution and creativity. De Bono describes this as ‘operacy’, where perception has a significant value. Critical thinking is reactive in nature and can only become proactive when placed alongside creative thinking. Creative thinking is not a mystical ‘gift’, but can be learned through the application of ‘lateral thinking’ skills, where the focus is on perception rather than logic; *‘Logic is a servicing mechanism to service the data and perceptions we are using’* (De Bono 1993: 18).

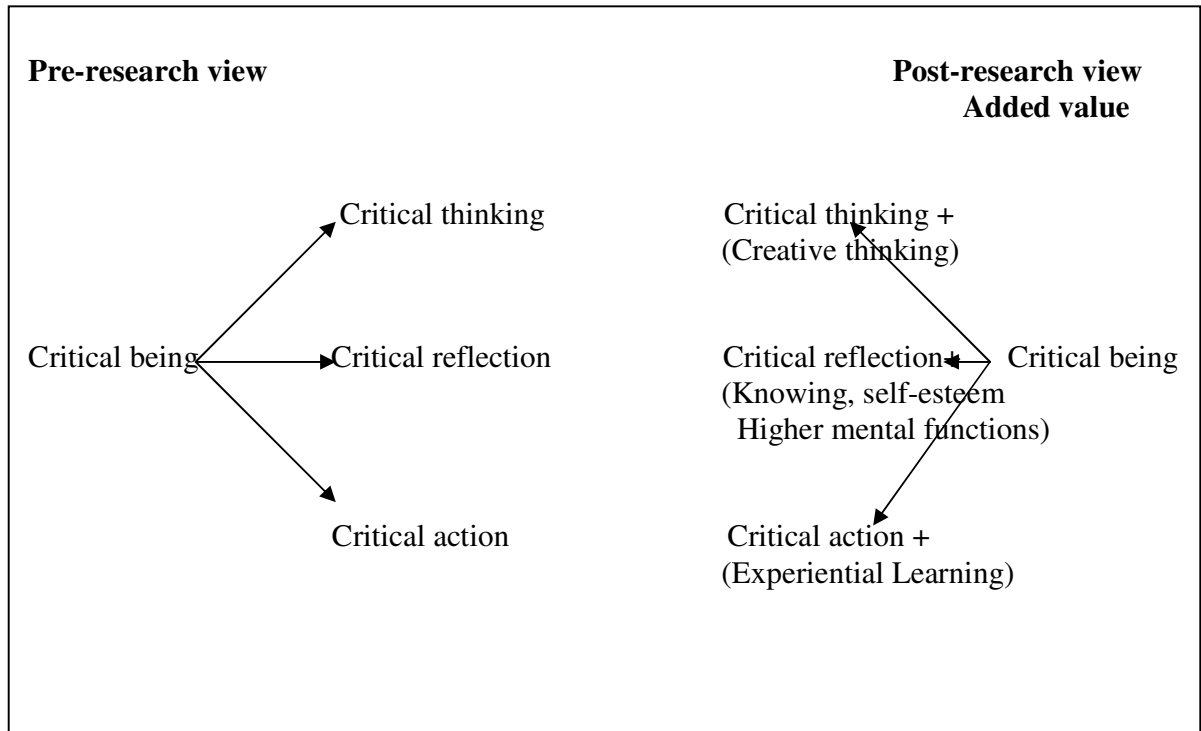
Barnett (1997) considers critical thinking to be a pragmatic skill that needs to be developed; in this way creative thinking could be considered as an addition to the critical thinking skill set. Many of the activities in the study provided participants with the opportunity to think both critically and creatively in a proactive context. They had to create their own actions and form their own perceptions and understanding and then

reflect on these in a very challenging way. This helped to add a very new dynamic to the practice of critical being, making it more spontaneous and innovative. I think it would be beneficial if creative thinking were expressed more implicitly and explicitly in Barnett's model. This could be achieved by investing the model with a fourth element and giving that element a clear and specific function. In De Bono's (1993) framework, creative thinking has the capacity to stand independently as a form of thinking that can engage with learning, knowledge and understanding.

Another element that might aid Barnett's (1997) model involves a more explicit role for the self within the context of critical reflection. This has emerged throughout the study as being central to the participants' capacity to practice critical being. Many of these points have been made, but the issue that arises is how to give the self a more significant role within the model. All of the participants revealed elements of self to varying degrees and this component offered the most challenging analysis and evidence of change. The study has indicated that critical being is a generic process that requires full human involvement if it is to occur and the emotional or affective self must drive the model if it is to succeed fully. Again, De Bono's (1993) framework might be helpful here: *'The purpose of thinking is to so arrange the world (in our minds) that we can apply emotions effectively. In the end it is emotion that makes the choices and decisions'* (De Bono: 19). Logic and argument may not change feelings, but perception can. The emotional self is the catalyst for real learning and development. In the context of a Personal Development programme, the focus is very much on the entire self and how all the constituent parts (thinking, feeling and acting) are encouraged to find new meanings and new ways of seeing the self

and the world. Throughout this study the participants engaged with perception at many levels, rather than with logic or reason, and the result was a changed sense of self and view of the world. Barnett's model needs to place the critically reflective self more centrally if students are to become full critical beings. This can be achieved not just through analysis and logic but through design and perception.

In addition to making the self more central to the model, there are other aspects of the critical self that have emerged that might enhance students' capacity to activate critical being in their lives. To access the self requires confidence and self-awareness. Confidence can be developed through improved self-esteem, and Brandon's Six Pillars of Self Esteem (1994) provide a framework through which this improvement can be channeled. Each pillar is described as a 'practice' and, like critical being, can be accessed through thinking, reflection, action and understanding. I think this would be a very useful starting-point on the journey to critical being for many students. Allowing students to practice and develop self-esteem, along with giving them time to establish their level of knowing through dialogue and reflection (and not psychometric evaluations), would provide a very valuable backdrop to preparation for learning and the journey to critical being. Figure 6.0 below attempts to visually reflect this view.



*Fig. 6.0 Pre- research and post-research view of Barnett's model of critical being*

In evaluating Barnett's model I would therefore suggest that all eight participants in this study experienced some level of critical being, either at an objective or a subjective level. However, in order to be really effective it must work at the subjective level, where perception and exploring self are central to real development and transformation. This could be said to be true for four participants in particular, namely Kel, Martin, James and Betty. The consistency and extent of their experiences has been evidenced in various ways throughout the process. For the other four participants—Noel, Anna, Una and Aiden—the level of engagement and practice of critical being was less apparent and inconsistent, at best. Having outlined why this was so, it is reasonable to suggest that with

further expansion and focus, as discussed, critical being could have a wider appeal and embrace more fully the broader landscape of learning and development as presented by Dewey (1933, 38) and Vygotsky (1978). This would suggest that these models are better frameworks for developing learning, embedding knowledge and allowing the learner to experience educational change in a more complete manner. With critical being Barnett is attempting to address the nature of higher education today and to offer a way for students to adapt to and deal with this new situation. However, it is the view of this researcher that his model is too focused on the macro-environment that exists in higher education, therefore at a teaching and learning level it is incomplete.

### **Critical Being, research and higher education**

In addition to my reservations about critical being as a mechanism for effective teaching and learning, it also presented difficulties as a topic for research and as a research tool as referred to earlier. This was due to the qualitative nature of the subject—finding a way to explore and evaluate data and maintain consistency in my role as researcher. In carrying out this work in the context of a module designed to elicit and emphasise the affective learning domain, there was a danger that the research process would become very introspective and it was challenging to find a way to balance this with a rational analysis framework that would accommodate participants' concerns and allow for some real understanding to emerge. The thematic analysis framework that was employed was helpful in this respect. However, I also acknowledge that to carry out research in this way on a broader scale within a higher education context would be difficult and time-



consuming. It would involve a very lengthy process of teaching and engaging with participants in a range of activities which would generate data that would be difficult for one person to evaluate. It would also be very difficult for another person to be involved because the nature of the relationships needed for this work requires trust and one-to-one contact. The gathering and collating of data involves a subjective response from the researcher, while at the same time demanding that he or she maintain an objective overview within the analysis framework.

Many of the features of this research are also unique in that Tipperary Institute is the only higher education college in Ireland offering a Personal Development module of this kind. It is a compulsory course for all undergraduates. It would be difficult for this type of research to be replicated elsewhere, which means the findings cannot be easily compared. Furthermore, the type of student participating in this work does not fit with the standard profile for learners in higher education. However, while these features may be unique, the results would, I believe, be indicative of the broad response that would emerge from any group within this profile. Whether this could be applied to a wider range of more typical or standard student profiles would require further research. The existence of critical being also highlights a perceived absence within higher education that points to another concern.

Despite the stated concerns about critical being, this research highlights a broader issue that I believe has implications for teaching and learning within higher education. Barnett's model does lack a greater focus on the subjective self as learner, a creative

thinking dynamic, a dialectical construction and attention to the micro-learning context. To what extent are these elements evident in other teaching and learning models currently in use at higher level? Massification has, if anything, reduced the opportunity for students to get the time and support to really develop the self as learner at a deeper level. At third-level, teaching is often given less value than research. Teaching and learning evaluations carried out annually in Tipperary Institute consistently point to student satisfaction with teaching, small class sizes and the quality of teacher–student relationships. Students consistently equate learning with time given to real dialogue and being listened to by teachers. In other words, the self is acknowledged and provided with space to learn effectively. Critical being attempts to redress this within a much larger educational structure and with greater student numbers. Barnett argues that the educative role of higher education has been subsumed by the vested interests that control funding, who see education only in instrumental terms. Critical being is a response to what Barnett perceives to be missing, to what is not being addressed elsewhere within higher education.

## **Conclusion**

In this final chapter I have addressed the significant issues to emerge from this research and have identified concerns relating to the practice of critical being within the teaching and learning context. I have also outlined what I believe is my original contribution to education knowledge. As an educational model, critical being is derivative of Dewey (1933, 1938) and Vygotsky (1978) and places itself within the current context of higher

education as a necessary remediation to the difficulties being experienced by students and teachers at third-level. It represents an attempt to counteract the external forces that Barnett believes are influencing higher education to the detriment of education. While the findings suggest that the model is flawed, I have suggested modifications that could provide the framework with elements that would enhance its capacity and value as a significant teaching and learning tool. This research took place within a very specific Personal Development programme, with a group of non-traditional adult learners and required a close participant–researcher relationship. The overall findings must be evaluated in light of these considerations.

This work was carried out in the context of both teaching and research as I strove to explore critical being and develop my teaching. The result has raised many questions about my professional work, challenged my assumptions about learners, presented unique research difficulties, explored educational theories and compelled me to examine the nature of teaching and learning in my day-to-day practice. In my current role as a trainer of teachers I have come to realise the value of reflective practice (Schön 1983) as a model of thinking about teaching, and it has allowed me to engage with students in a more meaningful way about their perception of teaching and the importance of defining their authentic self (Palmer 2007) as teachers. Critical being as an educational framework may be flawed, but as a model of living and engaging with the world it offers some possibility for real change and new meaning perspectives in a ‘radically unknowable’ learning environment.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

### *PhD Research Ethical Statement*

*To whom it may concern,*

This is to state that I have agreed to participate in the above research with Martin Fitzgerald of my own free will and that I understand fully what this entails.

The work will involve:

- Participating in a number of specific sessions to explore different aspects of Critical Being
- Participating in recorded conversations/dialogues relating to critical being
- Filling out a detailed questionnaire
- Continuing to maintain a reflective journal
- Participating in a Reflective Action Project (RAP).
- Be available for any follow up activities that may be required over a 12 month period

I accept that the information I give will be used to write a research document as part of his *PhD* studies. I have been assured that the integrity of my comments and contributions will be maintained at all times and that the research will be carried out in an ethically appropriate manner.

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the process and data will be destroyed, if requested by the participant on completion of the research.

I realise that I have the right to withdraw at any time and this has been explained to me.

I am happy for Martin to use my first name \_\_\_/pseudonym \_\_\_ in referring directly to comments made or using direct quotations for the purpose of completing this work.

Yours Sincerely,

Date,

\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_.

## APPENDIX 2

### REFLECTIVE JOURNAL EVALUATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_.

COURSE: \_\_\_\_\_.

DIB: \_\_\_\_\_.

- **QUESTION 1.**

Have you ever kept any kind of diary or journal in the past?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Please give your reasons whether you have ticked yes or no above.

- **QUESTION 2.**

Had you heard the term Reflective Journal before you joined the Personal Development class?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

If yes, what did you understand the term Reflective Journal to mean?



- **QUESTION 3.**

Before you began to write the Reflective Journal, did you have any idea of what writing such a journal would involve?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, can you explain what you thought it would involve?

- **QUESTION 4.**

Before you began to write the Reflective Journal, did you have any idea if writing such a journal would affect your feeling or thoughts?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, can you explain in what way you thought this would occur?

- **QUESTION 5.**

Initially, which part of the journal did you tend to write first?

Can you explain why you choose this part?

- **QUESTION 6.**

Did your starting point change as you continued to write the journal?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, in what way and why?

- **QUESTION 7.**

What were the main challenges you experienced in writing this journal?

- **QUESTION 8.**

Has writing this journal:

(1) Influenced your thinking?

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_ **No** \_\_\_\_\_

(2) Changed the way you work?

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_ **No** \_\_\_\_\_

(3) Changed the way you relate to others?

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_ **No** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where the answer above is yes, please outline the nature of the change.**

**Where the answer above is no, please indicate why you think no change has taken place?**

• **QUESTION 9.**

Since starting to write the journal, have you begun to think critically about?

(1) Yourself

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_ **No** \_\_\_\_\_

(2) Your understanding of the subject content?

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_ **No** \_\_\_\_\_

*Whether the answer is yes or no above, please indicate why you think this is the case.*

- **QUESTION 10.**

Has doing the **Reflective Action Project** changed your attitude towards using the journal?

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_                      **No** \_\_\_\_\_

Please give your reasons whether you have ticked yes or no above.

- **Question 11.**

Would you consider using the reflective journal process again in the future?

**Yes** \_\_\_\_\_                      **No** \_\_\_\_\_

Please give your reasons whether you have ticked yes or no above.

Thank you.

## APPENDIX 3

(Critical Incidents and Sample Answer Sheet)

### Critical Incident Session Outline 1

*February/March 2004*

**Title:**

**Analysing assumptions about a positive educational experience**

**Materials:**

Writing materials plus handout.

Flipchart and markers

Recording or videotaping equipment (not essential for all sessions)

**Time:**

60-90 minutes

**Methodology:**

The tutor needs to place the activity in an appropriate context for the group and develop trust by sharing his or her own experiences openly. The session will be divided into 5 distinctive stages:

1. **Introduction-** Tutor will outline the exercise, provide a context and share an experience for the group to model and practice assumption analysis.
  
2. **Critical incident-** Students are asked to write a description of the incident (see title) on the handout provided.
  
3. **Triad Discussion-** In groups of three, students will share their critical incidents individually and each incident will be examined by the other two under the following criteria:
  - **What assumptions informed your choice of incident or what does this choice say about your value system?**
  
  - **What assumptions underlie the actions taken by you in this incident?**

Following this the individual whose incident is being discussed can respond to the others members of the group in terms of the accuracy or validity of their insights about your assumptions and values. It will be useful at this stage to identify common assumptions from the three incidents shared and also examine divergence. Do these assumptions/values fit in with conventional views in the field at large or are there contextual issues to be considered? It will also be useful at this stage to examine the questions asked by the other two in the group to see what assumptions are embedded in here also.

4. **General group discussion-** It is important to get feedback from the whole group and identify common or divergent assumptions that have emerged.
  
5. **Reflection-** Group take time to fill in reflection sheet provided.



## **Critical Incident Session Outline 2**

*February/March 2004*

### **Title:**

**Analysing assumptions about a negative educational experience**

### **Materials:**

Writing materials plus handout.

Flipchart and markers

Recording or videotaping equipment (not essential for all sessions)

### **Time:**

60-90 minutes

### **Methodology:**

The tutor needs to place the activity in an appropriate context for the group and develop trust by sharing his or her own experiences openly. The session will be divided into 5 distinctive stages:

- 1. Introduction-** Tutor will outline the exercise, provide a context and share an experience for the group to model and practice assumption analysis.

2. **Critical incident-** Students are asked to write a description of the incident (see title) on the handout provided.
  
3. **Triad Discussion-** In groups of three, students will share their critical incidents individually and each incident will be examined by the other two under the following criteria:
  - **What assumptions informed your choice of incident or what does this choice say about your value system?**
  - **What assumptions underlie the actions taken by you in this incident?**

Following this the individual whose incident is being discussed can respond to the others members of the group in terms of the accuracy or validity of their insights about your assumptions and values. It will be useful at this stage to identify common assumptions from the three incidents shared and also examine divergence. Do these assumptions/values fit in with conventional views in the field at large or are there contextual issues to be considered? It will also be useful at this stage to examine the questions asked by the other two in the group to see what assumptions are embedded in here also.

4. **General group discussion-** It is important to get feedback from the whole group and identify common or divergent assumptions that have emerged.
5. **Reflection- Group take time to fill in reflection sheet provided.**

## **Critical Incident Session Outline 4**

### ***February/March 2004***

**Title:**

**Analysing political assumptions**

**Materials:**

Writing materials plus handout.

Flipchart and markers

Recording or videotaping equipment (not essential for all sessions)

**Time:**

60-90 minutes

**Methodology:**

The tutor needs to place the activity in an appropriate context for the group and develop trust by sharing his or her own experiences openly. The session will be divided into 5 distinctive stages:

- 1. Introduction-** Tutor will outline the exercise, provide a context and share an experience for the group to model and practice assumption analysis.
- 2. Critical incident-** Students are asked to write a description of the incident (see title) on the handout provided.
- 3. Triad Discussion-** In groups of three, students will share their critical incidents individually and each incident will be examined by the other two under the following criteria:
  - **What assumptions informed your choice of incident or what does this choice say about your value system?**
  - **What assumptions underlie the actions taken by you in this incident?**

Following this the individual whose incident is being discussed can respond to the others members of the group in terms of the accuracy or validity of their insights about your assumptions and values. It will be useful at this stage to identify common assumptions from the three incidents shared and also examine divergence. Do these assumptions/values fit in with conventional views in the field at large or are there contextual issues to be considered? It will also be useful at this stage to examine the questions asked by the other two in the group to see what assumptions are embedded in here also.

4. **General group discussion-** It is important to get feedback from the whole group and identify common or divergent assumptions that have emerged.
5. **Reflection- Group take time to fill in reflection sheet provided.**

Use the space below to describe a **critical incident** based on the above title that has taken place in the last year or so. Describe every aspect of this incident that you can remember (including time, place, people involved, roles, functions, titles etc.).

**Recall specifically a time when you watched a TV programme (news report, current affairs, political broadcast) about a politician's behaviour that made you very angry. What was it about the politician's actions that so incensed you?**

# Critical incident

*Describe the critical incident in detail:*

*Actions taken as a result of this incident:*

# REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

## REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**What assumptions and values emerged from the analysis of your critical incident?**

**Assumptions:**

**Values:**

*As a result of doing this exercise, have your assumptions and values been challenged or changed in any way? Please elaborate whether your answer is 'yes' or 'no'.*

## **APPENDIX 4**

**(Metaphor Analysis and Sample Answer Sheet)**

### **Metaphor Analysis Session Outline 1**

*February-April 2004*

**Title:**

**Metaphor analysis of team work experience**

**Materials:**

Writing materials plus handout.

Flipchart and markers

Recording or videotaping equipment (not essential for all sessions)

**Time:**

40-60 minutes

**Procedure:**

1. Select a primary subject for metaphor analysis (see title).
2. In groups identify a metaphor that describes the experience or is in some way associated with the primary subject (this could be done through exploring the key

- elements of the subject, examine the thoughts and feelings associated with the subject etc.).
3. Study the key metaphor and identify the various meaning perspectives and characteristics associated with the metaphor.
  4. Reflect on the values, assumptions and beliefs embedded in the central metaphor.
  5. Examine the values, assumptions and beliefs and compare them to the individuals own life experience and seek out commonality or divergence. Is there harmony between their individual lived values and those identified by the group?
  6. Does a new or revised metaphor emerge from the discussions in 5 above?
  7. What are the implications for action that arise from the newly created metaphor?
  8. Repeat the process if necessary if there are other primary subjects to be explored and new metaphors to be identified.

### **Methodology:**

The session will involve 3 stages:

- 1. Introduction-** The tutor will introduce the topic to the group and explain the procedure giving examples and definitions where appropriate. If specific anecdotal examples are needed they can be given at this stage.
- 2. Group work-** The group will break up into smaller groups to carry out the metaphor analysis outlined in the procedures above. Flipcharts and markers will be used to draw and unpack metaphors.



3. **Plenary review-** Metaphors are compared and wider meaning perspectives are explored.
4. **Reflection-** each individual carries out a reflective journal exercise to identify and explore key elements of critical thinking that has emerged from the exercise.

## **Metaphor Analysis Session Outline 2**

*February-April 2004*

### **Title:**

**Metaphor analysis of group relationships**

### **Materials:**

Writing materials plus handout.

Flipchart and markers

Recording or videotaping equipment (not essential for all sessions)

### **Time:**

40-60 minutes

### **Procedure:**

1. Select a primary subject for metaphor analysis (see title).
2. In groups identify a metaphor that describes the experience or is in some way associated with the primary subject (this could be done through exploring the key elements of the subject, examine the thoughts and feelings associated with the subject etc.).

3. Study the key metaphor and identify the various meaning perspectives and characteristics associated with the metaphor.
4. Reflect on the values, assumptions and beliefs embedded in the central metaphor.
5. Examine the values, assumptions and beliefs and compare them to the individuals own life experience and seek out commonality or divergence. Is there harmony between their individual lived values and those identified by the group?
6. Does a new or revised metaphor emerge from the discussions in 5 above?
7. What are the implications for action that arise from the newly created metaphor?
8. Repeat the process if necessary if there are other primary subjects to be explored and new metaphors to be identified.

**Methodology:**

The session will involve 3 stages:

- 1. Introduction-** The tutor will introduce the topic to the group and explain the procedure giving examples and definitions where appropriate. If specific anecdotal examples are needed they can be given at this stage.

2. **Group work-** The group will break up into smaller groups to carry out the metaphor analysis outlined in the procedures above. Flipcharts and markers will be used to draw and unpack metaphors.
3. **Plenary review-** Metaphors are compared and wider meaning perspectives are explored.
4. **Reflection-** each individual carries out a reflective journal exercise to identify and explore key elements of critical thinking that has emerged from the exercise.

# REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**What assumptions and values emerged for you from the metaphor analysis exercise?**

**Assumptions:**

**Values:**

*As a result of doing this exercise, has your capacity to think critically been challenged or changed in any way? Please elaborate whether your answer is 'yes' or 'no'.*

## **APPENDIX 5**

**(Learning Autobiography)**

### **Learning Autobiographies Session Outline**

*March/April 2004*

**Title:**

*Analysing critical stages in the journey of learning*

**Materials:**

Flipchart and markers

Reflection sheets

Question sheets

Dictaphone

**Time:**

60-90 minutes

**Methodology:**

The key objective is to stimulate critical thinking and reflection through a phenomenological technique that will enable participants to develop their capacity to reflect on learning and enhance critical thought.

1. Choose a metaphor that would describe or represent your learning journey up to this point.
2. Place the key stages in your learning life on this metaphor. These stages identified may be formal or informal in the learning context but are very significant to you.
3. Develop this map and add comments where you wish. These may be personal comments, quotations, comments from others or random thoughts that strike you.
4. In pairs/triads explain your map to the other person(s) outlining the significant moments.
5. Each participant will answer prepared questions (see sheet) also as a way to further explore each metaphor.
6. This will be followed by a group discussion.
7. Finally participants will be asked to fill out a reflection sheet as a conclusion to the session.

## **Learning Autobiographies Question Sheet**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Why did you choose this metaphor?**

**2. What assumptions and values do you associate with this metaphor?**

**3. Has your thinking about learning been changed as a result of doing this activity?**

**4. Do you see any pattern/common trends emerging from your metaphor?**



**5. How do you see this metaphor evolving in the future?**

**6. Any other comments**

# REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Which part of this exercise did you find the most challenging and can you say why?**

*As a result of doing this exercise, has your capacity to think critically been challenged or changed in any way? Please elaborate whether your answer is 'yes' or 'no'.*

## APPENDIX 6

### Reflective Action Project (RAP) Outline

### Personal Development and Group Dynamics

### Continuous Assessment

### Portfolio/Reflective Learning Assignment

#### Instructions:

1. Read and respond to **ALL** of the questions, which follow.
2. Answers to this assignment must be submitted in typed format and included in your Portfolio.
3. This assignment should be approximately **800-1000 words** in length.
4. The assignment should contain **evidence and notes** of action taken.
5. This assignment is to be completed and submitted for assessment with your Portfolio before **9:00 a.m. on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2004**.
6. Ensure that your name and student identification number is clearly visible on the front of your Assignment and Portfolio.

## Reflective Action Project

1. In relation to the different topics in the Personal Effectiveness section of the course, identify one topic or component of a topic and carry out an ***action*** over a period of **one consecutive week** (or 5 different days) to develop your understanding and ***apply*** your reflections on this choice. In carrying out this action you will need to;

- **Keep a record of activities carried out.**
- **Write a short reflection on progress each day.**
- **Evaluate the success or otherwise of this action.**
- **Reflect on what you might do differently in the future.-**
- **Reflect on the extent to which this action project has enhanced your understanding of**  
**(1) yourself, and (2) the topics presented in this section.**

---

(100 Marks)

---

## **Considerations for Programme Specialists**

*In carrying out this action project PS need to be aware of two issues;*

- 1. That the student can identify specific activities that can be done in relation to the chosen topic.*
- 2. That the topic is substantive enough to allow for genuine intrapersonal reflection.*

*In relation to question 2, actions that might suggest themselves include:*

- Implement a goal setting or time management exercise*
- Carry out a series of stress management activities*
- Choose self esteem and practice each pillar actively for a week or focus on one or two pillars*
- Practice assertiveness/active listening techniques or audit your own behaviour in specific situations*

*This is not an exhaustive list by any means. In fact any topic in this section could be used for this reflective action project.*

# Reflective Action Project Worksheets

## Worksheet 1

Topic chosen;

Activities to be carried out

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5

# Reflective Action Project

## Worksheets

### Worksheet 2

**Daily reflection on activities carried out**

*(This should include comments on the activity itself and how it went, significant changes that occurred and your overall thoughts)*

**Date;**

**Activity(s);**

**How the activity went;**

**Overall Comments;**

# Reflective Action Project Worksheets

## Worksheet 3

### **Evaluation of Reflective Action Project**

**The success or otherwise of this action;**

**What I would do differently in the future?**

**In what way has this action enhanced my understanding of;**

**(1) Myself;**

**(2) The Topic;**



<b><i>Reflective Action Project</i></b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Student marks</b>
<p><b>Activities carried out</b></p> <p>The activities outlined here must be;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant to the topic or element of topic chosen</li> <li>• Stated clearly with details of time, location or lay out where required</li> <li>• Presented in a structured and logical format</li> </ul>	<b>25</b>	
<p><b>Application</b></p> <p>The student must clearly demonstrate;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A good knowledge of the topic or element chosen</li> <li>• Evidence that the action was carried out by the student and is authentic</li> </ul>	<b>25</b>	
<p><b>Reflection</b></p> <p>The quality of reflection will be based on;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much you have personalised your reflections and demonstrated their relationship to the action chosen</li> <li>• The quality and thought of the journal entries</li> </ul>	<b>50</b>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extent to which you have made links to your own life and identified applications in you own life</li> <li>• The students philosophy/worldview has changed in some way</li> <li>• Can see elements of the course in a new light</li> </ul>		
<p>TOTAL MARKS FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT (divide the total by 20 to get mark out of 5%)</p>	100%	
<p><b>Overall Comments</b></p>		

Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **(Taped Interview Questions)**

#### **Taped interviews with Adult Learners**

**April/May 2004**

#### **General Questions**

1. How would you describe your experience as a learner in the PD&GD class this year?
2. What do you understand the terms critical thinking, critical reflection and critical action to mean?
3. In terms of knowledge, has your understanding of how people become more effective changed as a result of doing the module?
4. In what way has the course impacted on your sense of self and how you go about your life?
5. Is your perception of the world and the way it works any different to when you began the course?
6. Has the process of reflection and exploration of critical thinking changed your understanding of yourself or the world in any way?
7. What did the metaphor(s) signify for you in the group analysis exercise?
8. In what way was doing the RAP different from doing the weekly reflective journal?

9. What do you understand critical thinking to mean?
10. Has this work changed or transformed you in any way in relation to how you see yourself, the world or how you understand knowledge?
11. Can you remember your MBTI profile?

## Specific Questions for each individual participant

**ACCS Group**

**Martin Ryan**

1. Your approach to learning is very pragmatic. Has this always been the case?
2. You've stated that you tend to do things without thinking too much about them.  
Has this changed as a result of the work we've done together?
3. Why did your approach to writing the journal change?
4. What has prompted this desire to see others point of view?
5. Why are you more concerned now about the impact your way of doing things has on others?
6. How does standing back and looking at things objectively help to improve your critical thinking skills?
7. The RAP seems to have given you a mechanism for maintaining a 'coherence of thought' throughout the reflection process. Can you elaborate on this?
8. The RAP allowed you to focus on a critical incident that was significant in your life. This led to very important critical thinking and reflection on your part. Has it led to any critical actions since then?
9. Have you developed greater congruence between your values and practice since doing the RAP?
10. What learning values have emerged for you from this process?

1. You have used diaries in the past. In what way has keeping a reflective journal been different?
2. In what way specifically did writing the journal impact on your personal effectiveness?
3. The blank journal page seemed to provide you with a ‘stream of consciousness’ opportunity leading to moments of critical reflection. Can you describe what these moments of critical reflection felt like exactly? How has this affected your understanding of yourself?
4. Expressing thoughts either through writing or verbal communication has been challenging for you in the past. In what way has doing this work changed that?
5. You say that you wanted to change. What prompted this desire to change and what was it about this course/work that facilitated this change?
6. In what way has practicing critical thinking on this course effected how you see the world and yourself? In your previous studies was critical thinking part of the process or were you aware of engaging in critical thinking at any time?
7. Can you distinguish between critical reflection and critical thinking from your experience of the work we have done?
8. You say that it is only now that you have really ‘learned how to learn’. Can you explain this in more detail?
9. Using a journal has now become a tool rather than a refuge. How has this transformation come about for you?

10. Why was doing the RAP so significant? Have you continued to be more assertive in work and what other actions have you taken since?
11. In what way have your values about life and knowledge changed as a result of this work?
12. On reflection what are your thoughts on the group exercise metaphor now?
13. What critical actions do you plan to take as a consequence of this experience/process?

1. Much of the theory studied fitted with your own perception of yourself. What effect did this realization have on you?
2. Your approach to problems and situations has changed since beginning this work. In what way has this affected your understanding of critical thinking?
3. Can you distinguish between critical reflection and critical thinking from your experience of the work we have done?
4. How has doing the RAP 'changed your way of thinking and doing things'? Has it impacted on actions you have taken or plan to take?
5. You have said that the journal makes you think about your actions before taking them. What critical actions do you plan to take as a consequence of this experience/process?
6. In your Learning Autobiography you chose a lake as a metaphor suggesting that you absorbed every experience. Does this metaphor also contain hidden areas that you haven't explored? In what way does this metaphor engage with others or impact on critical decisions in your life?
7. You have said that reflection leads to action for you. Can you think of an example since you started this work with me where the process of reflection led to an action that you wouldn't otherwise have taken?



8. You are now more conscious of listening to others and taking in their point of view. Has this change impacted on your practice of critical thinking and critical reflection?
9. Your group metaphor of the house on fire with the fire brigade seems paradoxical. Can you elaborate on this from your perspective?

1. You tend to reflect-on-action after the event. How has this impacted on your learning in the past?
2. Do you think your reluctance to write or to reflect in writing has impacted on your ability to think critically?
3. Writing the journal has changed your thinking somewhat. Has this translated into changes in the actions that you have taken?
4. Has writing the journal or doing the RAP enhanced your listening skills in any way?
5. How did writing the journal help you to think more critically about the material covered in class?
6. The RAP helped you to focus more on the core of the subject. Can you explain what you mean by this?
7. Why was the RAP the most challenging exercise of the year for you? Has it led to any significant changes in the way you go about tasks or how you understand yourself?
8. Have you been keeping a reflective journal during your work experience?
9. In your group metaphor exercise, you chose a baby delivering a child. How would you view this metaphor now?
10. You have mentioned that in terms of values you haven't always 'walked the walk' and this work has made you more aware of this. What critical actions do you think you might take to change this?

1. To what extent did the writing of the reflective journal help you to 'internalise your thoughts'?
2. You experienced no challenges in writing the journal, despite having no previous experience or awareness of journal writing. Can you elaborate on this?
3. Has becoming more aware of the 'me in me' from writing journals changed the way in which you critically think or act?
4. How do you think that a greater awareness of the 'now' might impact on your capacity to think reflect or act critically?
5. You describe your core values as an extension of yourself like an 'umbilical cord'. Has doing this work helped to generate greater congruence between your values and your actions?
6. How did the metaphor exercise help you to open up 'the capacity from within' and progress your critical thinking?
7. You said in your Learning Autobiography that experiences when young were being reawakened in your 40's. What are the critical differences between your views then and now?
8. Why is it easier to do this kind of work now than 2 years ago?
9. You say that you don't 'jump' into issues in the same way as in the past. Have you become more reflective and has our work enhanced this in any way?
10. You described the RAP as 'heavy going'. Why was this and has it led to any changes in the way you now think or act?

11. In doing the RAP and critically reflecting on your life, is your view of these events different now and what actions do you think it will lead to?
12. How was doing the RAP like 'confession' and does this suggest anything to you about the nature of critical reflection?

1. Your group metaphor of the house on fire with the fire brigade seems paradoxical. Can you elaborate on this from your perspective?
2. Did the opportunity to write opinions about what you studied help your critical thinking in any way?
3. You have said that looking back at things written in the journal helped. How useful was this in terms of your own critical reflection?
4. You stated that you liked the 'open plan' page of the journal. Did this allow you to think more critically on issues covered or did it allow you to be more creative in your responses?
5. Often you didn't fill in the journal for a day or two because it allowed you more time to reflect. What was the nature of this reflection?
6. You say that your reflections have become more structured. Have they become more critical and if so how?
7. You weren't surprised by the change of attitude that occurred when doing the RAP. Was this because the change was gradually taking place over time and related to the fact that you were keeping a journal regularly?
8. Has doing the RAP led to any subsequent actions that might not have occurred otherwise?
9. Your Critical Incident in relation to the waste management plan has led to a very significant critical action, i.e. going to college. You admit that you are now 'less

angry, more effective and more realistic'. What has brought about this critical change?

10. The wall metaphor in your Learning Autobiography offers a solid foundation for you to look at your life's journey. Do you see this as a base for further development or could it be an obstacle to further critical development or action?

1. You have kept diaries usually during low periods in your life. Do you associate them with healing or a type of confessionality or meditation?
2. Why did you always only fill out the reflections side of the journal?
3. 'Our minds don't want to take time out to review and reflect; they want to look ahead'. Did having to do the journal encourage you to develop your critical capacities to think and reflect?
4. What critical actions have you taken as a result of keeping the journal or have been influenced by using the journal?
5. How did the RAP change your attitude towards using the journal apart from the fact that the compulsory element was completed?
6. In doing the RAP you stated that you have developed skills. Have these led to a change in your thinking or in actions taken?
7. You have stated that Personal Development 'requires engagement'. Has this engagement led to real critical change for you?
8. Have the 'insights gained' from keeping the journal led to any real changes in your ability to critically think, reflect or act?
9. The CI exercise helped you to recognize the need to commit yourself to action, i.e. 'walk the walk'. Has this led to a greater level of critical self awareness for you?

1. Keeping a journal has been linked to emotional awareness and development in your past. Has this 'mapping of progress' led to a greater capacity to think critically for you?
2. You expected to be challenged by the process. Has this in fact been the case?
3. In what way did doing the RAP challenge your approach especially in the area of critical action? Have you sustained these changes in your daily life?
4. What was the attraction of the 'reflections on this topic' page for you?
5. Why did you feel the need to detach yourself from the process of writing and become objective? Did this help you to develop your critical thinking?
6. Why do you think there is 'no correlation' between journal writing and how you relate to others?
7. Has doing this work helped you to discover part of your 'hidden self'?
8. What critical actions will you take as a result of this work?
9. Reflection has become 'integrated into daily living'. How has this affected your view of yourself and the world?
10. Your group metaphor was intriguing as it suggested that all was not well aboard the 'ship' called the Titanic. Was this metaphor appropriate? On reflection what critical thoughts or actions would you apply in the future?



## APPENDIX 8

(Reflective Portfolio Sample Sheets)

# REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

**Topic:**

**Date:**

**Activities completed:**

**List the main learning points of today's work.**

**Knowledge:**

**Skills:**

**Attitudes:**

**How might you apply these learning points in your daily life?**

# REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

**My reflections on this topic.**

**Topic title:**

**Date:**