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bell hooks on Critical Thinking: The Successes and Limitations of Practical Wisdom

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By

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ABSTRACT

Bell hooks' work on pedagogy covers a great deal of material in very broad strokes. She relies on the work of John Dewey and Paolo Freire, often drawing upon their critiques of traditional educational models to criticize the values she claims drive current models of education. When hooks addresses critical thinking explicitly, she reorients critical thinking toward practical aims, specifically democratic social progress. In order to better understand the potential value of her approach, and the relationship between critical thinking and democracy, I attempt to situate her conception of critical thinking as practical wisdom within current philosophical scholarship on critical thinking.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my parents, Michael and Maria, and to my sister, Kelly. Our

house was never short on *philotimo*, and I thank you all for that.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

My interest in this project was sparked when I learned that bell hooks (pen name of Gloria Watkins) wrote a trilogy on pedagogy. I was familiar with a few of her books and essays, and found inspiration in much of what she wrote and how she wrote it. Having taken only one class in philosophy of education during my undergraduate degree, I was hesitant to begin this project, and soon after some of my worst fears were realized. Not only was my foundation in philosophy of education shaky, but reading her work and trying to translate some of her ideas into recognizable philosophical concepts, proved difficult. The first problem I encountered was the problem of translation across disciplines. For me, the difficulty came from the fact that although much of her work touches on important philosophical issues, such as what constitutes "good" education and what constitutes "good" critical thinking, hooks does not write in ways that explicitly connect her work to philosophical work on critical thinking. The second reason I found it harder to engage with her work on pedagogy than with her work on race and social justice, is that hooks tends to rely on personal experiences in her writing, leaving the reader to draw the important connections between the theory of critical thinking and the experiences she uses to illustrate her points. Regardless of the difficulties, the more I read, the more I was convinced that her pedagogical project would be a valuable addition to the philosophical scholarship on critical thinking.

Hooks' work on pedagogy covers a great deal of material in very broad strokes. She relies on the work of John Dewey and Paolo Freire, often drawing upon their critiques of traditional educational models to criticize the values she claims drive current models of education. When hooks addresses critical thinking explicitly, she reorients critical thinking toward practical aims, specifically democratic social progress. In order to better understand the potential value of her approach, I needed to understand where her conception of critical thinking fits within the current philosophical scholarship.

The driving force behind wanting to situate her work within a philosophical understanding of critical thinking is to understand where the current scholarship can be argued to be guided by democratic ideals, and where the practices of teaching critical thinking could be amended to promote democratic ideals like equality and justice. Before starting this project, I had thought a bit about the connections between critical thinking and democracy, but had not really thought about how the practices of teaching critical thinking could come to bear on the promotion or maintenance of democracy.

So I began this project with only a superficial understanding of the important relationships between education, critical thinking, and democracy, and was wholly unprepared for the depth and scope of the scholarship on these topics and of the importance of the work. I had to narrow my focus. I began with an attempt to flesh-out hooks' main project. This proved difficult for the reasons mentioned above, but also because hooks draws on many influential thinkers from a variety of disciplines. The dynamic variety of works that hooks draws on in her trilogy on pedagogy means that any attempt to situate her work within current critical thinking scholarship would have to first tease out the connections between her work and critical pedagogy, philosophies of

education, feminist standpoint theories, and social and political philosophies.   Therefore, in this thesis, I will begin by situating her work within these different domains of scholarship in order that I am able to understand, by the end of this thesis, her contributions to philosophical scholarship on critical thinking.

In the first chapter of this thesis I explore the points of connection between critical thinking, pedagogy, democracy, and feminist standpoint theories in hooks' work.   In bringing these together, hooks' main goals are to reorient the ideals of education to reflect democratic ideals, and to change the practices of teaching critical thinking to enable students to better engage with the subject matter at hand, their social environments, and other people. Much of hooks' motivation for highlighting the connections between democracy and education no doubt comes from her experiences as a student in a racially segregated school system. Throughout her trilogy on pedagogy, hooks argues that education divorced from democracy can seriously affect students' ability to succeed in formal education, and can also affect students' ability to think critically.

Second, I address what hooks argues are the most important philosophical and social implications of the disjoint between theory and practice.   This section further develops hooks' motivation for reorienting the ideals and practices of education, and creates a backdrop against which her project can be better understood.   In this section, I draw connections between hooks' work and Dewey's 'progressive' education, through a discussion of feminist standpoint theories.

Finally, at the end of the first chapter, I flesh-out hooks' interpretation of practical wisdom by contrasting her work with three important conceptions of practical wisdom.

My aim in this section is to develop a clear understanding of the most important facets of practical wisdom in order to develop a concise definition of hooks' critical thinking.

In the second chapter, I attempt to show to what degree hooks' version of practical wisdom represents the aims and methodologies of critical thinking and critical pedagogy. Because hooks' conception of critical thinking adequately represents the concerns of both critical thinking and critical pedagogy, understanding the areas of overlap helps to explain some of the difficulties in situating her work within a philosophical understanding of critical thinking. Making these connections clearer, I then explain some of the differences and similarities between hooks' practical wisdom and current definitions of critical thinking. For clarity, this section is divided into context-specific and cross-discipline definitions of critical thinking. Categorizing definitions of critical thinking in this way helps to show the varied concerns of critical thinking scholars, and allows for a better understanding of the divergent implications of both context-specific and cross-discipline definitions.

At the end of the second chapter, I argue hooks' conception of critical thinking engages different aspects of both context-specific and cross-discipline definitions of critical thinking. Although it can be argued that hooks' practical wisdom has more in common with cross-discipline definitions of critical thinking, to varying degrees, hooks' practical wisdom shares in the successes and limitations of both categories.

After situating hooks' practical wisdom within philosophies of education, other interpretations of practical wisdom, critical pedagogy and the two basic categories of critical thinking definitions, I turn in the third chapter, to argue that her conception of critical thinking meets the minimum requirements of a philosophical definition of critical

thinking. I do this for two reasons. The first reason is that critical thinking is an important part of any sort of education, and so before any proposed definition of critical thinking can be taken seriously, or used to critique current critical thinking definitions, it must be worthy of the name. The ability to think critically is not merely the ability to think well, but rather learning how to think critically impacts our lives, our ability to navigate novel situations, and our ability to deal effectively, responsibly and respectfully with problems and with other people. Our ability to think critically is directly linked to our freedom and our ability and responsibility to make informed and reasonable decisions.

The second reason that I test whether hooks' practical wisdom meets the minimum requirements of a philosophical definition of critical thinking is because there is a great deal of philosophical work dedicated to exploring the value and function of critical thinking in education. Philosophical standards of critical thinking are widely used and account for much of what is commonly understood as critical thinking. Given the scope of critical thinking scholarship written from a philosophical perspective, it is important to understand whether hooks' practical wisdom accounts for enough of what is considered critical thinking such that her criticisms and suggestions can be reasonably applied.

At the end of the third and final chapter of this thesis, I will briefly discuss some of the more interesting practices of teaching critical thinking in hooks' work. These include collaboration as a standard of adequacy and as a teaching practice, the disposition of radical openness, her reliance on narrative as a pedagogical tool, and her insistence on the value of vernacular as a way to challenge the divide between theory and practice, and

as a way for students to communicate in ways that produce new kinds of knowledge while valuing difference.

CHAPTER 1

Education and Practical Wisdom

In this chapter I will outline what I take to be bell hooks' project at the intersections of critical thinking, pedagogy, democracy, and feminist standpoint theories. At these intersections, hooks seems to have three main goals. The first is to criticize some of the current values of teaching in college and university settings. According to hooks, when values like progress and authority are adopted and implemented in specific ways that support only the interests of the dominant group, they either lead to social stagnation, or regression; either away from democratic education, or work toward reinforcing existing oppressive social structures. Second, hooks seeks to criticize the disjoint between theory and practice. For hooks, theory and practice are not separable; they are importantly linked, and theory that is not informed by practice, or practical reasoning about the experiences that shape and are shaped by theory leaves theory empty, and at times, dangerous. Hooks' third project is to construct critical thinking as practical wisdom, and to teach practical critical thinking guided by democratic ideals. To help flesh out hooks' discussions, I will primarily rely on hooks' trilogy on pedagogy, as well as the works of Paolo Freire, Sandra Harding, and John Dewey. I apply this discussion to develop a concise definition of the sort of critical thinking promoted by hooks.

Feminist Standpoint Theories and Critiques of Education

The first of hooks' projects is to criticize some of the current values and practices of teaching in college and university settings. Many of her criticisms are based on her strong commitment to democratic values. Values like inclusion, justice, equality, and diversity, create the basis for her critiques, and her commitments to these values are mirrored in the commitments of standpoint theorists. Hooks, like other standpoint theorists, is interested in the connections between what we can claim to know, and how knowledge shapes and is shaped by the social contexts in which knowledge is produced. In this section I will begin by outlining some of the main concerns that unite feminist standpoint theorists and then relate those concerns to current conceptions of education in North America.

In "Feminist Standpoints", Sandra Harding explains that the collective aim of standpoint theories is to focus on the particular social contexts in which knowledge is produced. The purpose of this focus is to 1) highlight the fact that knowledge *is* produced within certain specific social contexts, 2) critique existing knowledge producing methodologies that exclude considerations of social context and therefore lack accountability to the peoples whose lives are affected by the knowledge that is produced, and 3) to enrich our knowledge by exploring the framing of research questions and the knowledge they produce from different 'standpoints'.[1] What comes out of these investigations is often a better understanding of the social and political connections

[1] Harding, Sandra. "Feminist Standpoints" *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. Eds. Hesse-Biber, Sharlene N. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007. p.47. Print.

between different ideas, and sometimes challenging knowledge claims which have become naturalized to the detriment of traditionally marginalized peoples.

Harding claims that although there has been (and still is) resistance to experience as a locus of authority for knowledge, this resistance is unwarranted. Knowledge derived from inquiry which starts at the level of everyday experience is thought by some to lead dangerously into the sphere of relativism: "objectivity requires the elimination of all social values and interests from the research process and the results of research."[2] In fact, Harding claims that "[d]emocracy advancing values, such as feminist concerns for social justice, have systematically (though not invariably) generated less partial and distorted beliefs than those typically held by the dominant social institutions and the research disciplines upon which institutions depend for knowledge of nature and social relations."[3] Some concrete examples of this offered by Harding include Catherine MacKinnon's work in the early 1980's on what constitutes rape, Donna Haraway's work on showing how the social situatedness of the researcher comes to bear on research in the field of primatology[4], and bell hooks' work on the perspectives of marginalized peoples and the clarity available only from those spaces. In *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*, hooks writes that, "…ultimately there is the awareness that knowledge rooted in experience shapes what we value and as a consequence how we know what we know as well as how we use what we know."[5] Not only does hooks reiterate the importance of the social contexts to the knowledge itself, but she claims that using experience as a starting point of inquiry provides us important tools for critiquing current knowledge claims, or

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[2] Harding, Sandra. "Feminist Standpoints" *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. Eds. Hesse-Biber, Sharlene N. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007. p.49. Print.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid. p.47
[5] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.185. Print.

interpretations of evidence. Inquiry that starts at the level of experience is important for generating new, and ultimately more democratic, ways of knowing. Underscoring the importance of experience in theory making, hooks claims that in her own life, her "…efforts to make sense of everyday life experiences, from [her] efforts to intervene critically in [her] life and the lives of others… makes feminist transformation possible."[6] So for hooks, experience provides a source of knowledge from which theory springs, and importantly the theory that starts from trying to understand her own and others experiences is translatable into liberatory social change.

Although there are many differences between standpoint theories, one of the unifying features is the privileging of real-life experiences not only as a way of evaluating knowledge production, but also as a starting place for the development of research questions. Harding argues that from the vantage point of experience, a standpoint 'logic of inquiry'[7] can be understood as "[extending] the benefits of the methodological controls back to the beginning of research so as to include the 'context of

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[6] hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. p.70. Print.

[7] The term "logic of inquiry" comes from John Dewey, primarily from his essay "The Pattern of Inquiry" which was published in a collection of essays spanning from 1925-1953. Part of his later works, Dewey developed the term "logic of inquiry" to show that "formal properties accrue to subject matter in virtue of its subjection to certain types of operations." (Dewey, John. *Logic, the Theory of Inquiry*. New York: H. Holt and Company, 1938. p.316. Print.) By developing a "logic of inquiry" Dewey was attempting to show that traditional conceptions of formal logic makes three main mistakes, and that in order to inquire in a more complete and pragmatic way, that these mistakes must be avoided. Dewey claimed that formal logic's mistakes were 1) the attempt to eliminate consideration of subjectivist or mental states from inquiry, 2) the claim that logic *solely* transcribes experience is incorrect, and that logic must be seen as developing along with those who were working within the field, and 3) that our conceptions are indeed observable; they are not transcendental or mere intuitions. (Ibid. pp.317-318) Harding uses the term "logic of inquiry" in much the same way, but expands its application to sciences and social sciences. With this expansion, Harding is attempting to show that the mistakes found in traditional conceptions of logic are also made in sciences and social sciences, and that discovery in science needs to be understood as products of the contexts in which those discoveries were made.

discovery[8],"[9] A 'logic of inquiry' based on standpoints is able to extend the traditionally used methodological controls because instead of exploring or challenging knowledge from the dominant conceptual frameworks, a standpoint logic of inquiry starts from experience, particularly the lived experiences of traditionally oppressed or marginalized peoples.

The connections between power and knowledge that a standpoint 'logic of inquiry' make possible are important for hooks. The connections are important for many of the reasons that Harding argues, but for hooks, the connections are also important because they allow for a "politics of location" to come to the fore. Hooks writes that "[a]s a radical standpoint, perspective, position, "the politics of location" necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision."[10] For a "politics of location" to have the effect hooks wants it to have, as a motivating force behind social change, a standpoint "logic of inquiry" needs to be adopted. Investigating the connections between knowledge and the contexts that produce knowledge will, hooks argues, work as a catalyst for social change because researchers who actively produce knowledge will better understand the social forces that shape their research and their lives, and will enable researchers to expose and challenge the values that may be driving research in undesirable directions.

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[8] The "context of discovery", Harding argues, is the point at which values enter science. It is through the research questions that are asked, how the research is carried out, the aims of the research, what types of methodological controls are used, and even what types of research are funded that we are able to see the values present in science. The 'context of discovery' is the value-laden context in which the research is carried out, and critically investigating the context in which scientific discoveries are made, Harding argues, will enable investigations between the knowledge that is produced in science, and the power relations that bear on the research that produced that knowledge.

[9] Harding, Sandra. "Feminist Standpoints" *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. Eds. Hesse-Biber, Sharlene N. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007. p.49. Print.

[10] hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984. p.153. Print.

For hooks, and many other standpoint theorists, those who live on the margins of society have certain perspectives that enable new and different critiques of the institutions that support the interests of the dominant group(s). Hooks claims that these different perspectives may offer avenues of resistance to hegemonic practices because,

> Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the centre as well as on the margins. We understood both. …Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and centre and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of the whole."[11]

The 'marginal' perspective that hooks describes becomes a possibility when one person inhabits different social 'worlds' at different times. Many people who are, or feel they are, excluded from full participation in the dominant social groups and the spheres of life that they influence, are forced to participate in the social systems of the dominant culture to sustain them and, in many cases, their families. Hooks notes that during the mid-1900's in the United States, many black women commuted from their poor neighbourhoods to work as domestic 'help' in rich white neighbourhoods making many of these women the backbone of the dominant group's ability to function on a day to day basis, without ever being accepted as a valuable part of the group. This type of access meant that many domestic workers had intimate knowledge of the differences between the lives of those in the dominant social group, and the lives of those who were actively excluded. Being on the 'margins' in this way, enabled these women's perspectives to be informed by knowledge of the 'inside' without being subject to the same degree of indoctrination that would make them blind to many of the assumptions and values that drive dominant social institutions.

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[11] hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984. p.156. Print.

When standpoint theorists, with their concentration on the intimate link between theory and practice, and their commitment to democratic values, enter into discussions of education, the result is an almost complete re-evaluation of the values the drive the practices of teaching. For hooks, this means that the goals of education should be democratic values.

Bell hooks' definition of education is aimed at progressive social action and engagement. Again, hooks does not offer her definition explicitly, but builds an understanding of socially progressive education primarily through the works of Paolo Freire and John Dewey. She provides critiques of current educational practices and ideals through discussions of the roles and responsibilities of the members of learning communities. Hooks' critiques of traditional education and the role of universities are strikingly similar to Dewey's critiques of education.

Traditional education, as characterized by Dewey, is more concerned with production, and short-term development of highly specialized skill sets that enable the student to prepare for future possibilities, and 'contribute' to society in the ways that have been deemed valuable by that society's history (and therefore those who had the power to shape the narrative of that history), and which continue to be upheld. In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey outlines and critiques three forms of traditional education, two of which are included here.

The first is a Platonic conception of education which is built on the development of the natural capacities of students in order that they can later fit into the rigid [and for most, oppressive] roles of society outlined in the *Republic.*[12] The second is of the

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[12] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1916. p.72. Print.

German educational model which Dewey describes as being steered by national and social aims. This type of education is charged with producing citizens at the expense of individual development, and more importantly (at least for Dewey and hooks) lacks a conception of the type of society (democratic or otherwise) it seeks to create that remains separate from the fluctuating aims of the political state.[13] Of the German educational model, Dewey writes, "[i]t is equally possible to state its animating principle with equal truth either in the classic terms of "harmonious development of all the powers of personality" or in the more recent terminology of "social efficiency."… The conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind."[14] Educational models which are steered by national political aims, and do not take into account the type of society that *should* be created by the aims of the nation apart from the political aims of the party in power, and this leaves the practices and subject matter of education at the mercy of those who control the nation.

Dewey argues that democratic values should be the basis of any progressive educational model. Although democratic values are indeed political values, Dewey claims that a democratic model of education is not subject to the same criticisms that the German model can be charged with. Education models driven by democratic values are not attached to any particular political party, and so they are not subject to the whims of any particular administration. Dewey also notes that a democratic educational model is clear about what kind of society it would support.

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[13] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1916. p.74. Print.
[14] Ibid. p.77

Dewey's conception of democratic education is closely aligned with what hooks calls 'education as the practice of freedom'. When describing the traditional role of universities, hooks claims that,

> If we examine critically the traditional role of the university in the pursuit of truth and the sharing of knowledge and information, it is painfully clear that biases that uphold and maintain white-supremacy, imperialism, sexism, and racism have distorted education to that it is no longer about the practice of freedom. The call for a recognition of cultural diversity, a rethinking of ways of knowing, a deconstruction of old epistemologies, and the concomitant demand that there be a transformation in our classrooms, in how we teach and what we teach, has been a necessary revolution – one that seeks to restore life to a corrupt and dying academy. [15]

That the traditional education models on which we currently rely are not aligned with an expansion of democracy and freedom in the way hooks advocates, is clear. The type of freedom that traditional and current models of education promise is material freedom. If a student can passively consume discipline-specific and highly specialized information, the student can then regurgitate that information in order that she be able to get a job and be able to sustain herself. While I am not denying that material security is very important, using material freedom as a way to "sell" education to prospective students perverts and distorts a democratic understanding of freedom, and makes the measure of the success of education one of material success, rather than the pursuit of knowledge. Alongside this broad-stroke criticism of traditional education, hooks identifies some particular values, and their interpretations, that she argues are problematic. Four of these values that come to the fore in all three of her books on pedagogy are progress, authority, objectivity, and conformity.

The value that seems to best represent her critique of the current education system is the value of progress. Her characterization of the current North American education

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[15] hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. pp.29-30. Print.

system can be loosely understood as a 'banking-system of education', a term she borrows

from Paolo Freire. For Freire, a banking-system of education refers to education as an act

of 'depositing', in which

> the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system.[16]

Freire argues that a "banking-system" of education fails to adequately engage students

with the subject matter; creating students that cannot think creatively or make meaningful

connections between what they study and its relevance to their lives. Relying on Freire's

critique of the "banking-system" of education, hooks argues that this type of education

creates a certain type of student, and brings about a certain type of progress.

For the most part, the current North American interpretation of progress is

through a capitalist perspective – economic and technological progress. This means the

value of education is found in the student's ability to take in information during the

course of their academic careers in order to later cash in their knowledge, for material

gain (jobs, etc.). Through this perspective, personal progress is the development of an

immature student into a 'full-fledged' adult; more specifically, into an adult that can

participate in the capitalist system of consumerism, and as a reward for this participation,

the adult secures varying degrees of material stability. Furthermore, through this lens,

social progress is measured as progress in mostly economic and technological terms;

progress that may allow for greater personal comforts for the lucky few who benefit from

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[16] Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 2000. p.53. Print.

a capitalist society. No matter how loudly advocates of the 'trickle-down' effect claim that eventually the benefits of capitalism will be felt equitably, this model directly leads to maintaining the capitalist system *as it currently functions*, perhaps as a primary goal.

The second value that hooks takes issue with is authority. While authority in learning environments is necessary to a certain degree, the current interpretation of authority; how authority is played out in practice, does little to foster an empowering experience for students and teachers. The trouble with the current interpretation of authority is not that teachers and professors are authorities on what they teach, and indeed, it would be alarming to say the least, if teachers knew little more than the students in their classrooms. Hooks is aware of the necessity of authority, and claims that,

> As long as an individual professor is the only person who evaluates the work of students and grades, our status in the classroom is never that of equals. However this does not mean that professors must be authoritarian or lord it over students. It does mean that we teachers must always be willing to acknowledge our power in the classroom. We should not engage in false notions that all our voices carry equal weight.[17]

The problem arises when the value of authority is emphasized *at the expense* of the teacher's own realization that there is much to be learned from the students they teach, and at the expense of an engaged pedagogical relationship between teachers and students. Hooks argues that the current interpretation of the value of authority leaves teachers in a position where they feel the need to always be right, that they are, or have to be, the only source of knowledge in the classroom. This practice can leave students insecure about the value of their own assertions or contributions to the material being studied, and, as a result, promote passivity on the part of the student.

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[17] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.56. Print.

The value of objectivity in education is also problematic for hooks. The way objectivity is understood and sought in academic methodologies and results leaves subjectivity, as an avenue to greater understanding, undervalued. In many instances, the quest for objectivity has left context-laden, subjective experience out of the knowledge-producing realm of (at least scientific) inquiry. The tendency to privilege abstraction and theory over context and practice has left those scholars who recognize the importance of experience in knowledge production fighting against the historical tide of scholarship that has, for the most part, sought to actively quash experience as a source of knowledge. The value of objectivity, and therefore the historical and persistent discounting of the social contexts that are affected by supposedly objective knowledge, is one of the greatest challenges to education that concerns itself with democratic social progress.

The emphasis on objectivity in education has not only separated theory and practice in a way that has shielded some researchers and theorists from scrutiny on the grounds of the negative social affects their ideas have had (however unintentional), but objectivity can, and often does, lead to the presumption that there is a 'correct' answer, or a 'correct' perspective that precludes experience as a starting point. This can, in dramatic ways, reinforce the fourth value; that of conformity.

Hooks argues that the value of conformity is dangerous for many reasons. First, conformity works to erase certain, often knowledge producing, differences. Students are often encouraged to aim for objectivity in their academic pursuits. This can greatly diminish the value one gives to his or her own experiences; undermining the importance of the differences in his or her own perspective. Second, as students are put through the rigour of public school systems and standardized tests, they begin to value activity that

leads to success in specific ways. Students are taught that there are certain ways to behave in academic settings, and that adhering to these expectations is the only "safe" way to succeed. This is not to say that expecting professional behaviour from students is a bad thing. The problem is how narrowly defined the expectations are. A student on the road to success is often pictured as one who sits at the front of the class, knows the textbook intimately, studies rigorously for tests, adheres to deadlines, is polite to their fellow students and teachers, and attends class regularly and on time. Practicing these behaviours does indeed prepare students for success in the workforce, but it is often at the expense of a real engagement with the material and teaches the student that in order to be successful, he or she must do things as they have always been done. Like hooks, Paolo Freire argues that when conformity in education is valued, it

> …turns [students] into "containers," into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teachers. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teachers she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.[18]

When success is so narrowly defined, education becomes a precursor for material success, rather than an engaged development of individual capacities.

Furthermore, the emphasis on standardized tests goes a long way to showing students that there is a "right" answer which is predetermined and intimately linked to academic success. When these students attend university or college, they are sold choice in their study, but the emphasis on a "safe" road to a specific kind of success does not diminish. A major recruiting tool for many programs is to show prospective students the average salary of a successful person in their field, or a list of famous graduates from that particular field. The message that comes across is "join our program, follow our rules and

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[18] Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 2000. p.53. Print.

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you will be successful in life to the tune of X amount of dollars per year". When disciplines cannot compete in this way, they are labelled as impractical and therefore an 'unsafe' route to success.

Hooks seeks to re-orient education in response to what she argues is lacking in the traditional models of education. She is primarily concerned with the relationship between democracy and education, and breaking down the problematic division between theory and practice. Instead of education being available only in formalized institutions which produce graduates who are trained in maintaining capitalism, patriarchy, and oppression, education for hooks is about "healing and wholeness. …It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, [and] about renewing the vitality of life."[19] This list of general attributes does not seem to say anything about education that could not be said of other processes and experiences, and to some degree, that is the point. Hooks argues that formal education is not, and should not be, considered separate from everyday life. She criticizes the fact that many students have been taught that there is an inherent difference between formal education and their lived experiences. According to hooks, the divide between formal education and everyday life has consequences for students and the communities of which they are a part. The first consequence is that students can often not see the relevance of education to their lives and to their societies more generally.[20] The second consequence is that access to some knowledge is only available to those who have traditionally had access to it, and in most cases, continue to shape it.[21] The third, consequence is that students who come from marginalized or poor backgrounds may be discouraged from continuing their formal education in favour of immediate opportunities

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[19] hooks, bell. *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. New York: Routledge, 2003. p.43. Print.
[20] Ibid. p.42.
[21] Ibid. p.41

to work, especially those students interested in disciplines that do not traditionally feed into immediate and lucrative job prospects. Finally, those people who do not continue their formal education may feel, and are usually perceived to be, uneducated, or undereducated.

In response to the problems arising from the divide between formal education and everyday life, hooks' conception of democratic education focuses on bridging the gap between the two. She claims that,

> Teachers who have a vision of democratic education assume that learning is never confined solely to an institutionalized classroom. …the democratic educator breaks through the false construction of the corporate university as set apart from real life and seeks to re-envision schooling as always a part of our real world experience, and our real life. Embracing the concept of a democratic education we see teaching and learning as taking place constantly. We share the knowledge gleaned in the classrooms beyond those settings thereby working to challenge the construction of certain forms of knowledge as always and only available to the elite.[22]

Hooks' insistence on the harmful division of theory and practice, of education and everyday life is not restricted to considerations of knowledge production, or to challenging the framing of important research within academia. The divide between theory and practice, education and the everyday, is also harmful to democracy as it tends to erode the possible foundations for greater participation in and access to education. Because prospective students (and many academics) are oftentimes unaware of the ways in which formal education comes to bear on their everyday lives, many academics are unwilling to reach out to 'the public' to exchange ideas. A lack of meaningful exchange between those with access to knowledge and those without creates elitist educational institutions that lead to social stagnation and further reinforce the divide between formal education and everyday experiences.

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[22] hooks, bell. *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. New York: Routledge, 2003. p.41. Print.

Again, the similarities between hooks' characterization of democratic education and Dewey's work are clear. For Dewey, much of the meaning found in educative experience can be found in the connections between theory and lived experience. Education receives a broad construal from Dewey in *Democracy and Education* and other works. In this sense, education is "a freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims"[23], and this conception of education is based on a "reorganizing or reconstructing of experience."[24] For Dewey, education refers to any process in which the development of a person is aided through the facilitation of or critical reflection on experience. Dewey's education enables the learner to become more responsive to her environment, become more easily adaptive to novel experiences, and is the process by which experience gains meaning.

According to Dewey, formal education should be understood as the process by which an educator actively aids a student in the development of experience. It facilitates experience in ways that connect the meanings of activities done in classrooms with their applications in real life settings and actively include consideration of the social and moral implications of the activities. These experiences are in turn connected with skills of reflective thinking that enable the student to not only learn from experience in a rich way, but also enable her to better understand the role her experiences play in maintaining democracy.

Importantly, for Dewey, democracy is not a political system, but rather a type of relationship. Democracy as a relationship denotes a type of engagement between and

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[23] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1916. p.78. Print.

[24] Dewey, John, and Ratner, Joseph. *Intelligence in the Modern World: John Dewey's Philosophy*. New York: Modern Library, 1939. p.527. Print.

across political, religious, and social spheres based on accessibility, equality, and the sharing of communal and individual experience.[25] Democracy is anti-elitist, and focused on the fostering and maintenance of communal concerns and interests which create values out of the sharing of the real-life experiences of the constituents of the given society.

> Agreeing with Dewey, hooks writes that,

> > Nowadays, most students simply assume that living in a democratic society is their birthright; they do not believe they must work to maintain democracy. They may not even associate democracy with the ideal of equality. In their minds, the enemies of democracy are always and only some foreign "other" waiting to attack and destroy democratic life. They do not read the American thinkers, past and present, who teach us the meaning of democracy. They do not read John Dewey. They do not know his powerful declaration that "democracy has to be born anew in each generation, and education is its midwife".[26]

According to hooks and Dewey, democratic values cannot be claimed as the current driving force of educational practices, and the fleshing-out of the relationship between education and democracy has been left out of classrooms to the detriment of our ability to draw connections between academic pursuits and our experiences.

To rejuvenate the connections between theory and practice, hooks identifies critical thinking as an important resource. For hooks, critical thinking is the means by which she can speak to academics at all levels without being stifled by the boundaries of disciplines. Critical thinking is taught in a wide range of disciplines. The care and rigour of thought associated with critical thinking methodologies, whatever form they take, make critical thinking an active site for possible change. For this reason, hooks focuses on the ideals and practices of teaching critical thinking in her work on pedagogy.

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[25] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1916. p.69. Print.

[26] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.14. Print.

Although her focus is on teaching critical thinking, hooks advocates a change in our conceptions of critical thinking so that the practices of critical thinking are based in democracy, and the goal is social progress. That is how hooks reorients critical thinking toward practical wisdom.

hooks and Practical Wisdom

In this section I will outline hooks' conception of critical thinking as practical wisdom in order to tease out a concise conception of critical thinking that is representative of her concerns. First, I will briefly explain some of her intentions in reorienting critical thinking to better suit democratic education. Second, I will explore three different conceptions of practical wisdom and relate each to specific facets of hooks' conception. Finally, I will provide a tentative definition of hooks' practical wisdom in order to better situate her conception within popular definitions of critical thinking in the next chapter.

By suggesting that critical thinking can be described as practical wisdom, hooks brings together ethics, and a certain skill set which produces a certain kind of knowledge. In her commitment to teaching critical thinking as reasoning about practical matters, hooks dramatically reorients the teaching of critical thinking. Teaching critical thinking as practical wisdom becomes less about highlighting instances of fallacies, or emphasizing skills of argument, and more about guiding students through the connections among ideas. Often this involves inviting students to investigate the connections *they* draw between ideas.

This kind of thinking usually, if not always, includes consideration of real life experiences. Often experiences offer us new vantage points from which to investigate an

issue; other times points of contact between ideas emerge from our perspectives more broadly. Our experiences are important to what we know and can know because the collection of experiences that we have allow us to see a part of the puzzle that may not be evident to others, or at least not in the same way. Based on her insistence on the important connections between theory and practice, and guided by the aim of democratic social progress, hooks suggests that thinking is only critical when "we engage [in a way that allows for] an intensification of mindful awareness which heightens our capacity to live fully and well."[27] For hooks, living fully and well has a communal emphasis. Given her focus on democratic values, equality and justice are often the aim of practical wisdom. For hooks, the aim of practical wisdom can never be a social good which can be pursued at the expense of others, rather the social good is precisely that – the good of democratic social progress which is guided by a concrete understanding of responsibility, justice, diversity, and inclusion. Critical thinking as practical wisdom allows for a certain type of intellectual growth and development, while emphasizing that we are responsible to others; responsible for what we say, write, and do.

In *Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity,* John Wall argues that there are three prominent interpretations of practical wisdom as a significant moral category.[28] The first is practical wisdom as "a needed capacity for resisting the nihilistic moral logic that has invaded contemporary social values,"[29] put forth by Joseph Dunne. Dunne's practical wisdom is the capacity to determine and perceive the right human end. Dunne goes further to suggest that *phronesis* is the capacity to realize that there is a *moral* end (rather

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[27] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.185. Print.
[28] Wall, John. "Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. 6:3 (2003): p.318. Print.
[29] Ibid. p.319

than merely a utilitarian end) to thinking and action.[30] Dunne's interpretation of Aristotle's practical wisdom can then be understood, though perhaps not entirely, in terms of its contrast to capitalist values of utility and production, and may ignore certain, perhaps helpful, aspects of practical wisdom. On Dunne's account, practical wisdom as a means by which social ends may be recognized and *reshaped or reinterpreted* is largely ignored. This largely excludes the possibility of conflicting social goods because recognition of *the right human end* leaves little, if any, room for competing human ends suitable for different peoples or situations. It also does not allow for the recognition of social goods as socially constituted, reinterpreted, and reinforced. In effect, Dunne's reading of practical wisdom takes common social goods out of the realm of the socially constituted, and makes practical wisdom the recognition of the highest social goods which are always external to the societies served by the recognized good. One could argue that given hooks' challenge to capitalist values like utility and production[31], Dunne's interpretation of practical wisdom would be sufficient for her aims. However, her insistence on the social situatedness of knowledge cannot accommodate Dunne's interpretation of practical wisdom as the recognition of an external and unchanging conception of 'the good'.

Wall argues that the second prominent interpretation is put forth by Alasdair MacIntyre. For MacIntyre, practical wisdom "is the exercise of a capacity to apply truths about what is good for such and such a type of person or for persons as such to do

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[30] Wall, John. "Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. 6:3 (2003): p.320. Print.
[31] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.16. Print.

generally and in certain types of situations to oneself on particular occasions."[32] Practical wisdom for MacIntyre is not the capacity to apply external or unchanging 'goods' to a given particular situation, instead, the truths that are applied are taken from tradition, and as such, are socially situated, and continually socially reinforced.

Furthermore, MacIntyre argues that there is no way of engaging with these truths (either with respect to their recognition, evaluation, or applications to particular situations) that is not done from a particular tradition.[33] There is considerable overlap between this claim and the claim of standpoint theorists, like hooks, that knowledge is always situated. However, MacIntyre seems to fall short of recognizing the varied intersections (and therefore the varied standpoints of knowledge) in societies even when they can be said to be constituted by peoples of largely the same set of traditions. This limitation aside, MacIntyre's interpretation of practical wisdom is much closer to what hooks advocates than Dunne's practical wisdom. For hooks, an important part of practical wisdom is that practical wisdom insists on the fact that theory and practice are interdependent, and that experience and knowledge are inseparable.[34] MacIntyre takes into account that truth is socially constructed, and that the aim of practical wisdom may change in the face of differences in particular situations. The most important connections between MacIntyre's and hooks' account of practical wisdom come through when we consider that both MacIntyre and hooks insist that truths are created, and can therefore be evaluated, re-created, or re-framed to better suit the common good of the society in which those truths are reasonably applied. Furthermore, if MacIntyre and hooks are correct,

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[32] Wall, John. "Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. 6:3 (2003): p.321. Print.

[33] MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981. p.350. Print.

[34] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.185. Print.

then socially constructed truths are only truths *if* they are continually reinforced through various social institutions.[35]

A third significant interpretation of practical wisdom is that of Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum's practical wisdom consists in "overcoming 'moral obtuseness' and 'simplification' by sharpening, through literary narratives, our capacities for 'moral perception,' 'moral imagination,' and 'moral sensibility'."[36] Unlike MacIntyre, Nussbaum's practical wisdom is not the means by which we apply truths or historically reinforced values or ideals, rather practical wisdom is the 'moral end' in itself.[37] Through careful consideration of narratives we are able to awaken and sharpen our moral sensibilities because through narrative we are able to pay close attention to and care about the particular nature of our experiences with each other. Wall goes on to say that,

> Moral tragedy- which in Aristotle is the height of poetics – plays a particularly strong role for Nussbaum because it attunes its audience to the need for overcoming the simplification and narrowness that cause tragic conflicts in the first place, by teaching us to attend to the particular singularity of others. Nussbaum sees in Aristotle, in contrast with Plato, not just a separation of *poeisis*[38] from *phronesis*[39], but also a sense for their connection in the tragic sensibility required for a full moral life.[40]

For Nussbaum, practical wisdom relies *heavily* on the expression of personal experiences so that we can understand the nature of the experiences of others, and relate to them through our own experiences; allowing for a type of thinking that concretizes ethics and attends to the contexts in which the theories affect lives.

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[35] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.14. Print.
[36] Wall, John. "Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. 6:3 (2003): p.322. Print.
[37] Ibid.
[38] *Poeisis* is the root of the modern English word poetry, and indicates the act of making or doing something, usually in regard to doing or making something creative or artistic.
[39] *Phronesis* means "practical wisdom." Practical wisdom as the virtue of practical thought is often juxtaposed with theoretical wisdom.
[40] Wall, John. "Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. 6:3 (2003): p. 322. Print.

The attention given to the fact that ethics gains concrete meaning when we see how theory is played out (through narratives and the sharing of personal experiences) is a strong connection between Nussbaum's interpretation of practical wisdom and what hooks advocates. Another connection between hooks and Nussbaum's practical wisdom is that both pay special attention to the creative aspects of critical thinking, arguing, and expression. Nussbaum's emphasis on creation brings responsibility to the fore in a more radical way than do Dunne or MacIntyre's accounts, and is therefore closer to the type of practical wisdom that hooks introduces. For hooks, "the insistence on self-responsibility is vital to practical wisdom."[41] Her insistence on responsibility stems from her commitment to democratic values, so it is understandable that for hooks, we should be mindful that thinking, expression, the pursuit of truth, and the production of knowledge affects the person engaged in these activities, and the people with whom that person shares knowledge. Critical thinking as practical wisdom, at least characterized in this highly creative and context sensitive way, should be about care, attention to the experiences of others, and empowerment.

Although the comparisons between Dunne's, MacIntyre's, Nussbaum's, and hooks' conceptions of practical wisdom serve to highlight some important aspects of hooks' pedagogical project, the connection between practical wisdom and critical thinking remains unaddressed. For hooks, practical wisdom *is* critical thinking. The elision between the two normally separate terms is a result of her pedagogical goals. Hooks envisions education as a process driven by democratic ideals which reunites theory with practice toward democratic social progress. Because hooks sees critical thinking as perhaps the most likely area for change in people's individual lives, and in

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[41] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.185. Print.

societies generally[42], it is not surprising that she begins with critical thinking. To re-envision critical thinking as practical wisdom is to underscore the importance of context in critical thinking. Hooks' aim in presenting critical thinking as practical wisdom is to reorient the practices of teaching critical thinking, while strengthening the link between critical thinking and personal empowerment. If her project is to have an effect in disciplines that rely heavily on the current philosophical conceptions of critical thinking, an attempt at situating her conception within the current definitions must be made. An important step in this process is to condense her conception, which spans three books, to a workable definition that can be translated into something recognizable by scholars of critical thinking. My attempt to provide a concise conception of hooks' practical wisdom starts with taking what hooks says about critical thinking, highlighting what I take to be the main or recurring themes, and presenting those aspects as the constitutive elements of her conception.

Across all three of her books on pedagogy, hooks draws many connections between practical wisdom and critical thinking. Her conception of critical thinking can be broken down into three distinct categories: aims of critical thinking, requirements of critical thinking, and processes of critical thinking. The most important points in the three categories are listed below.

Aims of critical thinking:

  a) Critical thinking should empower people,[43]
  b) Critical thinking is the *primary* element allowing democratic social change,[44]

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[42] A brief discussion of the transformative power of critical thinking according to bell hooks can be found in "bell hooks – Cultural Criticism and Transformation" *Media Education Foundation Transcript.* Eds. Patierno, Mary and Jhally Sut. 1997. Internet (http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/402/transcript_402.pdf)
[43] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.11. Print.
[44] Ibid. p.202

c) Critical dialogue, especially dialogue that promotes diversity, helps ensure a strong link between theory and practice,[45]

d) Practical wisdom helps us remember that ideas are not fixed and static,[46]

e) Critical thinking is necessary to create 'humanizing' learning environments,[47] and

f) "…critical thinking is a profoundly democratic way of knowing."[48]

Requirements of critical thinking:

a) Critical thinking requires discernment,[49]

b) Critical thinking (in classrooms) requires that all participants in the classroom are engaged,[50]

c) Keeping a radically open mind is an essential requirement of critical thinking which maintains the integrity of the processes of critical thinking and education,[51]

d) Radical openness is an attempt to rid ourselves of our attachments to our own viewpoints. If a critical thinker is not open-minded it often leads to overly protective thinking about his or her own point of view,[52]

e) Critical thinking requires that we understand that not all of us can be right all the time, and that the shape of knowledge is constantly changing,[53]

f) Insistence on self-responsibility is vital to practical wisdom,[54] and

g) "Learning to see the whole picture and the connections with compassion and empathy is a basic tenet of practical wisdom."[55]

Processes of critical thinking:

a) "Critical thinking involves first discovering the who, what, where, and how of things – finding the answers to those eternal questions… and then utilizing that knowledge in a manner that enables you to determine what matters most,"[56]

b) Critical thinking is an *interactive* process that demands participation from each member of the learning community,[57]

c) "Critical thinking is [a method] of approaching ideas that aims to understand core, underlying truths, not simply superficial truths that may be most obviously visible,"[58]

d) Strategies of *dialectical exchange* which emphasize considering and reconsidering one's position, strategies, and values are important parts of the critical thinking process,[59] and

e) Teaching through *example* and *narrative* are some of the best ways to help students develop critical thinking skills.[60]

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[45] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.38. Print.
[46] Ibid. p.188
[47] Ibid. p.35
[48] Ibid. p.187
[49] Ibid. p.9
[50] Ibid. p.10
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid. p.185
[55] Ibid. p.187
[56] Ibid. p.9
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid. p.38

From what hooks writes about the aims, processes, and requirements of critical thinking, we can start to tease out and condense her conception into something more relatable to the major current definitions of critical thinking. First, her conception of critical thinking is driven by aims.   As noted above, the proper aims of critical thinking include empowerment, democratic social change, promoting diversity, establishing a strong link between theory and practice, and creating humanizing learning environments. Second, the requirements of critical thinking include a critical thinker's ability to: discern, engage with the material and their respective learning community, keep a radically open mind, acknowledge that one is not always right, be responsible to self and others, and see the whole issue at hand, including connections to other ideas. Finally, the processes of critical thinking are interactive, and rely primarily on the use of examples and narrative to aid students in asking relevant questions. Questioning starts at a superficial level; the who, what, when, and why, and then moves, through dialectical exchange and self-reflection to deeper questions that try to discern what matters most about a given issue.

Critical thinking for hooks is aimed at discovering the truth of an issue or problem. However, the underlying truths, the truths that hooks claims are most important for critical thinkers are socially constructed and therefore can change. This is an important part of hooks' conception, as most conceptions of critical thinking are aimed solely at truth. In hooks' case, the impact of "uncovered" truths on the respective social context is just as important, if not more important, than the critical discovery.

Based on the aims, processes and requirements of critical thinking in hooks' three books, a concise account of how hooks views critical thinking could be as follows. For

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[60] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.10. Print.

hooks, critical thinking is *purposive, creative, responsible, interdependent, and careful reflection (and self-reflection) which, to the greatest degree possible, would be free of patriarchal, colonial, white-supremacist, homophobic, and capitalist assumptions, and starts from considering the effects of a belief or decision on the real life experiences of people whose lives would be affected by the outcomes of a particular belief or action, with a mind to promoting democratic values.*

There are three aspects to this definition that may not be apparent from the lists given above. The first is my use of the term "reflection". As noted above, hooks mentions the word *discernment* in relation to critical thinking, however, she also uses the word *reflection*. Of the two, "reflection" seems to represent the aims of her project more fully than does discernment. Reflection is a more appropriate word to describe the cognitive processes that hooks advocates because reflection does not imply that a decision has to be made. Critical reflection and self-reflection allow the thinker to withhold judgment in a way that discernment does not imply. As a part of her commitment to radical openness[61], hasty judgment is a concern for hooks. She advocates being very cautious in making judgments or drawing conclusions about anything, and reflection seems to capture that aspect of her type of critical thinking more accurately. Also, hooks' reliance on Dewey's conception of progressive education in the creation of her pedagogical practices is better represented by the use of "reflection". In Dewey's earlier work, critical thinking is critical reflection. He amended his definition later to include a more specific breakdown of what critical reflection entails, but the similarities between Dewey's and hooks' conceptions of critical thinking, as well as her reliance on

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[61] Radical openness will be discussed at length in chapter 3. For now, it can be superficially understood as keeping one's mind radically open, and trying not to jump to conclusions based on one's previous experiences or perspective.

his theories of progressive education, justify its use.[62] Although the ability to discern is important to hooks because a critical thinker should be able to judge well, "reflection", as opposed to discernment better represents her concerns.

Second, my reason for including certain assumptions in the definition may not be obvious. The reason that I actively included consideration of these specific assumptions is because they are of huge importance to hooks. Throughout her books on pedagogy and in her work generally, hooks is sensitive to the types of assumptions, specifically anti-democratic assumptions that can impede one's ability to think critically. Paying close attention to the ways in which these types of assumptions can inform our thinking, often times without our knowing, is an important part of her work. A major part of being a democratic educator, a feminist standpoint theorist, and an advocate of personal responsibility in how we think is being sensitive to the harm that these kinds of assumptions can have. The inclusion of these specific assumptions as something to avoid in critical thinking is one of her most important contributions to critical thinking scholarship.

Finally, the reasons for including experience as the *starting* point for critical thinking, and the emphasis on considering the consequences of conclusions drawn may not be obvious. The reason for this inclusion is primarily that any conception of critical thinking that hopes to encompass hooks' pedagogical goals must include the defining feature of standpoint theories. The important link between experience and knowledge, practice and theory, must be made clear. The second reason is hooks' commitment to social progress and democracy. Without carefully considering the *real life* consequences

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[62] The similarities between hooks' and Dewey's conceptions of critical thinking will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

of how we think and of the conclusions we come to, critical thinking would have little value to hooks as a possible foundation for social change. If a critical thinker never took into account the consequences of a given issue for the people that issue affects, or for social progress on a larger scale, the democratic aims of hooks' critical thinking would be lost.

Hooks' emphasis on democratic social progress as the aim of critical thinking makes her conception somewhat different than many philosophical definitions of critical thinking. Hooks' conception of critical thinking contains some aspects of critical pedagogy. The most important link between her conception of critical thinking and critical pedagogy is the shared aim of democratic social progress. Some of the other points of connection are her insistence on the need for social progress, her attention to the functions of harmful biases in education[63], and her criticisms of capitalist values. In the following chapter I will outline some of the main differences and points of connection between critical thinking and critical pedagogy to highlight the difficulties in situating hooks' practical wisdom, and compare her conception to broad and narrow definitions of critical thinking in order to show the limitations and successes of her work on critical thinking.

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[63] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.23. Print.

CHAPTER 2

Situating Practical Wisdom

My aim in this chapter is to situate hooks' version of practical wisdom within current, widely used definitions of critical thinking. I will begin by highlighting the differences and points of connection between critical thinking and critical pedagogy to show to what degree hooks' practical wisdom can be considered representative of either. I will then explore the connections between hooks' practical wisdom and some 'narrow' definitions of critical thinking to understand the limits of practical wisdom, and to suggest what hooks' practical wisdom can add to these definitions. Finally, I will explore the connections between hooks' practical wisdom and definitions of critical thinking that are more broadly construed. Again, of interest here are the similarities and differences between the two, both in the definitions themselves, and in the necessary dispositions of critical thinkers. I will argue that hooks' conception of critical thinking represents different aspects of both narrow and broad definitions and so, to varying degrees, shares in the successes and limitations of both categories of critical thinking definitions. In this chapter I will draw on the work of Robert H. Ennis, John E. McPeck, and Richard Paul, among others, to construct a brief overview of the major definitions of critical thinking and to help situate hooks' conception of critical thinking within the spectrum of current critical thinking definitions.

Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy

In this section I will outline some of the major differences between critical thinking and critical pedagogy. The differences between the interests and aims of critical thinking and critical pedagogy make comparisons between the two difficult at times, especially where standards of adequacy are concerned. However, fleshing-out the distinctions between the two will allow for a clearer understanding of where hooks' practical wisdom fits within a philosophical understanding of critical thinking. This is because her conception of critical thinking as practical wisdom shares aspects with both critical thinking and critical pedagogy, and at times, blurs some of the boundaries commonly maintained between the two.

In *Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits*, Nicholas C. Burbules and Rupert Berk describe the main similarities and differences between critical thinking and critical pedagogy. According to Burbules and Berk, there are several important differences between the two; however, both critical thinking and critical pedagogy seem to share some assumptions. The first assumption is that in any given society, there are people who "are to some extent deficient in the abilities or dispositions that would allow them to discern certain kinds of inaccuracies, distortions, and even falsehoods."[64] As a starting point then, scholars of both critical thinking and critical pedagogy assume that the reasoning skills among the general population in any

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[64] Burbules, Nicholas C. and Berk, Rupert. "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits" *Critical Theories in Education: Changing Terrains of Knowledge and Politics*. Eds. Popkewitz, Thomas S, and Fendler, Lynn. New York: Routledge, 1999. p.46. Print.

society are insufficient to detect faults in reasoning, or verify claims. The second assumption is that developing 'critical' skills will enable people to recognize the distortions and falsehoods in arguments or claims and in turn recognize those arguments as faulty grounds on which to base belief and action. Consequently, scholars of critical thinking and critical pedagogy both claim that being unable to recognize distortions and falsehoods in reasoning limits freedom.[65] For scholars of both critical thinking and critical pedagogy, there is a direct relationship between training in 'critical' thinking and an increase in freedom; however this shared assumption does little to bridge the differences between the two.

The first, and perhaps most important difference that Burbules and Berk suggest is that scholars of critical thinking and critical pedagogy largely disagree about the meaning of 'critical'. For critical thinking scholars, being 'critical' is a *non-partisan* way of exploring, challenging, and making judgments about unsubstantiated truth-claims.[66] For critical thinking scholars, the motivation for being a critical thinker is the value that one ought to base his or her beliefs or actions on true assertions. Uninvestigated assertions (and the assumptions which support them) do not warrant assent and should not be taken as a reasonable basis for belief or action. One of the main motivations for critical thinking is protecting the thinker from making mistakes in reasoning, from trusting testimony that he or she ought not to trust, and so forth. So for scholars of critical thinking, 'critical' thinking is aimed at verifying the truthfulness of statements and arguments in order to protect the individual thinker against being persuaded by a line

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[65] Burbules, Nicholas C. and Berk, Rupert. "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits" *Critical Theories in Education: Changing Terrains of Knowledge and Politics*. Eds. Popkewitz, Thomas S, and Fendler, Lynn. New York: Routledge, 1999. p.46. Print.
[66] Ibid.

of reasoning they ought not to be, and consequently, to increase the freedom of the individual thinker.

On the other hand, scholars of critical pedagogy are primarily concerned with the relationships between power and knowledge. Critical pedagogues use the term 'critical' to highlight that many of our ways of knowing "perpetuate or legitimate an unjust status quo; [and so] fostering a critical capacity in citizens is a way of enabling them to resist such power effects."[67] For critical pedagogy scholars, the term 'critical' is used to underscore the importance of the context of the assertion, and to protect and empower the individual thinker. However, the emphasis on context is not strictly for the individual's protection. Unlike many critical thinking scholars, critical pedagogues hold that the context in which the assertion is made is important, as well as the consequences of adopting the assertion for *both* the individual thinker and the members of the social context in which the assertion, claim, or argument is made. Critical pedagogues' consideration of the context and social consequences is *partisan* and usually strongly linked to democratic values like justice, equality, diversity, participation, etc.

The use of 'critical' in this context is similar to its use in critical thinking scholarship in that both types of 'critical' thinking are aimed at "protecting" the thinker, however in critical pedagogy scholarship, 'critical' thinking is protection against oppressive social forces rather than mistakes in reasoning. For critical pedagogues, developing a 'critical' attitude is meant to empower people to expose and fight against systematic injustice. To point out the difference in emphasis between the two is not to suggest that critical thinking scholars are uninterested in the relationships between power

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[67] Burbules, Nicholas C. and Berk, Rupert. "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits" *Critical Theories in Education: Changing Terrains of Knowledge and Politics*. Eds. Popkewitz, Thomas S, and Fendler, Lynn. New York: Routledge, 1999. p.46. Print.

and knowledge, or that issues of social justice are not important or worthy of critical examination. What it does mean, is that for critical thinking scholars the task of assessing the veracity of an argument, and understanding the argument's social implications are separate endeavours. The above distinction between critical thinking and critical pedagogy highlights that for critical thinkers, experiences of social injustice are not the starting-point of critical investigation, while for many critical pedagogues, experience often is. An important implication is that in the context of critical thinking, 'critical' thinking may enable social progress through an expansion of individual freedom as a product of assertions being challenged, however, social progress is not the main goal of teaching critical thinking, nor is social progress understood as explicitly democratic.

A second difference between critical thinking and critical pedagogy is the relationship between their respective uses of 'critical' and 'true'. For critical thinking scholars, the relationship between the term 'critical' and truth seems, not necessarily stronger, but more direct. For critical thinking scholars, 'critical' thinking is thinking aimed at judging the truth of a statement or claim. Critical thinking is largely a skill set or methodology aimed at uncovering the truth. The 'truth' of a statement or argument does not necessarily depend on the social context in which the statement was made. Some critical thinking scholars hold that the methodology of critical thinking is transferable to different contexts to ascertain the truth of statements in a variety of disciplines. There are considerations of the thinker's biases and prejudices in much of the scholarship on critical thinking, but with the notable exceptions of Richard Paul's "strong" critical thinking[68], and the work of Stephen Brookfield, critical thinking definitions do not

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[68] Paul, Richard. "Teaching Critical Thinking in the "Strong" Sense: A Focus on Self-Deception, World Views, and a Dialectical Mode of Analysis." *Informal Logic*. Windsor, ON. 4:2 (1981): 2-7. Print.

necessitate consideration of the social contexts of arguments. On the whole, critical thinking can, and often does, include a far greater degree of abstraction from social contexts than critical pedagogy allows for without it affecting the thinker's ability to assess the reasoning in the argument.

For critical pedagogy scholars, the relationship between 'critical' and 'true' is less direct. Burbules and Berk suggest that scholars of critical pedagogy do not pursue truth dispassionately. They argue that "a crucial dimension of this approach is that certain claims, even if they might be "true" or substantiated within particular confines and assumptions, might nevertheless be partisan in their effects."[69] What Burbules and Berk point out is that critical pedagogy is concerned with 'truth' in so far as 'truths' can be acknowledged as constructed and multiple, and that the social effects of adopting 'truths' should be considered.[70] The effects of adopting 'truths' should be considered because understanding the effects may further our understanding of how oppressive social structures and ideologies operate. A powerful example given by Burbules and Berk is that many studies have shown that African Americans score lower on IQ tests, but often fail to explain the contexts in which the tests were developed or interpreted. Burbules and Berk claim that,

> even if it is a "fact" that this particular population does on average score lower on this particular set of tests, [this 'fact' still] leaves significant larger questions unaddressed, not the least of which is what effect such assertions have on the general population that is not aware of the important limits of these tests or the tenuous relation, at best, between "what IQ tests measure" and "intelligence."[71]

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[69] Burbules, Nicholas C. and Berk, Rupert. "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits" *Critical Theories in Education: Changing Terrains of Knowledge and Politics*. Eds. Popkewitz, Thomas S, and Fendler, Lynn. New York: Routledge, 1999. p.47. Print.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.

So while critical thinking is aimed at assessing the truth of an assertion, critical pedagogy attempts to expose and understand the constructed nature of reality, and the social effects of how we go about constructing it.[72]

A third difference between critical thinking and critical pedagogy that Burbules and Berk suggest centres on standards of adequacy. For critical thinking scholars, standards of adequacy are the measure of what can be considered 'critical'. Standards of adequacy cover a wide range of considerations; from the ability to recognize fallacies, to the ability to make clear obscure or ambiguous assertions. For scholars of critical thinking, standards of adequacy are usually separable from the issue or argument being critically assessed. There are some scholars of critical thinking, like John E. McPeck[73], that argue critical thinking skills are not separable from the discipline of which they are a part, but this does not mean that the relationship between a discipline's critical methodology is necessarily inextricably linked to the social contexts of the problems being assessed. Rather, it means that there are some critical thinking scholars who argue that critical methodologies are often linked so intimately to specific types of inquiry or disciplines that the skill set required of that discipline does not apply to the methods of critical investigation in other disciplines. In other words, some critical thinking scholars argue that critical thinking has to be about "something", however, that "something" is not the social forces that come to bear on a claim or statement, or the social consequences of the conclusion(s) drawn from critical investigation.

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[72] The differences highlighted here are meant to show, in broad and general strokes, some of the more interesting and important differences between Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy, and are not meant to be taken as representative of each of the different interpretations of the term 'critical' for either scholars of Critical Thinking or Critical Pedagogy.

[73] McPeck, John E. *Critical Thinking and Education*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981. Print.

For critical pedagogues, standards of adequacy cannot be separated from whatever issue is being critically investigated; standards of adequacy, and the way that they are interpreted and implemented in contexts "inevitably involve the very same consideration of who, where, when, and why that many other social belief claims raise."[74] Mirroring the concerns of many feminist standpoint theorists with regard to challenging the context of discovery and methodologies in science, critical pedagogues insist that standards of adequacy are informed by and interpreted through the same social forces that create the social inequities they seek to change. Challenging the standards of adequacy can help to make sure they are applied in a manner that is, to the greatest degree possible, sensitive to the social forces at play in a given situation. The ability to recognize and reject fallacious reasoning, like the use of *ad hominem*, often keeps thinkers on a reliable road to the truth of the issue at hand, but there are instances in which the thinker may employ an *ad hominem* fallacy that highlights a *social* 'truth' of a situation.

Consider the following example:

A: "Men ought not to have a say in whether women have abortions."

B: "Of course you would say that, you're a feminist!"

The response is an example of an *ad hominem* fallacy because it does not seek to address the argument in any way, but rather seeks to discredit the argument by pointing out an irrelevant characteristic of the person who made the original claim. While this type of move does not help reach the truth of the issue at hand (whether men should have a say in a woman's choice to have an abortion), it does work to highlight assumptions about feminist views, prejudices about assertive women, the supposed homogeneity of feminist

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[74] Burbules, Nicholas C. and Berk, Rupert. "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits" *Critical Theories in Education: Changing Terrains of Knowledge and Politics*. Eds. Popkewitz, Thomas S, and Fendler, Lynn. New York: Routledge, 1999. p.47. Print.

perspectives, etc. Instead of rejecting the use of the fallacy, or the portion of the argument that constitutes the fallacy, its place in the argument can be questioned. Investigating instances of fallacies alongside the social contexts in which they are employed (like in the example above) can point to the arguers' assumptions and highlight the dominant perspectives in arguments that touch on social issues.

Furthermore, there may be instances in which the social situatedness of the person offering the argument *should* be called into question. One of the key features of the *ad hominem* fallacy is that the attack on the arguer's character usually points out a personal characteristic that is *irrelevant* to the issue at hand in an effort to discredit the argument. Although it cannot be claimed that committing a fallacy in reasoning is in itself beneficial to the argument at hand, challenging the *relevance* of the personal characteristic highlighted goes a long way to add context to an argument. Challenges to what are considered relevant personal characteristics have to be made alongside considerations of context. When critical thinkers reject instances of fallacious reasoning outright, insights into the implicit assumptions of arguments can be lost. Consider another example:

A: "It is hard for white men to advance in the workforce because of affirmative action policies".

B: "Of course you would say that, you're a white man!"

B's response to A highlights an important connection between the issue at hand and the social situatedness of the arguer. Some might claim that this example fails because of the obvious relevance of the arguer's social situatedness to the subject of the argument, but it does not. It is largely due to critical investigations like those in feminist standpoint theories and critical pedagogy, that the connections between knowledge and social forces that help to produce knowledge are considered relevant to arguments at all. Challenging

the standards of adequacy, like the recognition and rejection of fallacies, allows critical pedagogues to better understand the forces that come to bear on the assumptions and, to some extent, the background knowledge of the arguers.[75]

A fourth difference suggested by Burbules and Berk is that critical thinking does not necessitate action, while critical pedagogy is directly and strongly linked to action. For critical pedagogues, "the critical person is one who is empowered to seek justice, to seek emancipation. Not only is the critical person adept at recognizing injustice, but… the person is also moved to change it."[76] For Burbules and Berk, this is the difference that most radically separates critical thinking from critical pedagogy. They argue this difference comes from critical pedagogy's emphasis on the 'pedagogical relations' between members of learning communities rather than teaching certain skills sets.[77] More specifically, for critical pedagogues, a critical disposition is not just the sum total of skills and knowledge necessary for critical thinking, rather it is a critical 'spirit' which motivates social and political action that comes from and is supported by the relationships between all members of academic communities. The difference that Burbules and Berk suggest then, is that critical thinking does not motivate collective social action in the same way that critical pedagogy seeks to. Concerning this difference they write,

> [f]or both Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy, "criticality" requires that one
> be moved to do something, whether that something be seeking reasons or seeking

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[75] When investigating an instance of fallacious reasoning in arguments similar to the ones above, it is easier to understand some of the assumptions of the arguer when personal attacks highlight the other person's membership in a recognizable group. This is because recognizable groups are recognizable for a reason; there are certain traits (whether they are actual or perceived) by which groups are stereotyped. This does not mean that the group must be strictly a political or social group.

[76] Burbules, Nicholas C. and Berk, Rupert. "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits" *Critical Theories in Education: Changing Terrains of Knowledge and Politics*. Eds. Popkewitz, Thomas S, and Fendler, Lynn. New York: Routledge, 1999. pp.50-51. Print.

[77] Ibid. p.51

social justice. For Critical Thinking, it is not enough to know how to seek reasons, truth, and understanding; one must also be impassioned to pursue them rigorously. For Critical Pedagogy, that one can critically reflect [on] and interpret the world is not sufficient; one must also be willing and able to act to change that world. (CTCP, pp. 51-52)

The kind of self-reflection necessary for 'criticality' in both critical thinking and critical pedagogy, and the extent to which critical thinking in either context can change belief and action, seems to point to a difference in the *kind* of action each promotes. For critical pedagogy, action is usually *collective* or organised social action, whereas critical thinking is not necessarily tied to specific political or social aims, but still involves individual action aimed at the pursuit of truth.

The four differences between critical thinking and critical pedagogy suggested by Burbules and Berk are: 1) the different uses of 'critical', 2) the relationship between their respective uses of 'critical' and truth, 3) whether or not standards of adequacy are subject to critical investigation, and 4) the kind of action each promotes. The differences between critical thinking and critical pedagogy that Burbules and Berk suggest highlight key points at which hooks' conception of critical thinking straddles the supposed boundaries between critical thinking and critical pedagogy.

Different facets of hooks' practical wisdom reflect the aims of both critical thinking and critical pedagogy in different ways. Although the motivation for her project is democratic social progress (reflecting the concerns of critical pedagogues), hooks explicitly claims that critical thinking is the primary means to affect change, often pointing to the work of particular critical thinking scholars as instrumental in her own

work and in the struggle for freedom.[78] Hooks' attempt to teach critical thinking skills while reorienting the ideals and practices of education is not without tension.

As mentioned above, scholars of critical thinking use 'critical' to describe a *non-partisan* way of exploring, challenging, and making judgments about arguments, while critical pedagogues use 'critical' to highlight the relationship between knowledge and context in a *partisan* way; strongly linked to democratic values like justice and equality. Some critical thinking scholars may argue that searching for truth in a partisan way, as critical pedagogues do, predetermines (to varying degrees) the conclusions drawn from critical thinking. For many scholars of critical thinking, filtering one's reasoning through a democratic agenda would result in conclusions informed by politics rather than the strength of the individual's reasoning skills. Some scholars of critical thinking go so far as to claim that teaching students partisan critical thinking indoctrinates students and decreases students' abilities to think creatively about problems which touch on larger social issues. In response to this criticism, critical pedagogues might argue that whether the aim of critical thinking is partisan or not, the fact that we are all situated knowers means that our reasoning is already affected by dominant ideologies and so the results of critical investigation are always partisan. For critical pedagogues, *non*-partisan exploration of issues results in socially stagnating education, and 'critical' thinkers concerning themselves with the wrong sorts of things; for critical pedagogues, many scholars of critical thinking are not asking the right sorts of questions.

No doubt aware of this tension, hooks insists that "[p]rofessors who strive to educate as the practice of freedom are most inclined to resist their own purpose…."[79] For hooks,

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[78] In her discussions, she highlights the contributions of Daniel Willingham, Richard Paul and Linda Elder as essential to a full account of critical thinking. (hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. pp.8-9. Print.)

resisting one's own purpose means that educators must understand that there are many different ways to teach toward freedom, so embracing differences in interests and the social locations we inhabit should be a primary goal of engaged pedagogy[80].   Hooks recognizes that academics at all levels critically engage with problems in different ways and are motivated by different interests. Because hooks' particular brand of critical thinking starts at the level of experience, critical thinking that includes as many perspectives as possible is essential to resolving (if possible) the issue at hand. So although hooks' goals are similar to the goals of many critical pedagogues (most notably Paolo Freire), in that she seeks to promote democratic values, she does not appear to do so at the expense of including the ideas of many critical thinking scholars.

hooks' Practical Wisdom and Current Definitions of Critical Thinking

In this section I will attempt to situate hooks' practical wisdom within some current and widely-used definitions of critical thinking in order to show the limitations and successes of her conception of critical thinking. I will assess hooks' practical wisdom in relation to context-specific definitions and to cross-discipline definitions to further clarify what sets hooks' project apart from current scholarship.

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[79] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.35. Print.
[80] "Engaged pedagogy" is a term that hooks uses throughout her trilogy on pedagogy to explain her educational model. Her educational model is based on intense personal relationships between students and teachers that aim to empower students to recognize their authority (usually based on experience) as legitimate knowers in the world. She claims that engaged pedagogy "goes further" than critical or feminist pedagogy because rather than focusing on large-scale progressive social and political action, her 'engaged pedagogy' focuses on the self-actualization, empowerment, and well-being of the individual academic. (hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.33. Print.) Although, like many feminist and critical pedagogues, hooks is concerned with large-scale social progress, she argues that the most fertile ground for change of this nature is teaching critical skills to individuals. For hooks, engaged pedagogy describes the democratic relationship necessary to effectively teach critical thinking. (hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.39. Print.)

According to Sanders et al., most definitions of critical thinking can be separated into two categories. The first category is context-specific definitions, and the second is cross-discipline definitions. The context-specific definitions "assume that critical thinking cannot occur without a specific context. …[and that] the development of critical thinking skills is interdependent with the context within which critical thinking activity occurs."[81] Scholars whose definitions fall into this category argue that what is required for critical investigation in each discipline is so intimately linked with the context (i.e. the requirements and objectives) of that discipline that the skills are not readily transferable to other contexts. For example, the critical methodologies used in chemistry would not be appropriate for critical investigation in philosophy. Sanders et al. argue that context-specific definitions allow for well-defined expectations, and often make the requirements of critical thinking more accessible to students.[82] Students who are taught context-specific critical thinking tend to have a clearer understanding of what it means to be a critical thinker in their respective discipline(s). To varying degrees, definitions offered by John E. McPeck, Stephen Brookfield and Joanne Kurfiss fall into this category.

John E. McPeck's critical thinking falls squarely within the category of context-specific definitions. He argues that critical thinking done in isolation from a specific context or discipline is not critical thinking.[83] This is because the skills needed for critical investigation in each discipline differ, and so to talk about critical thinking apart from a specific discipline does not refer to any particular skill set.[84] For McPeck, critical thinking is "the judicious use of skepticism, tempered by experience… [where] the

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[81] Sanders, Maria and Moulenbelt, Jason. "Defining Critical Thinking: How far Have We Come?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 26:1 Spring, 2011. p.44. Print.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid. p.42
[84] Ibid. p.41

criterion for regarding skepticism as judicious, as opposed to incorrect or frivolous, must be determined by the norms and standards of the subject area in question."[85] More clearly, McPeck's critical thinking starts from doubt and experience, where standards of adequacy are determined by each discipline. According to McPeck, some disciplines may have similar definitions or recognize similar standards of adequacy, but these overlaps are products of the types of problems being investigated by each discipline rather than the application of a generalizable conception of critical thinking.

The lack of cohesion across the critical methodologies of different disciplines has two main implications. The first is that the lack of a shared definition of critical thinking makes communication across disciplines difficult. What is required of a critical thinker in biology may be sufficiently different to what is required of an English student that assessment of critical thinking skills across the boundaries of disciplines becomes incredibly difficult. The second implication is that it may be difficult for academics from one discipline to challenge the critical methodologies employed by other disciplines. Many feminist standpoint theorists, including hooks, would argue that 'marginal' perspectives are valuable in challenging dominant ideologies and values because often times 'marginal' perspectives have knowledge of the values of the dominant group, but have not yet been indoctrinated into the dominant system. If discipline-specific definitions of critical thinking are dissimilar enough it can shut down communication between disciplines important to challenging the assumptions made by each interpretation of critical thinking. In other words, when discipline-specific definitions of critical thinking are dissimilar enough, challenges to critical methodology and interpretations of

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[85] Sanders, Maria and Moulenbelt, Jason. "Defining Critical Thinking: How far Have We Come?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 26:1 Spring, 2011. p.41. Print.

standards of adequacy are left to academics within each discipline who may share the same values or understand objectivity in the same ways.

Joanne Kurfiss offers another current context-specific definition of critical thinking. For Kurfiss, critical thinking is "an investigation whose purpose is to explore a situation, phenomenon, question, or problem to arrive at a hypothesis or conclusion about it that integrates all available information and that can therefore be convincingly justified."[86] Like McPeck, Kurfiss argues that much of what constitutes critical thinking is discipline specific, and reflective of the types of problems different disciplines are concerned with.[87] Although Kurfiss' context-specific definition shares the same limitation as McPeck's, in other ways, her definition is more compatible with hooks' conception of critical thinking. Kurfiss' emphasis on justification highlights the intersubjective aspect of critical thinking. Although Kurfiss does not state explicitly in her definition that judgments must be justified to anyone other than oneself, in other work, Kurfiss argues that students who develop and practice their critical thinking skills by thinking through problems together, and testing their conclusions against the objections of their peers, are often the most successful students in terms of their critical abilities.[88]

So where McPeck argues that the strength of reasoning can be assessed against the standards of a discipline, Kurfiss argues that the strength of reasoning must be judged by what is "convincingly justifiable" to people in varied contexts. For Kurfiss, critical

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[86] Sanders, Maria and Moulenbelt, Jason. "Defining Critical Thinking: How far Have We Come?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 26:1 Spring, 2011. p.44. Print.

[87] Kurfiss, Joanne Gainen. "Critical Thinking by Design" *The Professional & Organizational Development Network in Higher Education* (http://teaching.uchicago.edu/oldsite/pod/89-90/Kurfiss.htm.) Internet.

[88] Kurfiss, Joanne Gainen. *Critical Thinking: Theory, Research, Practice, and Possibilities*. Washington, D.C: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1988. Print., and Kurfiss, Joanne Gainen. "Critical Thinking by Design" *The Professional & Organizational Development Network in Higher Education* (http://teaching.uchicago.edu/oldsite/pod/89-90/Kurfiss.htm.) Internet.

methodologies depend on the standards of particular disciplines, but critical *assessment* depends on both the standards of the discipline and the varied contexts in which the argument is given. For this reason, it can be argued that Kurfiss' definition emphasizes the intersubjective nature of critical thinking and allows room for fuller consideration of context in assessing reasoning.. Kurfiss' definition of critical thinking is compatible with hooks' conception in this respect, because Kurfiss broadens the scope of justification beyond the values and standards present in a particular discipline.

Finally, Stephen Brookfield's definition of critical thinking is the closest context-specific definition to hooks' practical wisdom. Brookfield's definition focuses on the abilities necessary for critical thinking, and on the types of activities needed to cultivate critical thinking skills. His definition of critical thinking has three main aspects. The first is a focus on emancipatory learning. Emancipatory learning as the goal of critical thinking means that the learner "becomes aware of the forces that have brought them to their current situations and take action to change some aspect of these situations."[89] Brookfield's attention to the social situatedness of the learner and how social forces come to bear on what we know represent much of what hooks and critical pedagogues consider important. The connections between knowledge and power are important aspects of Brookfield's definition, but what is most representative of hooks' project is Brookfield's call to action. The call to change one's situation (to whatever degree possible) assumes that we are not wholly free to decide what social situation we find ourselves in, and, if Brookfield is advocating a change in social situation, he seems to imply that there are negative or unwanted forces which can determine certain aspects of our social situations.

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[89] Sanders, Maria and Moulenbelt, Jason. "Defining Critical Thinking: How far Have We Come?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 26:1 Spring, 2011. p.43. Print.

The aim of Brookfield's critical thinking (emancipatory learning) and his attention to how oppressive social forces limit freedom shows sensitivity to individual human experience that is not represented in many other definitions of critical thinking.

The second aspect of Brookfield's definition is dialectical thinking. By dialectical thinking, Brookfield means that critical thinking should focus on "understanding contradictions and arriving at suitable resolutions."[90] It is unclear from this statement alone whether Brookfield's critical thinking requires input from other people to consider possible contradictions and reach solutions, or whether dialogical thinking can be done in isolation. However, when Brookfield's definition is related to his other work in critical thinking, dialectical thinking seems to directly involve the input of other people. In *What is Critical Thinking?* Brookfield argues that "critical thinking is a process of hunting assumptions"[91] which includes discovering what assumptions we *and others* hold, and assessing the impact of those assumptions on our reasoning and the conclusions drawn. He goes on to argue that the most difficult assumptions to expose and challenge are assumptions informed by "dominant ideologies such as democracy, capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heterosexism"[92] making the inclusion of as many perspectives as possible vital to critical thinking. Like hooks, Brookfield is sensitive to the hard work and personal reflection necessary to bring deeply engrained assumptions to the fore in order to understand how those types of assumptions inform our reasoning. Hooks' and

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[90] Sanders, Maria and Moulenbelt, Jason. "Defining Critical Thinking: How far Have We Come?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 26:1 Spring, 2011. p.43. Print.
[91] Brookfield, Stephen. "What is Critical Thinking?" p.14 (http://www.stephenbrookfield.com/Dr._Stephen_D._Brookfield/Articles_and_Interviews_files/Ch%201% 20What%20is%20Critical%20Thinking.pdf). Internet.
[92] *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1987. p.15. Print.

Brookfield's shared concern for the effects of these kinds of assumptions on reasoning is one of the strongest connections between their work.

The third aspect of Brookfield's critical thinking definition is reflective learning. For Brookfield, reflective learning means that critical thinking "involves a process of internal examination brought on by some experience that allows the critical thinker to understand and appreciate a new understanding."[93] For Brookfield experience is an important point of departure for critical examination. In his definition, experience functions as the starting point of personal reflection and the way by which we can appreciate the products of personal reflection. In much the same way that Dewey and hooks argue that the connections between experience and subject matter imbue subject matter with meaning, Brookfield argues that experience allows us to appreciate new perspectives that come from critical engagement. Again, like Dewey and hooks, Brookfield claims that experience is the lens through which we can better understand subject matter. The connections that Brookfield makes between experience, understanding and meaning represent much of what hooks claims is important to the aim and process of critical thinking. So although Brookfield's definition is somewhat limited because it is context-specific (in that comparison and criticism across discipline boundaries are difficult when a common understanding of critical thinking is absent), his definition of critical thinking comes closer to what hooks advocates than the other two context-specific definitions.

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[93] Sanders, Maria and Moulenbelt, Jason. "Defining Critical Thinking: How far Have We Come?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 26:1 Spring, 2011. p.43. Print.

Cross-discipline definitions are those definitions which assume that "critical thinking skills are not dependent on a particular context"[94] and are usually broadly defined so that the same basic conceptions of critical thinking can be maintained across a multitude of disciplines. Cross-discipline definitions do not imply that context is not important, but rather that there are certain components to a common understanding of critical thinking that can be applied across the disciplines. Unlike context-specific definitions, cross-discipline definitions offer an over-arching understanding of critical thinking, creating a common language through which to argue about differences in application across disciplines. When a common conception of critical thinking is present, scholars in different disciplines can challenge and critique the critical methodologies of other disciplines by challenging interpretations of the shared understanding. I will begin with Dewey's definition because of hooks' reliance on his 'progressive' educational model.

According to Dewey, critical thinking is "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that supports it, and the further conclusions which it tends."[95] Although Dewey's definition is ambiguous, the key components include an active engagement between thinker and subject matter, care in consideration of the problem at hand, and taking into account the possible consequences for conclusions drawn. From Dewey's vague pragmatic definition it quickly becomes clear that there are many ways to interpret each of the key components of Dewey's critical thinking. It is a good illustration of the need for scholars to interpret based on the projects and problems of their particular disciplines,

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[94] Sanders, Maria and Moulenbelt, Jason. "Defining Critical Thinking: How far Have We Come?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 26:1 Spring, 2011. p.44. Print.
[95] Ibid. p.39.

and how those interpretations can be challenged through comparing what each component means in different fields of study. Unlike Brookfield and hooks, Dewey does not offer explicit motivation for, or goal of, critical thinking in his definition. However, in Dewey's work on pedagogy he claims that the goal of critical thinking is for the thinker to become adaptive to novel situations, and for knowledge to gain meaning through its connection to experience.[96] The connection between Dewey and hooks' treatment of the role of experience in education and knowledge production has already been established in the previous chapter.[97]

There are two other important connections between Dewey and hooks' critical thinking definitions. The first is their shared commitment to democracy; they both argue that education should be guided by democratic values. The second is that critical thinking involves an attempt to discern the consequences of adopting a particular belief. In *How We Think*, Dewey further defines critical thinking as "a self-directed type of thought which analyzes a belief to see upon what it is based and to determine as well as possible what consequences will follow from that belief [that] includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality."[98] As 'progressive' educators, both Dewey and hooks argue that consequences are important. It is not clear from Dewey's definitions whether considering the consequences of adopting a particular belief are important for the individual, social progress more generally, or both. However, it can be reasonably assumed that his commitment to democracy is not limited to democratic values as the driving force of education, and that the consequences

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[96] Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1916. p.100. Print.
[97] Pp. 12-13
[98] Dewey, John. *How We Think*. Boston: D.C. Heath & Co, 1910. p.9. Print.

of belief and action are important to broader social action as well. The three main points of connection between Dewey's and hooks' definitions of critical thinking are the role of experience in critical thinking, their commitment to democratic values, and the consequences of beliefs and action for individuals and democratic social progress.

Another heavily influential cross-discipline definition is offered by Robert Ennis. For Ennis, critical thinking is "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do."[99] Like other broad definitions of critical thinking, Ennis' definition is vague. The key components to Ennis' definition seem to be that critical thinking is reasonable, purposive, and the results should help guide belief and action. To provide context through which to interpret his definition, Ennis suggests twelve important aspects of critical thinking, which include:

> 1) Grasping the meaning of a statement,
> 2) Judging whether there is ambiguity in a line of reasoning,
> 3) …whether certain statements contradict each other,
> 4)…a conclusion follows necessarily,
> 5) …a statement is specific enough,
> 6) …a statement is actually the application of a specific principle,
> 7) …an observation statement is reliable,
> 8) …an inductive conclusion is warranted,
> 9) …the problem has been identified,
> 10) …something is an assumption,
> 11) …a definition is adequate,
> 12) …a statement made by an alleged authority is acceptable.[100]

Adding these twelve aspects of critical thinking to his definition allow for more specific interpretations to be made by thinkers in varied disciplines. The twelve aspects give a more precise idea of what constitutes critical thinking without privileging the critical methodology of one discipline over another. Additional descriptions, like Ennis' twelve

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[99] Sanders, Maria and Moulenbelt, Jason. "Defining Critical Thinking: How far Have We Come?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 26:1 Spring, 2011. p.41. Print.
[100] Ibid.

aspects of critical thinking, help create a more explicit common language of critical thinking across disciplines and also help to give fuller meaning to the term critical thinking. Adding context to broad definitions, like Ennis has, helps reconnect critical thinking with definite meaning.

In addition to his twelve aspects of critical thinking, Ennis also outlines nine dispositions and abilities necessary for critical thinking. According to Ennis, a critical thinker must be able to:

1) Judge the credibility of sources,
2) Identify conclusions, reasons, and assumptions,
3) Judge the quality of an argument, including the acceptability of its reasons, assumptions, and evidence,
4) Develop and defend a position on an issue,
5) Ask appropriate clarifying questions,
6) Plan experiments and judge experimental designs,
7) Be open minded,
8) Try to be well informed, and
9) Draw conclusions when warranted, but with caution.[101]

Relying on his definition alone, there do not seem to be important overlaps between Ennis' definition and hooks' conception of critical thinking that could not be said of other cross-discipline definitions. However, there is one major connection between their projects if Ennis' nine dispositions and abilities of a good critical thinker are considered. Both Ennis and hooks argue that being open-minded is necessary for critical thinking.

It can be argued that for both Ennis and hooks, being open-minded is a key component of being reasonable, and is necessary if one is to adequately consider alternate perspectives. However, Ennis' motivation for considering alternate perspectives is different than hooks'. If we focus on Ennis' definition and added dispositions, considering alternate perspectives is central to being well-informed. We rely on

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[101] Sanders, Maria and Moulenbelt, Jason. "Defining Critical Thinking: How far Have We Come?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 26:1 Spring, 2011. p.41. Print.

knowledge provided by other people, and so for Ennis being open-minded can help expand the pool of resources a critical thinker might draw from to help solve a particular problem or make a decision. On the other hand, hooks argues that being open-minded is necessary both to expand a thinker's pool of intellectual resources, and as a basic requirement in support of diversity. Hooks sees the value of open-mindedness for the integrity of research and argument, and also as an important way to promote respect for diversity and include the perspectives of people that may not be considered 'experts' on the problem being investigated. The difference between Ennis and hooks' interpretation of open-mindedness becomes clearer if we consider some of Ennis' dispositions in conjunction with one another.

Although Ennis advocates open-mindedness, he also points to the importance of developing and defending a position on an issue (disposition 4). For Ennis, a critical thinker's ability to develop and defend a position is important because for any skill-based definition of critical thinking, practice developing and defending a position improves critical thinking skills. This is the point at which Ennis' and hooks' definitions of critical thinking depart.

Hooks argues that open-mindedness should be interpreted as radical openness. Radical openness is an attempt to withhold judgement. Hooks argues that if critical thinkers attempt to radically separate their own perspectives and positions from the problem or issue at hand, they will be able to mitigate the effects of the fundamental (and potentially socially harmful) assumptions on reasoning. Withholding our own perspectives when thinking critically also works to challenge what, from our own perspectives, we would normally consider relevant to a particular issue. According to

hooks, interpreting open-mindedness in this way allows us to shed some of our assumptions about how to engage with material, challenges the privilege afforded to dominant critical methodologies and works to counteract the tendency of students to think defensively about their own perspectives while being critical only of other people's perspectives. Both Ennis and hooks argue that being open-minded is an essential part of thinking critically, but their respective interpretations, and the role of open-mindedness in critical thinking are very different.

Finally, Richard Paul's definition of critical thinking is the closest to hooks' practical wisdom. For Paul, there are two forms of critical thinking; 'weak sense' and 'strong sense' critical thinking. According to Paul, 'weak' critical thinking is atomistic[102], and assumes that critical thinking can be taught "as a battery of technical skills which can be mastered more or less one-by-one…"[103] For Paul, critical thinking in a 'weak sense' represents many of the current practices of teaching critical thinking. Paul criticizes skill-based critical thinking classes that focus on teaching different fallacies and other skills of argument through abstracted and simplified examples. This is because, according to Paul, the products of 'weak' critical thinking reflect the tendency of students to use critical thinking skills to protect their own perspectives and conclusions instead of challenging the assumptions they make. Because of this, Paul argues that teaching critical thinking in a 'weak sense' does little to mitigate problems of self-deception, and often

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[102] Paul, Richard. "Teaching Critical Thinking in the "Strong" Sense: A Focus on Self-Deception, World Views, and a Dialectical Mode of Analysis." *Informal Logic.* Windsor, ON. 4:2 (1981): p.3. Print.
[103] Ibid.

leads students to use their critical skills against arguments that they have already rejected.[104]

On the other hand, 'strong sense' critical thinking is "disciplined, self-directed thinking which exemplifies the perfections of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thought"[105] which actively takes into account the interests of diverse persons or groups. Critical thinking in the 'strong sense' teaches students to assess arguments or claims in relation to other arguments because, according to Paul, it is only when counter arguments about the same issue are raised against each other that the points of conflict can be rationally argued over or through. The distinction Paul makes between 'weak' and 'strong' sense critical thinking does not imply that 'weak' critical thinking is not valuable. One advantage to teaching critical thinking in the 'weak' sense is that students get clear and unambiguous training in assessing arguments, however, Paul argues this type of training does little to aid students in assessing complex arguments (especially arguments which are not presented in "textbook" language or structure).

Paul's two-part classification comes out of his concern that by the time students are exposed to critical thinking in a formal way, many of their prejudices and biases have already been largely established. He argues that in 'weak' critical thinking there is nothing inherent in the critical engagement that would force one to be critical of his or her own viewpoints and perspectives in the same way that engagement in collective or collaborative thinking does. This concern does not prompt Paul to claim that 'weak' critical thinking, or any other definition of critical thinking is useless. Instead, he actively urges critical thinkers to appreciate the value of considering many different

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[104] Sanders, Maria and Moulenbelt, Jason. "Defining Critical Thinking: How far Have We Come?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 26:1 Spring, 2011. p.43. Print.
[105] Ibid. p.42.

definitions of critical thinking. He does this for two main reasons. The first reason is to ensure that insight into the various dimensions of critical thinking that alternative definitions highlight is maintained, and the second is "to help oneself escape the limitations of any given definition."[106]

Paul's conception of 'strong' critical thinking and hook's practical wisdom overlap in three important ways. First, like Brookfield and hooks, Paul focuses on the impact that assumptions based on dominant ideologies have on reasoning. All three of these scholars advocate "assumption hunting" as a necessary and primary part of critical thinking. They do so because all three understand the importance of recognizing and challenging assumptions in the search for truth, as well as how products of critical thinking informed by these assumptions can negatively affect the human experience and social progress on a larger scale. Hooks, Brookfield, and Paul all draw attention to the specific assumptions (capitalist, white supremacist, heterosexist, patriarchal, etc.) which are of primary concern to critical pedagogues and work to enmesh both the processes and results of critical thinking within every-day human experience.

The second connection between hooks' and Paul's conception of critical thinking is the role that collaboration plays. For hooks, the most engaged and rewarding critical thinking is done with other people. Paul states explicitly that 'strong' critical thinking relies on collaborative efforts, like reasoning through problems in groups, to ensure that we are respectful and responsible to the interests and experiences of others as they relate to the issue at hand, and to ensure that as many potentially competing assumptions and perspectives can be raised to maintain the integrity of the critical thinking process. Like

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[106] Sanders, Maria and Moulenbelt, Jason. "Defining Critical Thinking: How far Have We Come?" *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 26:1 Spring, 2011. p.43. Print.

Paul, hooks contends that collaborative critical thinking is essential to the integrity of critical thinking because sharing different experiences and perspectives can help determine what is relevant to a given issue, and help develop a compassionate and morally sensitive disposition in critical thinkers.

The last important point of connection between hooks' and Paul's conceptions of critical thinking is their evaluation of other definitions as important to critical thinking. As mentioned above, Paul argues that working with many definitions of critical thinking can help to ensure that the various dimensions of critical thinking are adequately represented, as well as help the critical thinker identify and overcome the limitations of each definition. I argue that hooks' goal is similar, though perhaps more extreme.

In my attempt to situate hook's practical wisdom within a philosophical understanding of critical thinking, it became clear to me that much of her project involves representing the varied interests of critical thinking and critical pedagogy. I argued that hooks' practical wisdom straddles the boundaries between critical thinking and critical pedagogy in important ways. Her inclusion of critical thinking scholarship and her reliance on Dewey's work in exploring the connections between knowledge and experience, as well as her insistence on the importance of certain critical dispositions and abilities (open-mindedness and the ability to recognize assumptions) makes hooks' work adequately representative of the aims of critical thinking. On the other hand, her commitment to democratic values and social progress, as well as her insistence that standards of adequacy in critical thinking must be challenged represents the concerns of many critical pedagogues who claim that the current North American educational models assume and promote harmful interpretations of dominant values. Also, the common

features between hooks' practical wisdom and *both* context-specific and cross-discipline definitions of critical thinking show that, like Paul, hooks acknowledges the importance of competing definitions for integrity in critical thinking and education. I believe that this is hooks' most important contribution to critical thinking scholarship. Her attempts to bridge gaps between theory and practice, to include and see the value of differences, and to challenge the traditional boundaries between different conceptions of critical thinking make her approach to critical thinking interesting and valuable.

Hooks' practical wisdom relates strongly to many facets of both 'narrow' and 'broad' definitions of critical thinking. Despite the value of her approach, it remains unclear whether hooks' conception of critical thinking as practical wisdom is defensible. In the next chapter, I will attempt to flesh-out the requirements of a defensible definition of critical thinking in order to show that hooks' practical wisdom is indeed defensible, while highlighting the limitations of her approach and the implications for the practices of teaching critical thinking.

CHAPTER 3

Limitations and Successes of hooks' Practical Wisdom

In the previous two chapters I attempted to situate bell hooks' practical wisdom within a philosophical understanding of critical thinking; highlighting some of the most important aspects of her conception. In this chapter I will outline the minimum requirements of a philosophical conception of critical thinking, and flesh-out what I take to be hooks' most interesting contributions to the practices of teaching critical thinking, namely, collaboration, radical openness, and her use of narrative. I will begin by exploring whether hooks' practical wisdom meets the minimum requirements of a philosophical definition of critical thinking outlined by Sharon Bailin, Roland Case, Jerrold R. Coombs, and Leroi B. Daniels in "Conceptualizing Critical Thinking". I use this work to outline the minimum requirements of critical thinking over other works with more comprehensive accounts of critical thinking for two reasons. The first is that using a conception of critical thinking that accounts for a great deal of what we consider pertinent to critical thinking (like Ennis' critical thinking) does not show what is *minimally* required. The second reason builds off the first. Because hooks' work on critical thinking encompasses some aspects of critical pedagogy, and constructs critical thinking as practical wisdom, there are some aspects of a more comprehensive account that do not seem to be present in hooks' practical wisdom, so I am primarily interested in understanding whether her account meets the *minimum* requirements of what can be

considered critical thinking. I want to understand whether her conception of critical thinking meets the minimum requirements because I consider much of hooks' approach valuable to scholarship on critical thinking, but am hesitant to support the changes she promotes to teaching practices of critical thinking before understanding how far her project can be taken. If hooks' practical wisdom does not meet the minimum requirements of a definition of critical thinking, it may still be reasonable to consider her project, but perhaps only as a limited criticism of the teaching practices that her account explicitly calls into question, or the processes required for critical thinking which she explicitly names. On the other hand, if hooks' practical wisdom meets the minimum requirements of a philosophical conception of critical thinking, which I argue her conception does, it is reasonable to consider and perhaps adopt, some of her suggested changes to current practices of teaching critical thinking, and to use her conception to criticize critical thinking scholarship more broadly. I rely on philosophical standards over standards found in other disciplines because of the breadth and rigour of philosophical scholarship on critical thinking, and because of the tendency for "stand-alone" critical thinking classes to be offered by philosophy departments. Because of these two factors, philosophical standards of critical thinking are widely used and account for much of what is commonly understood as critical thinking, and so it is important to understand whether hooks' conception meets the minimum requirements of a *philosophical* conception of critical thinking because challenging philosophical conceptions would likely challenge practices of critical thinking more broadly.

There are many ways to interpret even very similar definitions of critical thinking. In "Conceptualizing Critical Thinking: How Far Have We Come?", Bailin et al. argue

that differences between definitions of critical thinking emerge when abstract definitions are made concrete;[107] when they inform the practices of teaching and engaging in critical thinking. Some of these differences include their emphasis on "the range of activities [theorists] regard as falling within its ambit, the emphasis they give to various aspects of critical thinking, and the kinds of activities they see as relevant to learning how to think critically."[108] They also rightly point out that differences arise when trying to agree which emphases, and therefore which practices, are more effective in teaching students to think critically. Due to the broad scope and vague definitions of critical thinking, it is easy to see why one single definition cannot be held as the correct definition of critical thinking. Instead, considering what each definition emphasizes as important to critical thinking adds more to the picture of what we value as activities of critical thinking, and also adds to the possible scope of intellectual resources we can draw upon to engage in critical thinking.

According to Bailin et al., a definition that meets the minimum requirements of critical thinking must, at least in broad strokes, cover much of the common sense understandings of critical thinking. Instead of defining common sense understandings of critical thinking by showing what it is not – musing, daydreaming, etc. – Bailin et al. suggest that there are three core features of critical thinking, which is to say that most educators would, despite other differences, agree that any definition of critical thinking worthy of the name would have at *least* the following three features.

[107] Bailin, Sharon, et al. "Conceptualizing Critical Thinking" *J. Curriculum Studies*. 31:3 (1999): p.286. Print.
[108] Ibid.

The first feature is that critical thinking must be thinking with a goal in mind.[109] The purpose or aim of critical thinking could be to answer a specific question, resolve an issue, make a decision, and so forth. However, thinking that has a purpose or goal is not, in itself, necessarily critical thinking. In order to ensure that purposive thinking can be counted as critical thinking, Bailin et al. argue that standards must be met.

Therefore, the second feature of a philosophical definition of critical thinking relates to standards of adequacy. Bailin et al. caution that without standards of adequacy, which are understood and met by the thinker, such as the ability to recognize faulty arguments, hasty assumptions, and assertions made with no evidence, it would be hard to claim that purposive thinking is critical. According to Bailin et al., without standards of adequacy it is difficult to tell whether the products of thinking are reasonable, or superficial or careless.[110]

The third necessary feature of a philosophical definition of critical thinking is that the standards of adequacy must be met, to whatever degree, intentionally. If a person engaged in thinking happened to fulfill the standards of adequacy accidentally, if they were to stumble upon an acceptably reasonable or sufficiently critical answer to a question, not because of their endeavour to fulfill the standards, it would be hard to call his or her thinking critical.

If Bailin et al. are correct, the preceding three features of critical thinking definitions give a good starting place to better understand to what degree hooks' characterization of critical thinking as practical wisdom meets these three basic

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[109] Bailin, Sharon, et al. "Conceptualizing Critical Thinking" *J. Curriculum Studies.* 31:3 (1999): p.286. Print.
[110] Ibid. p.287

requirements. If we take the condensed conception of hooks' practical wisdom that I constructed in the first chapter,

purposive, creative, responsible, interdependent, and careful reflection (and self-reflection) which, to the greatest degree possible, would be free from patriarchal, white-supremacist, homophobic, and capitalist assumptions, and starts from considering the effects of a belief or decision on the real life experiences of people whose lives would be affected by the outcomes of a particular belief or action,

as adequately representative of her conception, we can begin to investigate whether hooks' conception meets the minimum requirements, i.e., does hooks' practical wisdom satisfy the three basic criterion of a philosophical definition of critical thinking offered by Bailin et al.? The first criterion is that critical thinking must be thinking with a goal in mind. Both critical thinking and critical pedagogy share this characteristic, so although the goal of hooks' practical wisdom seems to be split between the aims of critical thinking and critical pedagogy ('truth-seeking' and promoting democratic social progress, respectively), hooks' practical wisdom is goal-oriented.

The second requirement of a philosophical definition of critical thinking is that there must be standards of adequacy against which the adequacy of thinking can be judged. This requirement is the most problematic for hooks' conception of critical thinking. Hooks focuses on the role that assumptions play in reasoning, but includes little in terms of standards of adequacy. Because critical thinking for hooks is largely focused on exposing assumptions, the standards of adequacy she does mention come through as collaboration, dialectical thinking, and self-reflection aimed at exposing harmful assumptions. Given the scope and detail offered by other definitions of critical thinking (especially cross-discipline definitions) with regard to standards of adequacy, it is hard, at first glance, to claim hooks' practical wisdom accounts for a sufficient quality or variety

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of standards. However, if the role of assumptions in reasoning and standards of adequacy is explored, hooks' critical thinking as exposing and challenging assumptions can be argued to satisfy the minimum requirements. As mentioned in the previous two chapters, feminist standpoint theorists are concerned with challenging the contexts of discovery in science[111], and critical pedagogues are concerned with exposing and challenging the critical methodologies employed by different disciplines. These two concerns represent much of what hooks seeks to do with her emphasis on the role of assumptions in reasoning.

For hooks, the inability to recognize (or challenge) assumptions informed by dominant ideologies constitute much of what is wrong with thinking. According to hooks, these kinds of assumptions can inform all critical methodologies, and so it makes little sense for her to offer standards of adequacy specific to a discipline, or even standards of adequacy more broadly construed (as Ennis does). Rather, standards of adequacy for hooks necessarily involve exposing the assumptions that support different critical methodologies, and so the standards of adequacy proposed by hooks do not go beyond a student's ability to recognize assumptions and reason through their implications (both for the problem at hand, and the broader social implications). It could be argued that, according to hooks, the ability to expose and challenge these kinds of assumptions are more fundamental to critical thinking than other standards of adequacy, because these types of assumptions are the underlying support for applying and interpreting standards of adequacy in different ways. More clearly, for hooks all standards of adequacy are

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[111] Challenging the contexts of discovery in the natural sciences was a starting point for much of the work done in standpoint theory, however the application of a standpoint 'logic of inquiry' has spread to many types of critical investigations, including those in the social sciences.

subject to the same scrutiny (with respect to the assumptions they rely on) as the products of critical thinking.

Although I agree with hooks that the ability to recognize assumptions is the most important standard against which to measure sufficiently critical thinking, there are limitations to her exclusive focus on the role of assumptions in reasoning. The first of which is that a student's ability to recognize these kinds of assumptions and their implications for reasoning require a very specific kind of knowledge, usually associated with the social sciences. Therefore, students in the physical sciences may not be exposed to the kinds of background knowledge necessary to make recognizing these kinds of assumptions easier. Social sciences tend to focus more on the relationships between power and knowledge, and students in the physical sciences are often not required to engage with the problems of their disciplines from social standpoints. However, one could argue that regardless of discipline, all students learn *some* form of critical thinking, and so hooks is not advocating additional training in critical thinking, but training that primarily highlights the connections between knowledge and the social contexts out of which knowledge is created.

It seems clear to me that her motivation for privileging critical methodologies found in social sciences is because of her unqualified reliance on democratic ideals as the proper driving force of critical thinking education. If hooks is advocating training in specifically democratic critical thinking aimed at exposing assumptions (especially those informed by dominant ideologies), she needs to make clear some of the assumptions in support of her own reasoning; specifically, assumptions informed by democratic ideals. Like hooks, Stephen Brookfield emphasizes the role of assumptions in reasoning,

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especially assumptions informed by dominant ideologies. In his brief list of dominant ideologies he includes patriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, heterosexism, *and* democracy. [112] Curiously, hooks' list is nearly identical to Brookfield's, with one exception; democracy. [113] Being explicit about assumptions is an integral part of her conception of critical thinking, and the only apparent standard of adequacy she argues for, yet her own assumptions about democracy are not offered to the reader.

The third requirement of a defensible definition of critical thinking is that the standards of adequacy must be met, to whatever degree possible, intentionally. With many standards of adequacy, it can be hard to recognize whether students meet them intentionally or not. Consider the following example:

A: Smoking is bad for you, ya know.

B: You smoke!

A: Just because I smoke doesn't mean it's not bad for you.

What at first may appear to be A's intentional recognition and rejection of fallacious reasoning (in this case an instance of *ad hominem*), could instead be a result of trial and error. Perhaps A has had similar arguments with others, tried a variety of responses to her fellow arguers' objections, and found this to be the strongest based on B's inability to respond. There are many ways that we get 'training' in how to argue, but it is not always clear from arguments themselves what type of training the arguers have had, what kind of reasoning processes arguers engage in, or whether sufficiently critical responses are a product of intentional engagement with standards of adequacy.

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[112] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.105. Print.
[113] Brookfield, Stephen. "What is Critical Thinking?" p.6
(http://www.stephenbrookfield.com/Dr._Stephen_D._Brookfield/Articles_and_Interviews_files/Ch%201%20What%20is%20Critical%20Thinking.pdf). Internet.

On the other hand, when standards of adequacy are focused on recognizing assumptions and understanding their role in reasoning, it is more often indicative of an arguer's intentional engagement with standards of adequacy. For hooks, assumptions are the foundation of arguments. They are the silent informants of perspectives that shape how arguments are constructed, and often times, why arguments are given. To expose and challenge the assumptions on which arguments are founded, even informally, indicates an engagement in critical thinking. Consider the following example:

A: You know, you should really leave those seats open for elderly people or people with disabilities.

B: Just because I am young, doesn't mean that I don't have a disability.

In this example, B rightly points out that A is making an assumption based on B's age; namely, that young people are not disabled. What B's response indicates is that B has heard A's argument, has identified a flawed assumption, and challenges the strength of A's argument in light of that assumption. While both of the above examples are simplistic, I argue that instances in which assumptions in arguments are exposed and challenged signify an intentional engagement in critical thinking that cannot be said of other many other standards of adequacy.

Although hook's practical wisdom meets all three minimum requirements of a philosophical conception of critical thinking, her account is limited for two reasons. The first is that the ability to recognize assumptions is the only standard of adequacy explicitly addressed by hooks. Because she does not flesh-out the connections between her reliance on democratic ideals, and the importance of "assumption hunting" in critical thinking, she leaves important assumptions in her own reasoning obscure.

So far I have attempted to situate hooks' practical wisdom against current ideals and practices of teaching, among other interpretations of practical wisdom, and against broad and narrow definitions of critical thinking. I would like to turn now to a discussion of the limitations of hooks' approach, as well as some of the important contributions hooks has made to scholarship on critical thinking.

Limitations and Successes of Practical Wisdom

Reform to the practices of teaching is of central importance to hooks. In *Teaching to Transgress,* she claims that it is "crucial that critical thinkers who want to change our teaching practices talk to one another, collaborate in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention."[114] In the following two sections I will explain what I consider to be hooks' most important contributions to critical thinking scholarship. I believe that her focus on the role of collaboration in critical thinking in conjunction with a disposition of being radically open, and hooks' use of narrative to teach critical thinking are the most valuable practices she suggests. I will begin by discussing the role of collaboration in critical thinking, first as a standard of adequacy, then as a practice of teaching. Second, I will discuss how considering hooks' 'radical openness' alongside collaboration allows hooks' 'type' of collaboration to go beyond the current role and value of collaboration in current philosophical scholarship on critical thinking. Third, I will discuss the role of narrative and the value of vernacular to teach critical thinking in order to better understand some of the ways in which narrative can

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[114] hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. p.129. Print.

help build engaged learning communities and mitigate the difficulties in applying critical thinking skills to "real-life" contexts. My aim in the following discussion is to argue for the importance of hooks' conception of collaboration in critical thinking, and to promote both collaboration and the use of narrative as effective pedagogical tools.

hooks on Collaboration

For hooks, the role of collaboration in critical thinking is not limited to teaching; collaboration is an important part of any endeavour to think critically. She considers collaboration as the practice that will "most effectively enable everyone to dialogue together, to create a new language of community and partnership."[115]   Consequently, collaboration can help students identify personal biases, and give students practice in considering other relevant perspectives. There are two main aspects to collaboration in hooks' account. She uses collaboration as a standard of adequacy vital to democratic engagement with ideas, and as a pedagogical tool. I will first discuss collaboration as a standard of adequacy.

Within academic settings, there are many different types of collaboration that reflect the interdependent aspect of critical thinking. Collaborations happen between faculty members, between faculty and administrators, among students during group projects, and during the peer review process, to name a few. An example of seemingly effective collaboration in critical thinking scholarship is the American Philosophical Association Expert Consensus Definition of critical thinking. Over the course of six rounds of deliberation, 46 experts in critical thinking shared their respective interests and

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[115] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.41. Print.

concerns, and arrived at a comprehensive definition that seems to address a wider array of critical thinking skills, abilities, and dispositions than does any other widely-used definition. The panel of experts found that critical thinking involves,

> …purposeful, self-regulatory judgments which result in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which judgment is based… The ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit.[116]

Along with these requirements of critical thinking, the panel also provided a list of cognitive skills and sub-skills/dispositions necessary for critical thinking which include: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. The extent of the collaboration needed to bring together the diverse interests of 46 experts from different disciplines[117] should not be underestimated. However effective this definition is in representing the diverse interests of experts in critical thinking, for hooks, this type of collaboration does not sufficiently critical.

For hooks, collaborations which best develop and exercise critical thinking skills are collaborations which happen across boundaries of race, sex, and class.[118] Collaborating with thinkers from diverse social locations is essential for critical thinking and, according to hooks, "essential for those of us who want to move beyond one-dimensional ways of thinking, being, and living."[119] The APA's Expert Consensus

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[116] Facione, Peter, A. "Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction" *The California Academic Press*, Millbrae, CA. 1990. p.2. Print.
[117] The disciplines represented were Philosophy (52%), Education (22%), Social Sciences (20%), and Physical Sciences (6%).
[118] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.39. Print.
[119] Ibid. p.37

definition does not represent the type of collaboration hooks advocates for a few reasons, two of which I will discuss.

First, out of the 46 experts who participated in this endeavour, all are considered experts in their fields. While the APA's Expert Consensus definition represents many of the differences in critical thinking scholarship, for hooks, this type of collaboration does not adequately represent conceptions of critical thinking held by non-experts. Earlier this year, when presenting a paper on the difficulties of reasoning through narratives as part of a fellowship, I was asked a question from a professor in the audience challenging the value of non-expert opinion when engaging in collaborative critical thinking. By the end of the paper, my argument was that there exists a serious need, and obligation, to collaborate across social boundaries when attempting to think critically. The professor who asked me to explain the value of input from non-experts seemed to assume that this was a simple question (I assume this based on his direct wording and frank tone). For me, it was not a simple question. Having been a post-secondary student for ten years now, I rely heavily on the expert opinion of my professors for feedback and help, both in my research and my professional development. I have been trained to emulate the habits of the experts in my field, and with that, comes a certain faith in the soundness of their advice and knowledge. I do not think that there is anything overtly wrong with this. However, when asked about the value of non-expert input in critical thinking, I was forced to reflect on the value of my own ideas and suggestions in any given situation in direct relation to the contribution of experts in my field. My answer was that considering or relying on expert testimony is very important when trying to decide what to believe or do, but that there remained room, in the struggle to solve a problem, or answer a question,

for input from non-experts. I argued that, even if the contributions from non-experts only shed light on a small facet of an issue, that facet was still valuable. At the time, my answer felt like lip-service. It was not until I started to think about why people are considered experts that my answer began to feel sincere.

If I were asked the question again, I would argue that there is obvious value in expert opinion, but that care must be taken in deciding who is an expert and for what reason. The ability to judge the credibility of sources (including expert testimony) is central to many conceptions of critical thinking, and the standards by which experts can be judged as such are usually clear. That being said, there is little guidance with respect to navigating the connections between expert status and indoctrination in the values of the disciplines of which they are a part. Most experts are recognized as such because of their familiarity with, and ability to navigate their respective canons. Often experts are those people who can best recognize the pertinent problems in their respective fields, and bring together past investigations with suggestions for future work. In short, experts play a large part in setting the research agendas for their given field of study. Given these types of criteria, I began to question the extent to which experts in any field can have a pervasively critical perspective of their own discipline. More clearly, if the research agendas of even the most critical scholars in a given field are set by the discipline (by the simple fact that there are certain types of problems that each discipline deals with, and to be an expert in any field you must be doing research recognizable as within the purview of that discipline), the types of research that experts do are, to varying degrees, informed by some of the same assumptions of their discipline.[120] These are often the same socially

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[120] A robust explanation of this concern can be found in: Goldman, Alvin I. *Knowledge in a Social World*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. Print.

harmful assumptions that make critical pedagogy and the movement of democratic education necessary.

Given this, I argue that the research conducted by experts in any given field is informed by the critical methodologies of their field, and as such, expert input is often a valuable resource in solving the issue at hand, but reliance on expert testimony must be tempered by a critical investigation of other non-expert perspectives that may challenge whether the research questions asked are the right kinds of questions. When expert opinion is not challenged by people outside the circle of experts, or by people with radically different interests, the strength of the collaboration is less than ideal. So while input from non-experts may seem irrelevant to a given issue, it is often collaborations between experts and non-experts that move research in different and valuable directions, and help to reconnect academic pursuits with their real-life applications.

The second limitation of the APA's collaborative effort is the fact that only three of the experts were women.[121] For hooks, collaborations that do not include people from radically different social locations lack the diversity in perspectives necessary to challenge the potentially similar assumptions made by people who inhabit similar social locations. Inclusion is a central value in democratic education, and continuing efforts to include diverse peoples in collaborations are reflective of a commitment to promote and maintain democracy. So for hooks, the function of collaboration as a standard of adequacy is to ensure that harmful assumptions are exposed and challenged, that critical thinkers are careful and democratic in their research, and to expand the intellectual resources available to thinkers through being exposed to various view-points. Despite the

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[121] The three women experts were Brooke Noel Moore, Anita Silvers, and carol Tucker. Facione, Peter, A. "Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction" *The California Academic Press*, Millbrae, CA. 1990. p.6. Print.

importance of collaboration as a standard of adequacy for hooks, there are some

drawbacks to relying on collaboration for critical thinking.

The first limitation of hooks' collaboration is that it can be hard to tell which

perspectives are relevant to a given problem. In order to recognize the relevant

perspectives, hooks argues that we must seek collaboration across social, economic,

political, and racial differences,[122] however she does not offer further guidance in how to

select appropriate partners for collaboration. There seem to be two main options

available to those who would like to engage in sufficiently[123] critical collaborations

according to hooks' requirements:

1) A critical thinker could seek out people that seem to be sufficiently different from them with regard to social status, political views, race, sex, economic status, and other identity-constituting markers. However, the assumption that persons who inhabit even radically different social locations will have radically different perspectives does not always hold.
2) A critical thinker could collaborate with as many people as possible to ensure that as many relevant perspectives as possible are represented. While this option seems to be the best way to ensure diligence in considering other perspectives and care in collecting all relevant information, collaboration of this sort can significantly slow the process of critical thinking.

While there does not seem to be a remedy for this consequence, it is important to keep in

mind that conclusions drawn from exercises in critical thinking should not be made in

haste no matter which critical methodology is employed. Rather, conclusions should be

drawn with caution, and from the widest possible range of intellectual resources.

The second limitation of hooks' collaboration is that it can only be carried out in

certain contexts. There are often times when a decision has to be made under time

constraints, or when access to a variety of perspectives is limited. Although hooks does

not treat this problem explicitly, there are conceptions of critical thinking similar to hers

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[122] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.39. Print.
[123] According to hooks' characterization of collaboration.

that do. In *Teaching Critical Thinking in the "Strong" Sense: A Focus On Self-Deception, World Views, and a Dialectical Mode of Analysis,* Richard Paul suggests that there are two kinds of critical thinking; "weak" sense and "strong" sense critical thinking. Paul argues that collaboration is necessary in "strong" sense critical thinking because collaboration helps students "develop reasoning skills precisely in those areas where he [or she] is most likely to have egocentric and sociocentric biases."[124] The role of collaboration in exposing biases and assumptions is similar in both hooks' and Paul's conceptions of critical thinking. Perhaps Paul's "weak" sense critical thinking can offer some solutions for the tensions identified in hooks' account.

Paul argues that students engage in "weak" sense critical thinking when they reason without considering other perspectives, or "world-views", or when they do not assess arguments in relation to other relevant arguments. The divide between "weak" and "strong" sense critical thinking in Paul's account reflects the difference in intellectual resources available to the thinker. So, while hooks does not directly address whether thinking done in isolation is indeed a "weaker" form of critical thinking, it is clear she accepts that there may be times when fewer intellectual resources will be available.

In hooks' account, an example of critical thinking done in isolation could be self-reflection in light of a new belief or perspective being adopted. Given the parallels between standards of adequacy in hooks' and Paul's accounts (specifically, the role of collaboration in exposing harmful assumptions), there seem to be two possible conclusions to be drawn with regard to critical thinking done in isolation. One could either, based on the striking parallels in their accounts of critical thinking, argue that

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[124] Paul, Richard. "Teaching Critical Thinking in the "Strong" Sense: A Focus on Self-Deception, World Views, and a Dialectical Mode of Analysis." *Informal Logic.* Windsor, ON. 4:2 (1981): p.5. Print.

hooks would consider thinking done in isolation as a sort of "weak" critical thinking, or, on the other hand, that thinking done in isolation is not sufficiently critical. Both claims seem plausible, however hooks' insistence on self-reflection as necessary for critical thinking, makes the first option more likely. To strengthen her account, explicit treatment of the strength of critical thinking done in isolation is necessary.

With respect to collaboration as a pedagogical tool, hooks claims that there are many benefits. For hooks, teaching students to reason collaboratively is central to the success of her approach to critical thinking, and she argues that it is through collaboration that students are best able to investigate their own perspectives, and the perspectives of others. Simply put, collaboration is a method of instruction in which students at various levels of performance, who inhabit different social locations reason together toward a common goal. In this type of instruction, students are encouraged to give supporting reasons for conclusions they draw, or perspectives they hold so that the relevance of each perspective to the issue at hand can be assessed (this can happen formally, by employing critical methodologies, or informally, through discussion that is not guided by a particular method of inquiry). Through collaborative learning, students can share responsibility for the group's reasoning process and for the conclusions drawn, and are exposed to different perspectives and arguments that relate to the issue at hand.

Another benefit to collaborative learning is that collaboration develops students' abilities to recognize what is at stake for different people, especially when critically thinking about social issues. In *Teaching Critical Thinking in the "Strong" Sense: A Focus On Self-Deception, World Views, and a Dialectical Mode of Analysis* Richard Paul argues that "any student studying critical thinking at the university level has a highly

developed belief system buttressed by deep-seated uncritical, egocentric and sociocentric habits of thought by which he interprets and processes his or her experience, whether academic or not, and places it into some larger perspective."[125] So for Paul, like hooks, a dialectical/dialogical approach to teaching critical thinking in which arguments are assessed in relation to counter-arguments and other perspectives is best. This is because collaborative learning allows students to develop a "clearer picture of the relationships between world-views, human interests, and what is at stake for those affected by a particular problem,"[126] rather than focusing solely on the argument or problem before them. So for Paul and hooks, collaborative learning promotes sensitivity to the relevance of other perspectives.

Although Paul's and hooks' accounts overlap considerably with respect to the role and value of collaboration in critical thinking, hooks goes beyond Paul's account of collaboration when we consider her insistence on radical openness. For hooks, radical openness is the ability to "set aside" our own perspectives and assumptions during collaborative efforts, and is guided by the democratic ideal of inclusion.[127] For hooks, "[a] radical commitment to openness maintains the integrity of the critical thinking process and its central role in education."[128] Hooks argues that a commitment to radical openness maintains integrity in critical thinking because a commitment to radical openness can help mitigate some of the reactions, both emotional and cognitive, that we have to claims made by others (usually from very different perspectives). Hooks

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[125] Paul, Richard. "Teaching Critical Thinking in the "Strong" Sense: A Focus on Self-Deception, World Views, and a Dialectical Mode of Analysis." *Informal Logic*. Windsor, ON. 4:2 (1981): p.3. Print.
[126] Ibid.
[127] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.10. Print.
[128] Ibid.

advocates a commitment to radical openness to promote discussion between world-views that may seem incompatible. In support of this claim, hooks argues that traditionally marginalized peoples *can* learn from sexist and racist people – people who operate from world-views that reinforce dominant systems of oppression – and while their sexism and racism should not be ignored or set apart from what they are saying, perhaps these differences should not be the focus of our critical engagement with what is being offered (2010, p.108). This does not mean that hooks downplays the negative implications of sexism, racism and other forms of oppression found either implicitly or explicitly in claims made by others, but that judgment has to be reserved so that possible connections can be explored that might otherwise be missed.

Radical openness is then the attempt to reserve judgment, to push past our conceptual frameworks as best we can to hear what others say more "deeply". In the practices of teaching, this may amount to something as simple as asking questions about what a student or teacher has offered *before* judging it against our own perspectives or reactions. Practicing radical openness works to mitigate potentially hasty dismissals of reasoning based on perspectives that are dramatically different than our own, and also works to fight against the tendency to hold our world-views as neutral or having the capacity to delegitimize the claims of other people on the basis that the claim does not appeal to our own experiences. A disposition of radical openness, more than merely open-mindedness, changes the ways in which critical thinkers relate to the world, and expands consideration of potentially relevant view-points in critical thinking endeavours; leaving a space open for subversive discussion aimed at freedom and pushing the boundaries of what can be considered academically relevant when we relax the

experience-based evaluative standards against which we may disqualify otherwise "reasonable" or epistemically useful offerings.

hooks, Feminism, and Narrative

Throughout her three books on pedagogy, hooks relies heavily on narrative and anecdotes to express her ideas. Although this strategy can work well to highlight the fact that from our own experiences we *are* able to learn, *teaching* critical thinking through narrative can be a cause for concern. While I do not intend to explore all of the possible challenges that the use of narrative brings to teaching critical thinking (as practical wisdom or otherwise), I think that it is important to briefly outline the benefits and problems of employing such a strategy, and in light of these issues, try to understand why she promotes narrative as an effective tool for teaching critical thinking.

Narrative has been described in some feminist circles, as having a 'redemptive' feature;[129] one that enables traditionally marginalized peoples to tell their own stories in their own ways. Hooks argues that the use of narrative allows students to make connections between the stories that we tell about ourselves and our world, and allows room for a greater degree of contextualization to bear upon the framing and understanding of subject matter, knowledge claims, arguments, and the implications of conclusions drawn from critical thinking.[130] There seem to be two main claims concerning narrative as a 'redemptive' form of communication. The first claim is that

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[129] Fulkerson, Richard. "Transcending our Conception of Argument in Light of Feminist Critiques" *Argumentation and Advocacy.* 32: Spring, 1996. p.203. Print.

[130] Concerning sharing stories, it is important to note that hooks argues that, "[i]t is often productive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material." hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. p.21. Print.

narrative is a 'feminine' mode of discourse. Thinking of narrative in this way, in relation to critical thinking, means that questions concerning the difference between the ways in which women and men speak, write, know, and argue are sometimes raised in order to investigate the degree to which women and other marginalized peoples may be either disadvantaged or excluded by traditional forms of research methodology and the ways in which formal and informal logics seek to assess the reasoning provided in formal and informal arguments.[131] There does not seem to be consensus within these discussions, as even those who would argue that narrative is a 'feminine' mode of discourse do not agree as to why. Women have been claimed to 'naturally' think and speak in non-linear and heavily contextualized ways (as opposed to the linear and abstract requirements of formal arguments), while some argue that women, although not naturally 'narrative thinkers', have been socialized to identify with narratives. This is because there exist naturalized presumptions that women are emotional, rely heavily on experience and anecdotal evidence, and do not possess the rigor of thought needed to express complex ideas (specifically arguments) explicitly. To act in accordance with these types of naturalized presumptions becomes part of the inheritance of gender performativity; becoming socialized as 'properly feminine' means that one must become, to varying degrees, comfortable with expressing herself in these ways.

Although there is no consensus on whether certain people are more comfortable expressing themselves through narrative, or why, hooks claims that expression through

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[131] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, A. MacKinnon, Pamela Annas, and many more. A brief explanation of this can be found in Anges Verbiest's "Woman and the Gift of Reason" in which she argues that, "[c]anons are characterized by what they exclude, so even a modest question about non-canonical reasoning by women points [in] the direction of exclusion from the formal and abstract realms of logic and the rational. The concept of 'rational' contained in logocentric discourses sets up an 'irrational' as its opposite. This is the emotional, physical and intuitive, and it is invested in and understood as the province of women." Verbiest, Agnes. "Woman and the Gift of Reason." *Argumentation,* 9: pp.827-828. Print.

narrative *is* redemptive, and can create a heightened personal understanding between people, and promote compassion between members of learning environments. Much like what Nussbaum claims about the connection between *poeisis* and practical wisdom,[132] hooks argues that sharing personal stories between members of learning communities helps to develop a complex understanding of the history and perspective of the person sharing the story, and helps sensitize the audience to the experiences and interests of the sharer.[133] She also claims that as students become more aware of the interests and emotions of others through sharing personal stories, they also become aware of the connections that exist between their own experiences and the experiences of others.

Connecting stories told by others with our own stories can help students think critically in at least two ways. The first is that understanding the connections between our experiences and the experiences of others can help to highlight common values between members of learning communities, which in turn can help create trust between students and foster a disposition that promotes listening before judging (unfortunately, this is a benefit precisely because we often assume that people with similar values will have similar perspectives to our own which we already consider relevant to the issue at hand). The second is that understanding the *differences* between the perspectives of others and our own perspectives "eliminates the possibility that we can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators"[134] of the claims of others. Often, showing students differences in perspectives can help soften the tendency to assume that he or she is

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[132] Discussed in Chapter 1, p. 24
[133] hooks, bell. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. p.58. Print.
[134] hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. p.21. Print.

always right, and can help students understand that knowledge claims are often (if not always) arguable.

So although calling narrative 'redemptive' can raise concerns for scholars who connect expression through narrative with the problems of gender performativity, hooks insists that narrative is an important pedagogical tool. Sharing experiences through narrative not only helps to create compassionate bonds between members of learning communities, but also expands the number of possible consequences we consider when deciding what to believe or do, and enables students who are not comfortable, for whatever reason, expressing ideas within the confines of theory to contribute to the processes of knowledge production in their respective learning environments.

The second claim, that narrative is a more 'authentic' mode of expression, is largely, although not exclusively, based on the assumption that narrative allows for a greater amount of contextualization and particularity of experience in expression.[135] Even though an increase in contextualization does seem closer to lived experience than do formal arguments or abstracted theory; to claim outright that narrative allows for a degree of 'authenticity' rather than perhaps greater explanatory power, seems problematic. Lois McNay explores this problem in "Communitarians and Feminists: the Case of Narrative Identity". She claims that,

> While narrative is certainly a fundamental mode in which experience is rendered meaningful, care has to be taken not to elide altogether the distinction between narrative and lived experience. As Michael Bell puts it… 'narrative has to be a different kind of thing from lived temporality or there is no point in drawing any

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[135] Palczewski, Catherine Helen. "Special Issue: Argumentation and Feminisms." *Argumentation and Advocacy.* 32: Spring, 1996. p.162. Print., Meyer, Kevin, R. "Narrative Argumentation: Regarding Narrative as Argument and the Resulting Need for Developing Narrative Literacy Skills." (Student Paper submitted to the Argumentation and Forensics Division, National Communication Association Convention, San Diego, CA. 12, Print.), and McNay, L. "Communitarians and Feminists: the Case of Narrative Identity." *Literature and Theology*. 16.1 (2002): p.89. Print.

> analogy between them. The meaningfulness of the comparison depends on an implicit recognition of this difference even while it is being denied.[136]

The danger here is that experiences presented in narratives in order that the experience may be relayed to another as "how it happened", glosses over, and in some cases, covers over the difference between experience, and our interpretations and tellings of experiences.

Although the tendency to gloss over the difference between an experience and a story told about the experience is a real concern (especially when a narrative is used to delegitimize claims made by others), when stories are told in collaborative environments that allow interpretations to be discussed, this danger is mitigated. Hooks argues that collaborative learning environments allow students to tell stories, and have the stories retold to them to help develop "deep" listening skills. So when conflicts over different interpretations arise, students can reason through the arguments for adopting one interpretation over another, and have the added benefit of double-checking their interpretations against the intentions of the sharer. This type of dialectical learning allows students to learn how to share stories, how to listen, how to re-create stories or arguments, and how to justify their interpretations *while being sensitive* to the fact that arguments or stories provided by students in class reflect the interests of the person sharing, and can reveal what is at stake in the discussion of an issue for all involved.

The benefits of narrative as a pedagogical tool mentioned above are not exclusive to hooks' conception of critical thinking. As mentioned earlier, Nussbaum argues for the vital connection between narrative and our abilities to think critically, especially in practical matters. What sets hooks' account of the benefits of narrative as a pedagogical

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[136] McNay, L. "Communitarians and Feminists: the Case of Narrative Identity." *Literature and Theology*. 16.1 (2002): p.86. Print.

tool apart from other accounts, and what makes her reliance on narrative an interesting and important contribution to the philosophical scholarship in critical thinking, is her focus on the role of narrative in softening the divide between theory and practice, and her insistence on the use of vernacular.

Hooks argues that relying on narrative to teach critical thinking helps to break down the division between theory and practice.[137] Hooks claims that the divide between theory and practice devalues the role of narrative as a pedagogical tool, and softening the divide, and therefore including narrative and experience as a legitimate source of knowledge, will better enable social progress and help students connect the importance of subject matter with their everyday experiences. She claims that,

> [c]ritical reflection on contemporary production of feminist theory makes it apparent that the shift from early conceptualizations of feminist theory (which insisted that it was most vital when it encouraged and enabled feminist practice) begins to occur or at least becomes most obvious with the segregation and institutionalization of the feminist theorizing process in the academy, with the privileging of written feminist theory over oral narratives.[138]

According to hooks, critical thinking aimed at practical reasoning should be focused on employing both theory and narrative, without devaluing one or the other. She argues that there may be instances in which abstraction, or the use of theory to explain subject matter is necessary, but that teachers and students alike must carefully attend to the places where abstraction is necessary as opposed to exclusionary[139] to audiences that may not have the same level of sophistication or tacit knowledge. This is important in respect to more inclusive content, as mentioned above, but also in the practice of teaching people in ways that respect differences, and that engage students and teachers in the process of learning

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[137] The problems associated with the division between theory and practice according to hooks, are outlined in the first chapter of this thesis.

[138] hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. P.63. Print.

[139] Ibid. pp.63-64

from each other. For hooks this means including vernacular and not limiting legitimate expression to the boundaries of Standard English. [140] Hooks includes non-standard English as a legitimate method of communication which may help to facilitate a deeper understanding of the contexts of each speaker. [141] However, hooks cautions against actively translating what others are saying when they employ non-standard English. Instead she encourages the student employing vernacular to translate her offering for the rest of the class, highlighting the reasons why in that particular case the use of vernacular is preferable. Hooks argues that the use of Non-Standard English in classrooms creates instances in which we can learn from each other. [142] Collective, honest, and accessible discussion focused on inclusion - challenging the traditional views on what students and teachers are allowed to contribute - brings integrity to critical thinking, and encourages knowledge production in ways that have been traditionally excluded from education and practices of teaching critical thinking.

The practices of teaching critical thinking that hooks advocates, including, but not limited to collaboration, radical openness, narrative, and the use of vernacular, are important contributions to the philosophical scholarship on critical thinking, and can and *should* be considered as useful pedagogical tools either in conjunction with current practices, or as stand-alone practices when critical thinking is taught as a practice of freedom.

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[140] hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. p.171. Print.
[141] To illustrate this point, hooks uses the example of "[w]hen the slaves sang "nobody knows de trouble I see" their use of the word "nobody" adds a richer meaning than if they had used the phrase "no one," for it was the slave's *body* that was the concrete site of suffering." hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. p.170. Print.
[142] Ibid. pp.172, 174-175

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have attempted to situate hooks' practical wisdom within current philosophical conceptions of critical thinking. My aim was to explore the points of connection between hooks' practical wisdom and current philosophical conceptions of critical thinking to show the aims, limitations, and successes of hooks' project.

In the first chapter of this thesis I explored the points of connection between critical thinking, pedagogy, democracy, and feminist standpoint theories in hooks' work. I argued that hooks' main goals were to reorient the ideals of education toward democracy, and to challenge some of the current practices of teaching critical thinking to enable students to better engage with subject matter and make connections between theory and every day experiences. I argued that her criticisms of current ideals and practices of teaching were largely drawn from Paolo Freire's and John Dewey's work on education, and that her particular 'brand' of critical thinking, much like Freire's and Dewey's pedagogical projects, is aimed at democratic social progress.

In the first chapter I also explored the philosophical and social implications of the disjoint between theory and practice argued by hooks. Her focus on the divide between theory and practice speaks to a long history of abstraction in philosophy, and I agree with hooks that critical thinking scholarship and education generally, would benefit from a reinvigorated relationship between academia and 'the real world'.

At the end of the first chapter, I explored hooks' interpretation of practical wisdom by contrasting her work with three important conceptions of practical wisdom.

My aim was to better understand what hooks meant by practical wisdom, and make her interpretation more accessible to both philosophical and general audiences. The most important feature of hooks' conception of critical thinking raised in this section was the intimate relationship between critical thinking and ethics. Along with Martha Nussbaum, hooks' conception of practical wisdom aims to connect critical thinking with practical matters in ways that highlight the ethical implications for adopting beliefs and deciding how to act.

In the second chapter, I attempted to show to what degree hooks' version of practical wisdom represents the aims and methodologies of critical thinking and critical pedagogy. I argued that hooks' conception of critical thinking reflects the aims and concerns of both critical thinking and critical pedagogy, to varying degrees. I also argued that because hooks' practical wisdom shares certain aspects with both critical thinking and critical pedagogy scholarship, her project helps to relax the boundaries between the two, and also, to different degrees, shares in the limitations of both.

After making these connections clearer, I then explored some of the differences and similarities between hooks' practical wisdom and current definitions of critical thinking. My aim in this chapter was to show that although critical pedagogy and critical thinking appear to be sufficiently different to warrant separate treatment, there are considerable overlaps between the two, and that considering their aims in conjunction with each other can provide significant insight into the value of each. My aim in exploring these connections through hooks' conception of critical thinking was to show that hooks' conception represents some of the most important overlaps between the two, and is a valuable addition to the scholarship of critical thinking *and* critical pedagogy.

At the end of the second chapter, I argued hooks' conception of critical thinking represents different aspects of both context-specific and cross-discipline definitions of critical thinking. Again, the aim of this section was to further explain hooks' project, and to highlight the points of overlap between context-specific and cross-discipline definitions of critical thinking. I selected certain definitions of critical thinking, including definitions offered by Ennis, Paul, Kurfiss, Brookfield, and Dewey, to highlight different facets of her conception of critical thinking, and to point to the places where her conception needs to be more explicit or strengthened (particularly with respect to standards of adequacy). Perhaps further investigation into the points of connection between hooks' account and a wider array of current philosophical conceptions of critical thinking can inform a richer and more dynamic conception of critical thinking; better able to promote and maintain democracy and underscore the ethical implications of conclusions drawn by critical thinkers.

In the third chapter, I argued that her conception of critical thinking meets the minimum requirements of a philosophical definition of critical thinking. In comparing her conception of critical thinking to philosophical standards, I wanted to show two things. The first is that conceptions of critical thinking that are not explicitly philosophic can still translate to philosophic contexts to effectively critique definitions. Second, I wanted to show that the boundaries between disciplines and their respective critical methodologies are not as distinct as some of the literature would claim.

My hope is that situating hooks' practical wisdom has brought together the work of critical pedagogues and critical thinkers in ways that are accessible to both, and will

enable a transformation within education that reorients the values and goals of education toward democratic social progress.

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