Student and Teacher Perspectives on Choice Theory as Transformative Education: An Alternative Secondary School Context

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Abstract

Alternative education suffers from a bad reputation. Many people see these programs and schools as places where students who are considered to be "disruptive" or otherwise "deficient" in the eyes of mainstream education are sent to have their behaviour "corrected." Some teachers talk about the prospect of working in alternative education as career suicide. Although both of these perspectives may be true in some cases, alternative education as a whole should not be dismissed as a dead-end for students and teachers. Quite the opposite picture emerges at the alternative school that is the subject of this study. The researcher interviewed seven teachers and seven students for their perspectives on the transformative potential of a local option course based around Control Theory, a philosophy of self-help and institutional organization that was popularized by Dr. William Glasser. This study examines the role that Control Theory plays in creating the potential for positive personal change in both students and teachers in their own words. It also offers a view of how a school culture of positive transformation can be nurtured using the ideas of Control Theory. Students commented on the life-changing influence of being part of the school culture and teachers expressed a high level of job satisfaction and increased perceptions of happiness and personal growth through both being trained in Control Theory and by being immersed in the culture of the school. This information has the potential to inform administrators and teachers in both alternative and mainstream schools as to how to craft meaningful transformative experiences in their schools for both their students and their staff.

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Chapter One: Introduction

A Note On Terms

Throughout this document, I refer to the school site that will be the focus of my research as "The School." Any time that this phrase is used with capitalization, it is in reference to the research site. When the words "transformative" and "transformational" are used, they are to be understood specifically within the context of transformative education, which is discussed at length in both the introduction and literature review sections of this document. My use of the term "impacts" throughout the thesis is not related to program evaluation but represents the ways in which students and teachers at The School perceived their lives to be affected by learning Control Theory. The terms "Control Theory", "Perceptual Control Theory (PCT)" and "Choice Theory" are often used interchangeably throughout this thesis as in the context of The School they all refer to a hybrid of various theories based on PCT. The only exception in this thesis is in the discussion of William Powers' Perceptual Control Theory (PCT) in the introductory chapter. Throughout this particular section, the term refers specifically to Powers' theory and is not related to William Glasser's theory or any hybrids between the two.

A Prelude…

After two days of traveling across the Canadian prairies, I arrived at the research site on Friday, October 11, 2019 to make a short presentation to students and staff on what my study is all about and to ask for volunteers to participate. After giving the presentation, I had a discussion with the school principal who informed me that every staff member at the school was required by school policy to receive training in Perceptual Control Theory (PCT), one of the philosophies underpinning my study. Coincidentally, there were four new staff members who had just been hired within the past year and their training session was scheduled to take place one week after

my study was slated to be completed. The principal impressed upon me that it would be beneficial to my research for me to participate in this training so that I would have a more thorough understanding of not only the material but of the manner in which it is taught to the staff. I agreed and my name was added to the list of participants. This addendum to my fieldwork not only gave me the opportunity to explore another facet of my research topic but also allowed me to extend my window for conducting interviews by one week, which resulted in my being able to interview some students and alumni who would not have had a chance to speak with me otherwise.

The training course took place during a district-wide professional development weekend. The four-day session was attended by 11 other individuals. Four were staff at The School, two were teachers and one was an educational assistant from a small rural school nearby, one was from a local K-8 school. The class was rounded out with four employees of a local governmental organization that works with people with exceptionalities and myself.

This class was described to me as being “life changing” by a number of teachers at The School prior to my taking it. I was warned of the potential for emotional intensity and of the instructor being very demanding with regard to forcing participants to do difficult introspective work. These warnings were valid. Alongside presenting the information about Perceptual Control Theory, the session facilitator intensively applied the principles of the practice to real problems that participants were facing in their lives. These problems were at times very personal and I was surprised at the level of openness that participants, including myself brought to the session. I found that I was able to use these principles to address relationship problems in my life almost immediately.

By participating in this workshop, I was offered a glimpse of what both the teachers and the students experience in terms of being presented with a practical toolkit to help solve problems in their lives. Participation offered me an appreciation for both the feeling of connection and camaraderie that can exist within a group of people who are learning Control Theory and the trepidation involved with both personal introspection and the sharing of personal experiences with people I hardly knew. I believe that this experience gave me a richer perspective on the pedagogical approaches of *involvement* that were emphasized by the teachers and students in many of my interviews and also on the power of the direct practical application of the theory to my life that I would not have been able to get without participating. I bring this lens of understanding into my analysis and discussion of the interviews and in helping to piece together the interplay of transformative forces at work within the school's walls.

Introduction: Why Alternative Schools? Why Transformative Education?

Creating and maintaining an engaging learning atmosphere is important for all students, but extra consideration and support should be given to those students who are not engaged with mainstream school systems. According to Statistics Canada (2017), Canada's high school graduation rate in 2015 was 85%. The flip-side of this seemingly positive statistic, however, is the story of the remaining 15% of people who do not complete high school. It seems to go without saying that something about the way that these students experience school life is not fulfilling their needs (Jones, 2014). These statistics also say nothing of students who may attend and complete their schooling but who are disenfranchised from the school environment and not engaged in their learning. By grade 12, only 37% of Canadian students still feel engaged with school and that 98% of U.S. high school students consider school "boring" (Canadian Education Association, 2012).

In Canada, many school divisions address this disengagement by implementing a variety of types of alternative school programs in an attempt to help students who do not "fit in" to the traditional school model complete high school. These types of schools are of interest to me because of the unorthodox approaches that they often use to achieve this aim (such as Jones, 2014; Kaya & Ataman, 2016; Glasser, 1975/1991/1998; Glasser, 1991/1998; Glasser, 1992; Lagana-Riordan, 2010; Raywid, 1994; Raywid, 1999) and in the effectiveness of some of these approaches in achieving the goal of maintaining student engagement through graduation. A particularly unorthodox practice that I have been introduced to through experience is school-wide student and teacher awareness of William Glasser's Control Theory as part of initiation into a school's culture. *My research question asks: What are the perspectives of students and teachers of the intents and the transformational impacts of learning and practicing Control Theory in an alternative school?*

Alternative Schools as Positive Learning Environments

Based on my examination of the academic literature on alternative schools, it seems that the topic of alternative schools does not attract the same amount of attention as it once did. This is reflected in the fact that many of the articles I found date from the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's. I think that the models that alternative schools offer are very timely, however, not only because alternative education is currently expanding rapidly (Price, 2019) but because those who guide the aims of these schools often have the capacity and desire to embrace completely different approaches to the structuring of education. The flexibility of programs, philosophy, and the student-centred focus of many alternative school models seems to me to be ideally suited for this time of transition in human history where we are more connected with infinite amounts of

information while at the same time becoming disconnected from personal interactions with one another (Dyson, 2010).

Restructuring education is important in addressing the dissonance between students who continue to become disconnected from learning while nations and peoples are becoming more interdependent due to the rise of neoliberalism and the global economy (Au, 2010). Governments and institutions around the world are embracing new educational ideas in the 21st century, and we are faced with some problematic contradictions in the motivation behind these ideas (Bell, 2016). While most of these new ideas focus on the education system continuing to provide an able workforce to service the capitalist/corporatist economic framework in which we now live and thus ensure its growth (Au, 2010, Bowles & Gintis, 1975), we are faced with the fact that this very system is creating untenable problems for all life on Earth (Bell, 2016; Jickling, 2013; Klein, 2015). Schooling in our times is also suffering from a continuing trend toward student disengagement with the traditional methods of classroom teaching (McGee & Lin, 2017). I believe that alternative school models can contribute a great deal in the formation of transformations that could lead to more engaging learning not only for students in alternative programs but for all students.

Positioning Myself in Context of The School

Prior to describing The School, I believe that it is important to bracket, or *epoche* (as per Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), my experiences while working there. I will also to describe how these experiences stimulated my interest in exploring the factors that created what I perceived to be a positive working and learning environment at the school site. The transformative qualities that I observed within this school while I was employed there were the motivation for me to consider returning to university with the express intent of studying the culture I witnessed there.

A large part of my connection with the ideas, systems, and methods that I observed while working at The School comes from existing ideas I had developed long before I started working there. Many of the elements of The School including the focus on student mental wellness, student leadership, one-to-one student-teacher interactions, personalized instruction, and independent study reflected the existing concept of an "ideal school" that I had been thinking about since I was an undergraduate in education at the University of Alberta in 2003 and 2004. I have consciously worked to temper the enthusiasm that I feel for discovering that some of my long-held personal ideals were being enacted independent of me in the real world by obtaining verification from the principal through externally administered metrics that The School does indeed perform well relative to other schools in a number of realms (OurSCHOOL, 2015 - 2018). I have also informally discussed the positive attributes of The School with the principal and other teachers prior to my research and have had my observations confirmed as being true. In addition, I made a point of being aware of weaknesses and failures of The School and acknowledge the school's negative aspects as part of my discussion section in an attempt to balance my perceptions.

The School: A Background Based on my Experiences

The background information presented in this section is based on what I have been told about the school and have seen first-hand while employed there. I attempted to seek out as many of the original founders of the school as possible to ask them about their concept of what purpose the school was intended to serve in the first place and their recollections of any changes that may have happened over the years. This informal collection of background information was in addition to the data collection interviews that I carried out as described in the methodology section and serves to fill out the context in which the research took place. This allowed me to

provide more thick and rich description in my reporting and informed my methods of inquiry and analysis as well.

The research that I conducted for my thesis took place at a school that caters to at-risk, bullied, and marginalized students. From my observations while employed at the site, this includes, but is likely not limited to students from low income families, students of non-binary gender identities and sexual orientations, students from racial minority groups, students with psychological issues (depression, anxiety, autism, sleep disorders), students with drug and alcohol addictions, young mothers, and various combinations of the above. The first incarnation of the school was located in a small community roughly 15 km to the East of the city that is the home of the current site, which is a predominantly white, rural, Christian, conservative community. The original site was created to accommodate students who did not "fit in" at the local high school in that town. These students were referred to as "behaviour" students by one former teacher, which implied that the initial population of the school consisted of students who were deemed to be too disruptive to attend mainstream classes. After a number of years, the location was changed to an office space in the city. The school operated out of that location until 2015, at which point a decommissioned school for students with special needs was re-purposed, retrofitted, and renovated to accommodate the growing demand for the services that the alternative school provided to the community. The last time that I spoke to the principal, the current site housed roughly 90 students on a rotating basis. Some of these students attend the site daily; some use it as a space to work when they are available to attend school.

The motto of this school is "Freedom=Responsibility", which also serves as the guiding principle for the school culture. Although the school is student-centred, a sense of civic-mindedness, community, and interdependence is evinced in much of what goes on at the school.

A focus on democracy and student responsibility that fosters civic participation has the capacity to develop the belief that students have the power to create change (Lind, 2013). From what I could discern, the school, although it possesses many aspects of a free school, is far from being the type of school that leaves the students completely free to follow their own path with as little interference as possible (as in Hadar et al., 2018). The type of freedom apparent at The School is closer to what Niell (1992) describes as "freedom, not licence" in that students equate their personal freedom with the responsibility to not impinge on the freedom of others. This school provides a safe environment where students are actively assisted in developing tools that they need to discern good decisions from poor ones, to succeed in their schooling, to accept responsibility for their actions, and to work toward becoming more socially responsible citizens (as in Jones, 2014).

Compared to both traditional and alternative school models, this school consistently scores above the Canadian average on aspects of students' positive sense of belonging, motivation, engagement, student-teacher relationships, expectations of completing high school, and student feelings of safety (OurSCHOOL, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018). These results are in line with Edgar-Smith and Palmer's (2015) assertion that research shows observable increases in positive peer relationships, sense of belonging, school performance, and commitment to school within alternative school programs.

While I was employed at The School, I was involved with and observed a number of what I consider to be unique elements of the school community. I learned that even before entering the school as a student, interviews with the student and their parent(s) or guardian(s) are conducted with the principal to determine whether or not the student would be a good "fit" for the school. Within the scope of future research that explores the culture of the school more

deeply, I intend to discuss this intake process and the criteria for admission with the principal. Once a student is accepted to the school, they are required to complete an orientation course that is delivered on-site via computer-based modules.

Some of the courses that are offered at the school are also unique. One of the most notable is a local option classroom course that teaches students about a variant of William Glasser's Choice Theory called Control Theory, which is a philosophy of learning self-control and positive self-discipline, and how to implement it in their day-to-day life. As this philosophy is one of the primary drivers of my research, it will be discussed at length in the literature review section of this document.

The effectiveness of positive self-discipline and management techniques is supported by Zolkoski, Bullock, and Gable (2016) who suggest that these types of techniques reduce inappropriate behaviours and mitigate the potential for adversity in students' lives. Social skills instruction, according to McGee and Lin (2017), also contributes to the development of interpersonal problem-solving skills and reduces antisocial behaviour. These concepts of self-management and the resulting focus on the students' responsibility to create a positive environment for themselves serve as some of the foundational principles in defining the social atmosphere of the entire school. I anticipate that the research that I have carried out for my thesis will expand on this scholarship as the students and teachers who were involved shared their perspectives on their own personal behavioral and mindset change and how this change was influenced by taking the Control Theory course. Other courses include a social-justice-oriented social studies 30 course, "special project" credits that can be earned through private music lessons, art creation, or a number of other activities, and outdoor education trips that have

elements of mindfulness meditation and achieving "personal best" goals as the underlying curriculum.

In reference to Glasser's Choice Theory and the local option course, it came to my attention during the course of my research at the school that although sharing the same psychological roots as Glasser's Choice Theory, the model that is taught to the students and implemented at the school site is known as Perceptual Control Theory (PCT). In fact, the principal at the school told me that in practice, a blend of many different variants of Control Theory and Choice Theory are used interchangeably. As such, I chose to keep the review of Glasser's work as the basis of my literature review and conceptual lens as the approaches are essentially identical and they serve the same ends. Glasser's work is discussed within educational literature much more thoroughly than Perceptual Control Theory, of which I could find very little mention.

From what I learned through conversations with some of the teachers and the training facilitator, PCT is derived from the work of William T. Powers, an electrical engineer, polymath, and independent experimental and theoretical psychologist who developed a mathematical theory of mind in living organisms in the late nineteen sixties. Glasser used Powers' ideas as the basis for developing a system of psychological therapy and self-help which he also called Control Theory that was accessible to the general public and he subsequently went on to establish a successful career as a therapist, writer, and speaker on the subject. Parallel to Glasser's success, Powers continued to work as a cognitive scientist specializing in cybernetics and developing artificial intelligence systems while receiving little to no credit for providing the basis for Glasser's work. The story that I was told was that a group of individuals loyal to the seminal work of Powers formed an organization that challenged Glasser's Control Theory organization.

Powers was persuaded to litigate against Glasser for the unacknowledged use of his ideas and the name “Control Theory” and Glasser apparently responded by withdrawing all print materials using the words Control Theory and reissued the book, replacing Control Theory with Choice Theory. This story runs against what I read in an academic article which indicates that Glasser decided to rename the approach based on his own reflection that the word “control” did not properly convey the meaning of the phenomenon.

I could find no corroborative evidence online or in the academic literature to confirm or to discredit either account so I cannot verify the authenticity of what I was told. This dearth of knowledge and the obscurity of PCT created a lot of personal discomfort as it began to seem more and more likely that the entire concept had no basis in scientific truth and lacked scholarly support. I did some limited research into the work of William Powers and found that his theory is highly technical and does not seem to have been adopted by the mainstream psychological community, with only a few papers being published in obscure journals over the years. Despite these doubts, the evidence from my interviews with students and teachers seems to point toward a general trend of positive transformative effects in their lives and the lives of the people around them, which lends credence to the efficacy of the theory if applied consistently even if there is little scholarship around it. This will be discussed at length in the analysis and discussion sections of this document. I am considering this apparent lack of research into the use of PCT in education to be a gap that this study fills in the literature.

Theoretical Framework: Alternative Education as Transformational Education

Transformative education is grounded in critical pedagogy (as further discussed and defined within my literature review) and its proponents use this critical stance to propose education-based solutions to social issues surrounding, for example, the problems of inequality

and inequity amongst humans on many different social levels (Bowles & Gintis, 1975; McLaren, 1989; O'Sullivan, 1999). The transformative learning approach also extends to include the growing human disconnection from the natural world and the environmental and spiritual toll that this exacts on individuals (O'Sullivan, 1999). What I have found concerning the philosophy of transformative education is intriguing and aligns well with my own personal philosophy of life. A pivotal text that I draw upon heavily in my thinking about transformative education is *Transformative Learning: Educational Vision for the 21st Century,* (1999) by Edmund O'Sullivan. Inspired largely by the work of Thomas Berry, he presents the practice of transformative education to be a means of finding our place in history: recognizing the significance of being alive at this particular time of transition and, through this realization, be motivated to act responsibly. He explores Berry's themes of cenozoic and ecozoic periods, observing the fact that as a species, we have moved into a position where we have devalued the importance of maintaining the life-carrying capacity of the Earth (cenozoic) and we must change the value systems and visions of our entire society to prevent our own extinction (ecozoic). He proposes that much of this shift toward unsustainable practices has been driven by consumer capitalism and a system of symbols and myths that have replaced those that existed previously in traditional human society. Where pre-modern mythologies emphasized respect of the planet and the interconnectedness of all things, the symbols that we are subjected to in our contemporary time largely revolve around ideas of personal independence from society and infinite accumulation of market goods through commerce.

As a solution to these social, environmental, and spiritual problems, O'Sullivan (1999) proposes education for peace, social justice, diversity, and planetary consciousness. In addition to addressing these specific concepts through education, he advocates for the consideration of

two systems of managing and assessing human development which would replace our current money-driven systems. The first is a system of *integral development* that values properly maintaining the delicate balance of Earth's carrying capacity for supporting life. This involves developing a sense in the individual of being an "ecological self" and focusing on relationships between humans and between humans and the natural world instead of treating individual humans and nature as distinct and separate entities. The other major change that he supports is a move toward what he terms "quality of life education" that embraces ideas of human-scale development, awareness of human needs and their satisfiers, education for community and sense of place, education for civic culture, and education for diversity in both the human realm and in terms of the natural world. Human scale development revolves around ideas proposed by Max-Neef (2008) and Cruz, Max-Neef and Stahel (2009) that are intended to inform policy for grassroots organizations who want to build better societies in Latin America. Throughout the book, O'Sullivan urges the reader to also explore the idea of diversity of spiritual expression, reawakening a sense of awe and mystery, and creating rituals and practices that revere silence and celebration. All of these practices are intended to cultivate a sense of the spiritual that he asserts is important to existing as a human being in the world.

Bringing this back to my experiences at The School, I believe that a unique and supportive environment exists there that works to fulfill students' needs and thus leads to a higher potential for these students to become re-engaged with school, learning, and life. While there are many aspects of the school culture that could be considered to have transformative potential, I believe that transformative philosophies are enacted at The School in no small part through the inclusion of the classroom-based Control Theory course. Through a review of the literature surrounding alternative schools, Choice Theory, and transformative education. Further

exploration into the literature around Choice Theory points in a direction that supports this philosophy as being worth considering as a foundational element of structuring the culture of transformative alternative schools. It is to this review of literature that I now turn.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

As noted in the introductory section, my aim in this research study is to investigate student and teacher perceptions of how a course centred on William Glasser's Choice Theory influences personal and social transformation within the culture of an alternative secondary school.

As alternative education is a very broad and vague topic, it is helpful to first situate the reader in the historical and philosophical context of alternative education so that they might better understand what alternative education means and what its various aims are. As my theoretical framework revolves around philosophies of transformative education, I will also provide an overview of the literature concerning this educational movement. Since the focus of the data collection of my research revolved around student and teacher perceptions of the transformational potential of Control Theory on their lives, I also summarize some of the basic ideas of Glasser's Choice Theory and offer some perspectives of scholars in its use in an educational setting.

I begin with a discussion of some of the existing scholarly information pertaining to the history of alternative schools, various ways of understanding what constitutes alternative education, and around the factors that typify successful alternative schools. As much of the research on alternative schools focuses on schools outside of Canada, I was especially interested in finding Canadian examples. My interest in focusing on the Canadian perspective is due to the fact that the school systems in Canada and the United States, where many of the studies that I found were based, are much different. I was able to find very few studies of alternative schools in Canada, which I found interesting as according to Bascia and Maton (2015) the Toronto

District School Board alone is home to arguably the largest number of public alternative schools in North America. I believe that through completing research at the school site, a contribution will be made to developing a clearer picture of the effects of a number of factors including school climate on creating positive alternative learning environments within the Canadian context.

Alternative Schools: History, Purposes, and Perspectives

Alternative education is generally considered to be an undefined, or at least poorly defined term (McGee & Lin, 2017; Quinn et al., 2006; Raywid, 1999). As such, I begin this literature review with an overview that attempts to delineate what alternative education means in the context of our modern educational landscape. The idea of alternative education is not a new one. Rousseau, in his writing of *Emile* advocated for an approach to the education of children that stood as an alternative to the popular knowledge of the day. In the nineteenth century, Tolstoy in Russia and Thoreau in America, created their own schools to provide an alternative approach to what mainstream society had to offer (Miller, 2019). One could even consider the society of Pythagoreans on Croton in the sixth century B.C.E. to be a version of an alternative school that provided a way of thinking and learning that ran on a different path than the mainstream thought of the time. Religions, cultural groups, and even political groups (Wilson, 1991) have advocated for and created their own alternative streams of education over the years. With this in mind and due to its very nature as an "alternative" to mainstream education, the concept of alternative schooling is necessarily broad and ever-changing, as are the aims associated with it. These differences in perspective result in a different set of aims for each approach and it is important for schools, school divisions, and policy makers to be aware of these distinctions when planning alternative programming.

The needs of the student or of the system can vary widely from model to model thus the philosophy underlying each approach should be aligned with the outcomes desired. Although alternative education is considered by some to be an under-studied field (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Jones, 2014), some useful models have emerged that attempt to create a means of distinguishing between the myriad of options, and aims, that exist.

Who Attends Alternative Schools and Why?

The reasons for students to attend alternative schools vary depending on the type of alternative. Some alternative schools are attended by students of minority groups who do not identify with the western hegemonic structures reinforced within mainstream schools (O'Gorman, Salmon, & Murphy, 2016). Some attend alternatives to escape gang violence and otherwise unsafe or uncaring environments in their neighborhood public school (O'Gorman, et al., 2016). On the opposite end of the spectrum, some students attend to have the opportunity to explore their learning at their own pace (Hador, Hotam & Kizel, 2018; Wilson, 2015). Porowski, O'Conner, and Luo (2014) report that most students who attend alternative education in the United States are secondary-school-age students, with middle school and primary school-age students comprising the minority of alternative school attendees. Eligibility for attendance in alternative programs in the United States most often targets students with what the authors term "behavioral problems" that cause classroom disruptions. Other criteria include students whose behaviour warrants the severe disciplinary measure of being removed from regular schooling entirely. Non-behaviour related criteria include low achievement in terms of grades and lack of credits. They cite a category of "at-risk" students that encompasses students who are homeless, pregnant or parenting, headed toward dropping out, addicted to or abusing drugs or alcohol, and being abused physically or sexually. Family problems, including jailed parents or parents who

are being investigated by child protective services, are considered criteria for admission in some cases. Students who are English Language Learners qualify to attend alternative schooling in some states, while others broaden the criteria to students who simply do not benefit from the environment of a regular school. Interestingly enough, this focus on the individual student cases ignores larger societal reasons of why students may have behavior issues, drug problems, or simply not benefitting from the regular school environment. As a side note from a social justice perspective, it is fascinating and troubling that in this 41-page government report that attempts to define what alternative schools both are and are for, no mention is made of the larger sociological reasons for why there is a need for alternatives in the first place.

The General Aims of Alternative Education: Alternative to What?

Alternative education might include any type of school that provides an educational environment that does not fit within the mainstream or traditional model (Atkins, 2008; Bascia & Maton, 2015; Chou, et al., 2014; Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Hadar et al., 2018; Quinn, 2006; Raywid, 1994; Raywid, 1999) and therefore its aims are by nature malleable (Raywid, 1999) and fluid over time as ideas change about what constitutes mainstream and traditional education. What is considered alternative in one place or time may subsequently become mainstream and what was once mainstream may become alternative. In the second decade of the 21st century, alternative education is widely accepted as a term for schools or school programs that are devised and implemented in order to provide schooling for those students that are not served by the mainstream public education system (Atkins, 2008; Bascia & Maton, 2016; Chou et al., 2014; Jones, 2014; Hador et al., 2018; McGee & Lin, 2017; Quinn, 2006; Raywid, 1994; Raywid, 1999). Many scholars trace two broad approaches that form the roots of this conception of alternative education back to the 1960's in North America (Atkins 2008; McGee & Lin, 2017;

Quinn, 2006; Raywid, 1999; Wilson, 2015) while Bascia and Maton (2016) maintain that alternative schools have existed in North America for about one hundred years.

Regardless of how long alternatives have existed, alternative education in North America has greatly diversified and expanded since the 1960s (Atkins, 2008; Bascia & Maton, 2016; Hadar, Hotam & Kizel, 2018; Price, 2019; Morrissette, 2011; Niell, 1960/1992; Quinn et al., 2006; Raywid, 1999). Some scholars see divisions between the types of alternative schools as between private and public (Bascia & Maton, 2016) while some view the differences in terms of student or parent choice (Atkins, 2008; Raywid, 1994). I find that the ideas of Mary Anne Raywid (1994, 1999) are very useful in helping to organize and define different types of alternative schools as her frames of reference are open enough to allow for the previously mentioned divisions yet delineated enough that the boundaries between types are meaningful. Raywid (1994) initially categorized alternative schools into three "types." These were divided up based largely on the idea of choice with "type one" schools being innovative schools that students choose to attend, "type two" being punitive schools that students are "sentenced" to as a last chance before suspension or expulsion, and "type three" schools which she considered to serve the purpose of providing remedial or therapeutic work for students.

Raywid (1999) revised this framework and proposed a typology comprised of three categories of alternative schools that are based on the change that is expected through the functioning of the school. This typology includes schools that aim to either (1) change the student, (2) change the school, and/or (3) change the system itself. Each of these three types have commonalities and differences in their aims, which are defined by the measures of success associated with each type of school. As this newer typology has more depth and flexibility and

highlights the transformative quality of alternative schools in their focus on "change", I use this as a structural model to facilitate my discussion of alternative schools.

Alternative Schools That Aim to Change the Student

Within this worldview of alternative education, the responsibility for the student not being engaged with learning is placed firmly on the student (Raywid, 1999; Quinn et al., 2006). In many cases, these students "are believed to be at risk of educational failure, as suggested by various risk factors including disruptive behavior, poor grades, suspension, and truancy," according to Quinn et al. (2006). The aims of these types of schools are what could be considered to be a "reactionary model" (Atkins, 2008) that deals in correcting what are considered to be pathologies (Quinn et al., 2006) that have developed in the student by providing remedial or rehabilitative work that is to be performed on and by the student to make up for perceived deficiencies that are interfering with their flourishing in the mainstream system (Raywid, 1994). This work can take the form of remedial academic, social, behavioural or psychological work (Jones, 2014) that is carried out with the intent of eventually returning the student to the mainstream school system (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Raywid, 1994). In some instances, doing so is carried out from a more therapeutic perspective (Raywid, 1999; Smith & Palmer, 2015), but in others, it is approached more punitively (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Zolkoski, Bullock & Gable, 2016). This distinction is what defines the two main streams of this type of alternative education.

The former model takes a holistic or therapeutic approach to education (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Quinn et al., 2006). As a means of rehabilitating the student and re-engaging them with mainstream education these models provide a means "to engage young people in learning that do not involve repeating or reinforcing students' prior experience of failure" (Hayes, 2012 as

cited in Mills, 2016). Although this type of school sees the problem as being caused by the student (Quinn et al., 2006; Raywid, 1994; Raywid 1999), it takes a more nurturing and supporting rather than punitive approach to solving the problem behaviours (Jones, 2014). These elements might include individualized learning opportunities (Jones, 2014; McGee & Lin, 2017), counselling, food programs, and other supports for students whose personal lives outside of school make it difficult or impossible to function within the mainstream system. One could consider the aim behind this type of school to be in offering the students the tools necessary to "fix themselves" and to provide the support for them to be able to use those tools (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; McGee & Lin, 2017).

Much of this therapeutic approach revolves around creating an environment that contributes to the students' positive mental health (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Lind, 2013; McGee & Lin, 2017; Zolkoski, Bullok, & Gable, 2016). Lind (2013) identifies a number of factors that support capacity-building toward mental health including the presence of positive teacher-student and student-student relationships (as affirmed by McGee & Lin, 2017 and Jones, 2014), an environment of caring, appropriate challenges and opportunities for risk taking, a safe and secure school culture, a sense of non-judgemental and unconditional acceptance within the school, student engagement with social issues, a power structure that is shared with staff, freedom with responsibility, academic and personal success, experiences that foster maturing in the student, preparation for adulthood, mentoring, and opportunities to develop critical thinking skills (also affirmed by McGee & Lin, 2017). Another aspect of creating an atmosphere that encourages positive mental health is through developing resiliency (Zolkoski, Bullok, & Gable, 2016). A relevant example of this type of school is the Ventura School for Problem Girls, where William Glasser worked as a school counsellor and where he developed his concept of Reality

Therapy, the underlying philosophy of which subsequently became known as Choice Theory (Glasser, 1975/1991/1998).

Some alternative school models to which students are "sentenced" are not so warm, however. Raywid (1994/1999) defines another type of school that aims to change the student as being a "soft prison" or "last chance" program. Often, students are, in effect or in reality as a court order in some cases, "sentenced" to these programs (Atkins, 2008; Raywid, 1999) which are often authoritarian, punitive, and based on strict rules of behavior (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015). The environment is designed to incentivize students to stay in school through threats of future failure in life and harsh consequences to breaking the rules. McGee and Lin (2017) point out that these harsh disciplinary practices are often viewed by students as a further source of frustration. This type of school or program falls in line with Atkins (2008) concept of not only a reactionary model but as an alternative school that is designed to benefit the school system, as the purpose of this type of school or program could be considered to be a "dumping ground for students 'unwanted' by the education system" (Mills et al., 2016, p. 103). This includes those students who are too disruptive to be tolerated in the mainstream classroom or students who are at risk of being pushed out of regular school (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014). By removing these students to a remote location within the school or at another site entirely, the activities of the mainstream system are allowed to continue uninterrupted.

This philosophy of compartmentalization without making accommodations raises some social justice concerns because, as pointed out by Farrelly and Daniels (2014), often the type of student who is disruptive, delinquent, or otherwise deemed "at risk" is also likely to be embedded within a marginalized social group defined by factors such as race, social class, ethnicity, gender-orientation, differences in learning ability. Some scholars also note the cynical

motivation that the loss of these "at risk" students will reduce the amount of financial resources available to the school district, which requires these districts to create alternate programs or school sites that keep the "at risk" students enrolled by whatever means necessary (Atkins, 2008; Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Mills et al., 2016). Interestingly, even though this type of alternative program is quite common in schools across North America, Raywid (1995, 1999) points out that this authoritarian model does not serve its purpose in retaining students or in rehabilitating them. This ineffectiveness of the authoritarian approach is echoed by Zolkoski, Bullock, and Gable (2016) who state that punishment and focus on negative consequences usually prove to be counterproductive without systems of proactive support.

Within either model of "change the student" school, the stated aim is to reintegrate the student who is deemed to be "at risk" back into the mainstream school system once they have been suitably rehabilitated (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2016; Quinn et al., 2006; Raywid, 1999). This re-entry into the traditional system is not always what happens, however (Raywid, 1999). Some students who attend the authoritarian model either drop out of the system entirely or remain in the alternative program for the rest of their schooling due to continued discipline and behaviour problems that do not warrant their return to the regular school system (Raywid, 1994). Other students who return to the mainstream school system after attending an alternative program soon relapse into poor behaviour, academic difficulty, or social anxiety upon reintroduction to the mainstream system (Raywid, 1999) and either choose to return or are assigned back to the alternative school. Some students who are engaged with the more holistic or therapeutic model of alternative school find that they are more engaged by the type of learning that they experience in the alternative program and choose to remain there. This therapeutic

model, which draws largely from ideas that work to change schools and systems is where I turn next.

Alternative Schools That Aim to Change the School

The aims of this type of school align with the assumption that if students are not engaged with their learning and their experience within a traditional school, the fault lies with the approach to education at their school (Quinn, 2006; Raywid, 1994; Raywid, 1999; Mills et al., 2016). The goal, as such, is not to return the student to the regular school system but to offer them an alternative to the mainstream that they may choose to remain within for the entirety of their schooling experience (Raywid, 1994). These schools are typified by "novel curricular and instructional approaches and atypically positive school climates" (Raywid, 1999, p. 49) and often draw upon experimental and innovative ideas (Bascia & Maton, 2015, Kaya & Ataman, 2016). These types of schools consider the point of view of benefit to the student (Atkins, 2008; Raywid, 1994), as they provide a choice of schooling that accommodates different needs and types of learning such as a preference for personalized learning, strong student-teacher relationships (McGee & Lin, 2017, Jones, 2014), and a culture of care within the school (Mills et al., 2015; Quinn et al., 2006). The guiding philosophies of these schools vary considerably, from schools that implement some limited accommodations and special supports for students to others that adopt radical changes to the way education is carried out (as in Jones, 2014; Hadar et al., 2016; Wilson, 2015). Some extreme cases fall under the category of what could be considered to be the type of "progressive" education criticized by Dewey (1938/2016) in their structure and approach.

Perhaps the most famous example of an alternative school that embraced progressive values of student freedom and unrestrained and unguided learning is the Summerhill School

which was founded in Great Britain in 1921 by A.S. Neill, who felt that above all else students required personal freedom in order to learn (Quinn et al., 2006; Hadar et al., 2016; Niell, 1960/1992; Wilson, 2015). The entire philosophy of the school revolves around mental wellness of the child above all else (Niell, 1960/1992). To this end, Summerhill is organized to allow children to have as much freedom as possible without infringing on the freedom of others. The founder of the school, A.S. Niell, believed that through having this freedom, children would naturally come into their own talents and selves based on their particular natural interests when the time was right for them. He observed that the process of learning through community and through play are the most effective means of education possible when the aim is to ensure that an adult emerges mentally well from childhood. Summerhill was the first of many schools whose aim is to reject everything attached to the traditional education system and even go so far as to adopt the "pedagogic aim of protecting pupils from the ill effects of mainstream schooling" (Hadar et al., 2019, p. 69). Although many schools exist that attempt to emulate Summerhill, especially in the United States, some of them confuse freedom with license, which is a serious fault that is commented on by A.S. Niell (1992) and, he believes, comes from a misunderstanding of how he defines freedom. He defines freedom as doing what one wants within the limits of not limiting the freedom of others, as opposed to license, which allows for complete freedom at the expense of others (Niell, 1960/1992). It would seem that there is a potential danger within these implementations of certain educational ideologies that in creating these single instances of radical schooling within the broader social framework, those who are in charge of directing these schools could be guilty of creating "the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience" (Dewey, 1938/2016, loc. 162) by creating a situation where these students will not be able to participate in wider society or continue their learning

independently. One example of this, as related in Hadar et al., (2019), is that of a 12-year old student who was attending the Violin School, which is a free school in Israel. He relates the story of not being able to read a restaurant menu when visiting friends and wishes that he would have been taught reading and writing earlier, even though he did not have an interest in it. Although many students at Summerhill (Niell, 1960/1992), and possibly at other schools, eventually develop an interest in reading and writing, the possibility exists that students may not voice an interest until they have graduated and may never subsequently have the time or energy to learn on their own. In my opinion, such inability to read or write could possibly make it more difficult to continue to educate themselves through written language later in life.

A less extreme and just as famous example of an alternative school that was founded on the "change the school" principle is East Harlem's Central Park East Secondary School (Raywid, 1994, Raywid, 1999). One of this school's guiding principles was that it was the way of teaching that defined the school as alternative, not the students who attend it (Raywid, 1994) which reflects a belief that alternative methods of instruction are what is needed to reach students, not for the students to change their way of behaving. Raywid (1999) stated at the time that the school boasted a 90% graduation rate and, of those 97% moved on to college. Such numbers are impressive and indicate similar trends in other schools that adopt this type of model. Raywid (1994) asserts that this "change the school" approach has the potential to influence entire school systems. She offers the example of how awareness of demonstrably successful alternative schools within District 4 in Spanish Harlem instigated the adoption of system wide changes across the school district that attempted to emulate the features exhibited by the alternative schools.

Alternative Schools That Aim to Change the System

According to Raywid (1999) and Quinn et al. (2006), both schools that aim to "change the system" and the "change the school" type of mindset see a faulty educational system as being the primary reason for the disengagement and loss of potential in students. In the system-changing model of alternative school, the broad goal is to instigate a total, system-wide change (Raywid, 1999; Quinn, 2006). Those who advocate for these schools view them as proving grounds for alternative approaches and believe that their successes demonstrate a better way forward for education. The type of schooling that John Dewey (1938/2016) envisions in *Experience & Education* would also certainly have fallen under this category as his aim was to provide an alternative system of education for all, not just to have his ideas realized at one school, which I imagine is the case with all advocates of any coherent and broad philosophy of education. I like to think that this school could serve as an exemplar of an effective model for the potential for system-wide change and will perhaps need to reflect on this in the final analysis of my data and reporting.

Those who see alternative schools as a means by which to change the system often embrace critical theory and look at alternative education as more than simply a tool to bring wayward youth, by whatever means, back to mainstream participation in the economic system. Some look beyond the school system and expand their view and call for a movement to change the system of our entire society; a movement within which education reform is an important part. Bowles and Gintis (1975) express their view that many forms of alternative education within a liberal democracy are often little more than a compensatory gesture that deflects the need to restructure the hegemonic and unjust social structure that the capitalist economy relies upon. Their view is that alternatives placate the public and make it appear that "good work" is being

done to help students who are struggling when in fact it is business as usual. They also argue that those who initiate and implement alternative programs view the need for them as being important as a means of dealing with aberrations, not a signal that the structure of the school system, and indeed society, is at fault for creating a need for alternatives in the first place. The authors also insist that the approach of considering schooling separate from society is damaging in that despite alternatives like free schools helping children become more self-aware and autonomous individuals within the bounds of school, those students still must adapt to survive within the dominant social structure of corporate capitalism. Thus, Bowles and Gintis advocate for an alternative system of schooling that teaches a critical pedagogy of empowering students to challenge the status quo and to work toward creating a more humane means of structuring human life. Without this impetus for institutional change within the education system, all public schools – including alternative schools - will remain tools of the corporatist/capitalist elite and will continue to proliferate and reproduce the values and ideals held by those who benefit the most from the maintenance of this system.

The categories and divisions of alternative education discussed in this section barely scratch the surface of the myriad different approaches and manifestations that exist in the world. Within the limited space and time that I had in this project, I was necessarily restricted in the breadth of literature that I could explore on this topic prior to completing my thesis. In the process of evaluating which ideas to bring into this study, I limited my literature review to focus mostly on alternative education in Europe and North America and to alternative education models, with some exceptions, that seem to have already been adopted in some capacity by those in the mainstream education system who are tasked with developing alternative school programs. While there are differences between how each of these aspects of alternative education

accomplish their purpose, they are all tied together under a central core aim of providing an alternative to what is offered by the mainstream education system, the means and methods by which they accomplish this aim are diverse. In my view, the greatest value of alternative schools is that these experiments in education can create environments in which students who would normally quietly disappear from school and society find a place to belong and to thrive.

With a concept of the history and the current state of alternative schools and the various purposes that they might serve in place, I now turn my attention to an outline of the philosophy of transformative education.

Transformative Education

What is Transformative Education?

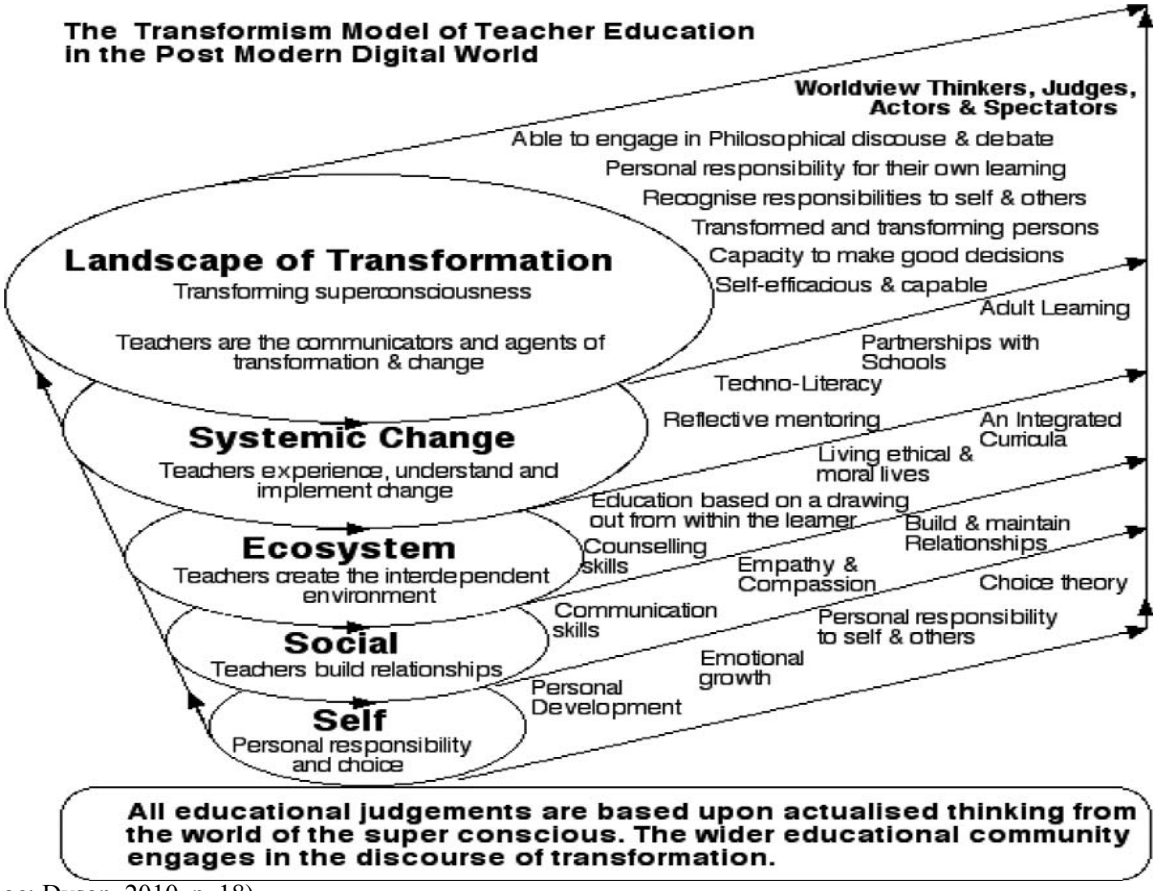
Transformative education begins with critical self-reflection (Arends, 2014; Cranton, 2002; Dyson, 2010; O'Sullivan, 1999; Leonardo, 2004; Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008). According to Cranton (2002), critical self-reflection constitutes examining one's values, beliefs, and assumptions with the goal of weighing the validity of these beliefs against experience, through consideration of how we came to possess these beliefs, assumptions, and values. Taylor (2008) explains this process as one of reflection on personal experience and of creating and internalizing new and revised meaning attached to that experience. As O'Sullivan (1999) sees it, the main importance of transformative education is to educate with the intent to encourage students to resist the currently dominant value system of individualistic market capitalism and opt instead for a value system based on sustaining the interdependent habitat of the planet for the benefit of all life on Earth. Thus, it seems that the transformative aspect of transformative learning revolves primarily around Nietzsche's idea of "revaluing all values" and looking for new and more humane ways to engage and interact with reality. Dyson (2010) refers to this

reflection on and transformation of one's values as developing a "world" view as opposed to a "me" view. He describes the process as a journey of change - first at the personal level and because of the interdependence, interrelatedness, connectedness, and shared consciousness of those living in society - holding the possibility of creating systemic change on larger scales.

Mezirow (1997) views transformative education as being limited to adults (Taylor, 2008) and to be a process of creating change within one's own frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008). In my opinion, his claim that transformation is limited to adults is not entirely true. Through the interviews I conducted in the data collection phase of my research, many teachers emphasized maturity, not age, as the deciding factor in whether or not an individual has the potential for transformation. Additionally, there were certainly examples of students in my study who exhibited transformational quality to their thinking. I see the ability of the adolescent students with whom I spoke to relate ideas of self-evaluation and empathy as a sign of transformation taking place. This is a topic that is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Mezirow (1999) posits that there exist two elements to one's frame of reference: habits of thought and a point of view. He describes habits of thought as being heuristic responses that we develop in dealing with our environment that are learned through experience within social settings. These habits of thought come together to form an interconnected constellation of beliefs, value judgments, attitudes, and feelings that constitute our subjective point of view. Transformative learning, according to Mezirow, is based on critical reflection on our frames of reference and can reveal assumptions upon which our habits of mind and points of view are based and subsequently we can learn to change these points of view and habits of mind. Arends (2014) asserts that the process of reflection centers around cognition and rationalism and that through rational analysis of thought, or rational metacognition, transformation takes place. Both

Arends (2014) and Mezirow (1999) emphasize the importance of discomfort in the transformational process. Taylor (2008) criticizes the rational approach of Mezirow as it focuses too much on the individual at the expense of the transformative potential of context and social change. He suggests that transformational education can also adopt what he terms a "social-emancipatory" (p. 8) view as well as neurobiological, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, and planetary forms that ideally would be considered holistically in working toward transformational learning. Through reflection, Dyson (2010) claims that we start to live differently due to our critically analysing first ourselves, then society, and the world in which we live. Dyson (2010) provides the following framework to describe his concept of the layered aims of transformative education as a means to spread personal critical analysis and potential for change outward into broader society through developing an expanded awareness of relationships.



(image: Dyson, 2010, p. 18)

Moving beyond Dyson's (2010) human-centric model, O'Sullivan (1999) considers a wider perspective on transformation to require critical reflection on not only existing social organization and the inequities arising from this organization but to critically examine history. He also considers transformative education as a means to transcend the focus on the human scale of relationships and develop an understanding of the "creative evolutionary processes of the Universe, the planet, the Earth community, the human community, and the personal world" (p. 208). Within this philosophy, he posits that humans as a species are the result of an evolutionary process that was initiated so that the Universe may appreciate itself through self-consciousness

and transformative education is the path to such understanding. Although this universal and quasi-spiritual view transcends the scope of this study, I present it here to illustrate the vast amount of intellectual and philosophical ground that transformative education encompasses. The discipline ranges from a focus on individual and personal thought and behaviour right up to the scale of speculative theorizing about the meaning of life and the universe. In my study, I draw upon a range of thought within the discipline that extends from relationships with the self through to relationships between people and the planetary ecosystem. Critical analysis of self and society that transformational learning theorists often reference points to critical pedagogy as being one of the main philosophical pillars of transformative education.

Critical Pedagogy

Probably the most important element of transformative education and the starting point from which the rest of the approach emerges is critical pedagogy. In his discussion of the multidisciplinary nature of transformative education, Leonardo (2004) points to the three historical lineages of ancient philosophy and literature, the Frankfurt School's Kantian/Marxist critical approach, and what he refers to as a general theory that is "politically edgy." Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2009), Giroux (2009), Leonardo (2004), and McLaren (1989) write that critical pedagogy has its roots in critical theory based on the philosophy surrounding the "Frankfurt School" which was a loose collective of thinkers who attempted early critiques of capitalism as it emerged. The critical pedagogic approach revolves around recognizing the relationships between objects in the world of objective appearances (Freire, 1970, Giroux, 1983) and through critical self-reflection on these relationships (Dyson, 2010; O'Sullivan, 1999; McLaren, 1989; Mezirow, 1999), to foster a discourse of social transformation that would be undogmatic and malleable to accommodate social change over time (Friere, 1970, Giroux, 1983).

O'Sullivan (1999) dedicates an entire section of his book to what he terms "Critique" which is couched in critical theory. The chapters in this section deal with critically analysing the dominant narratives of modern Western culture. He echoes McLaren (1989) and Bowles and Gintis (1975) in his assertion that the mainstream education system in North America as it has existed since the Second World War is largely a product of broad hegemonic processes driven by industrial society that perpetuates corporate and technocratic ideologies and supports the status quo. He calls on educators to reflect critically on issues of power and injustice both in terms of relationships between humans and between humans and the natural environment. This is expressed in criticisms of privilege, patriarchy, racism, classism in society and followed up with the encouragement for educators to teach to equity and difference, and in the importance of peace education. He also brings in arguments for the establishment of new ways for people to connect with the interconnectedness of all life and in developing new myths, rituals, and cosmological visions to aid in this connection. This wide range of critical analyses satisfies Darder, Baltodano, and Torres' (2009) suggestion that critical pedagogy as a philosophy is heterogenous as opposed to homogeneous and draws from "a myriad of epistemological, political, economic, cultural, ideological, ethical, historical, aesthetic, as well as methodological points of reference" (p. 9). This is roughly in line with Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg's (2012) conception of critical pedagogy as being a "bricolage" in that when properly approached, it resists dogmatic categorization and strict methods but instead draws upon a wide range of ideas as necessary with the central philosophy of questioning power and power structures. Critical pedagogy focuses on creating a form of schooling that is intended to empower marginalized students (Darder, Baltodana & Torres, 2009; McLaren, 1989) through anti-hegemonic (Dyson, 2010; McLaren, 1989; O'Sullivan, 1999) and dialogic teaching approaches

(Freire, 1970). As critical pedagogy is mainly interested in the critique of social structures and inequalities that are inherent in human-human relationships, there is sometimes, but not typically a consideration of relationships between humans and the natural world (Berry, 1988; Dyson, 2010; O'Sullivan, 1999). Transformative education extends critical theory's focus on the interconnectedness of cultural and social phenomena, to include human relationships with the Earth (O'Sullivan, 1999). As critical self-awareness is a foundational step toward higher levels of social and ecological engagement (Dyson, 2010), possessing or developing a means through which one might engage in this pursuit seems to be of great importance in the process of transformation. I believe that William Glasser's Choice Theory holds potential to at the very least create an entry point into transformational learning within individuals through developing their sense of critical reflection on their own perception of reality, their needs, and their behaviours. Once individuals are equipped with these tools, they may be better able to view how they fit into the structures of society and how the reality of these structures may be either privileging them or oppressing them through providing or denying them what they need in order to feel that they are thriving.

William Glasser's Choice Theory

Choice Theory is a philosophy developed by Dr. William Glasser to explain human behaviour. Glasser was a humanist educational psychologist (Tanrikulu, 2014) who believed that effective therapeutic practices designed to elicit positive change in the individual had their roots not in analysis of the influence of past events, but in teaching people to develop awareness of their inner behaviour and how this inner behaviour affects their experience of outer reality (Glasser, 1975/1991/1998; Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, 2008; Zeeman, 2006). Choice Theory was initially conceived as a practical tool that Glasser called *Reality Therapy* which was an

approach that he used in his therapeutic work with problem children (Glasser, 1975/1991/1998; Edwards, 2009).

Reality Therapy

Glasser believed that the existence of unfulfilled needs is the one common element that stands at the root of all psychological difficulties (Glasser, 1975/1991/1998) and thus, according to his theory, the therapist's treatment techniques should be universal for all problems. *Reality Therapy* is based on the idea that the only thing that one can control is their own behaviour (Glasser, 1975/1991/1998; Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, 2008; Tanrikulu, 2014). The reason that Glasser chose the name *Reality Therapy* was that many people who are suffering psychologically try to fulfill their needs in ways that are not connected to reality. These unrealistic attempts at needs-fulfillment create tension and chaos in their experience of life (Glasser, 1975/1991/1998). The solution, then, is to learn to fulfill human needs within the bounds of what is real. The first step that is necessary is for the suffering person to have at least one person who cares about them and who they care about. Glasser insists that this caring therapist must have their needs met and must have a firm grip on reality for therapy to be effective. It is at this stage that the therapy can begin. This relationship of mutual care fulfills the two fundamental needs within Glasser's system: to love and be loved and the need to feel that we are worthwhile to ourselves and others (Glasser, 1975/1991/1998).

Another interesting element to *Reality Therapy* that was contrary to popular psychological thought at the time was Glasser's belief that neither the individual's past nor their unconscious have any place in therapy (Glasser, 1975/1991/1998). The important question is "what" not "why" when it comes to behaviour. His focus is on behaviour in the present moment and in developing a sense of responsibility to fulfill ones needs without depriving others of their

ability to fulfill their own needs. For me, this aspect of the therapy resonates with Neill's (1992) distinction between "freedom" which demands that the individual respect other people's right to their own freedom, and "licence" which only respects the individual's right to freedom. Glasser in fact places a great deal of importance on what he terms "responsibility" and "irresponsibility", using these two labels to describe all psychological states. This stands in sharp contrast to the multitude of diagnoses that psychologists of his time would use to compartmentalize different symptoms of psychological dis-ease, which Glasser considers to be a practice akin to the story of the five blind men encountering the elephant - where each man could only perceive a part of the whole and made faulty assumptions based on limited information.

Control Theory and Choice Theory

The bulk of Glasser's inspiration for his thinking came from the work of William T. Powers. Through his analysis of the underlying reasons for the effectiveness of the approach, as described in his book *Reality Therapy* (1975), Glasser created a theoretical framework that he initially called Control Theory because of the focus on learning self-control and responsibility. According to Edwards (2009) and Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, (2008) Glasser subsequently renamed the philosophy Choice Theory to better communicate his belief that individuals, even school-age children, are responsible for the choices that they make and that all behaviour is in fact choices about responses to information. Although he acknowledges that external factors exist that negatively influence human development, Glasser emphasises preventative education that works to assist individuals to develop habits from within (Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, 2008) that encourage positive psychosocial well-being and interpersonal connections as opposed to simply treating symptoms associated with perceived disorders (Edwards, 2006; Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, 2008). Glasser believed that the idea that people cannot be responsible for

their actions is false and asserted that the underlying cause of psychological distress in most people comes about through choices that are largely driven by unconscious and internal desires to fulfill a set of basic needs (Edwards, 2006; Jones, 2014; Tanrikulu, 2014).

Total Behaviour

Walter, Lambie, and Ngazimbi (2008) explain Glasser's concept of Choice Theory as being grounded in behaviour. In fact, according to Glasser (1975, 1991, 1998), humans do nothing except behave. All behaviour is chosen and all behaviour is based around what Glasser calls total behaviour which he divides into the realms of acting, thinking, feeling, and physiology (Edwards, 2006; Glasser, 1991/1998, Tanrikulu, 2014; Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, 2008; Zeeman, 2006). Just as these elements are expressed in different intensities within different individuals (Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, 2008), they are also subject to varying levels of control by the individual and are interconnected in their influence over one another (Tanrikulu, 2014; Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, 2008). Acting and thinking, according to Glasser (1998), are the facets that individuals have considerable control over and thus through changing one's choice of how one acts and thinks, changes can be made in the other elements (Edwards, 2009; Tanrikulu, 2014; Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, 2008). As individuals have control over their thinking and acting, Choice Theory follows the idea that it is through making positive choices about these two elements that individuals can subsequently influence their automatic emotional and physiological responses (Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, 2008) and consciously create more positive relationships with both themselves and others (Edwards, 2009). According to Glasser, if one is unaware of or unwilling to participate in taking conscious control of their thinking and acting, sub-conscious attempts at needs fulfillment will take over and can lead to a variety of other ill effects including producing psychosomatic symptoms of illness (Edwards, 2009).

As Choice Theory is a theory of behavior, it includes a connection between behaviour and reinforcement strategies. Glasser frames this as being grounded in choices that lead to an individual's needs being met through a behaviour - thus reinforcing that behaviour (Jones, 2014). Walter, Lambie, and Ngazimbi (2008) suggest that students' behaviours reflect their attempts, conscious or unconscious (Edwards, 2009), at fulfilling these needs. Edwards (2009) emphasizes the importance of students being taught the connection between their chosen behaviours and the positive or negative consequences attached to these behaviours. He goes on to describe how consequences that seem negative, such as harsh discipline or reprimands by teachers, principals, or counsellors, act to fulfill a need to be connected to important members of a social network and without reflection on the motivation for the behaviour, negative relationships (Tanrikulu, 2014) and compounding, destructive behaviour can result over time. According to Choice Theory, these four types of behaviour are driven by the pursuit of five basic needs.

Five Basic Needs

As stated by Glasser, the five basic human needs within Choice Theory are (1) survival and reproduction, (2) love and belonging, (3) power, (4) freedom and (5) fun. The fulfillment of each of these, under Choice Theory, are the primary motivations for human behaviour. (Dyson, 2010; Edwards, 2009; Glasser, 1991/1998; Jones, 2014; Tanrikulu, 2014; Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, 2008). Edwards (2014) points out a connection between Choice Theory and Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs as both theories posit a set of requirements that must be fulfilled, including survival and belonging as common elements of both theories, for the individual to find satisfaction in life. Edwards (2009), however, points out a difference, that Choice Theory's elements are non-hierarchical and are more in-line with modern scholarship that indicates that people pursue multiple needs simultaneously. The therapeutic use of Choice Theory works to

bring a level of control to these behaviours so that the five needs can be met in more positive ways. As examples, Edwards (2009) provides the example of disruptive behaviour being a choice that a student might make to fulfill their need for love and belonging. A more positive choice that could be learned through learning the reflective practice of Choice Theory would be for the student to signal the teacher when they realize that this need is not being met.

In his description of an alternative school that is based on Choice Theory principles, Jones (2014) identifies many strategies that had been developed at the school including 5-minute walks, a "Choices" program, and a mediations procedure, that students initiate when they feel their needs are not met. These strategies were purposefully designed to interrupt potentially negative manifestations of students not having their needs met by providing a means of meeting their needs with a more positive behaviour. Jones goes on to describe these strategies as having a secondary outcome of creating a strong student-student and teacher-student relationship building tool and in developing a sense of student autonomy. Since Choice Theory posits that humans are social creatures, positive relationship-building tools are important in creating a sense of connectedness to others which is necessary to properly fulfill one's needs (Edwards, 2009). According to Walter, Lambie, and Ngazimbi (2008), the pursuit of satisfying these needs is an attempt for individuals to realize what Glasser terms their quality world.

Quality World

By "quality world," Glasser (1991/1998) refers to a set of idealized models or "pictures" that an individual holds in their mind of the systems, people, and ideas that are metaphorical representations of their basic needs (Tanrikulu, 2014; Walter, Lambie, & Ngazimbi, 2008). This set of models begins to form at birth and is ever-changing (Glasser, 1991/1998; Tanrikulu, 2014; Walter, Lambie, & Ngazimbi, 2014) and because every individual's life path is different, every

person's quality world is unique (Glasser, 1991/1998; Tanrikulu, 2014). Relationships with other people, especially parents (Glasser, 1991/1998; Tanrikulu, 2014) are considered by Choice theorists to be the most important representations of these models and people that best represent the models that are held in the quality world are those people that individuals most want to connect with (Glasser, 1991/1998; Walter, Lambie, & Ngazimbi, 2008).When the quality world and reality do not match, dissonance, or even anger and rage (Tanrikulu, 2014), may be the outcome within the individual, potentially leading to behaviours that attempt to correct the difference. The importance of seeking out inter-personal relationships is stressed within Choice Theory. Poor relationships that result from unproductive behaviours manifest as attempts to exert psychological control over others (Edwards, 2009; Glasser, 1991/1998; Tarikulu, 2014) and the pursuit of healthy, cooperative relationships is reflected in positive, caring habits that nurture relationship-building that promotes happiness and fulfills one's needs in a productive way.

Glasser in the Context of Transformative Education

Although Glasser was not a teacher, he did do much of his work in schools and a great deal of it with children (Glasser, 1975/1991/1998; Edwards, 2009). He wrote practical books about using his Choice Theory in the classroom and did extensive work as a school counsellor. In reading *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom* (Glasser, 1998) and *The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion* (Glasser, 1991) one sees that there is an undercurrent of critical theory within his worldview, which to me was unexpected. He discusses how the use of external power to control others manifests and perpetuates a deeply unfair and unhealthy social structure (Glasser, 1991/1998). He subtly criticizes the destructive power dynamics of the patriarchy, western hegemony, imperialism, environmental devastation, the market economy, and many other areas, classifying these societal ills as symptoms of

irresponsible individuals seeking to meet their needs in unrealistic ways that endanger us all (Glasser, 1991/1998). When I began investigating Glasser, I did not realize that there existed a connection between Glasser's beliefs and the philosophy of transformative education or critical pedagogy but I have found that this connection has proven to be worth exploring as I worked through the literature, and analysed the data that emerged from my interviews.

One of Choice Theory's main purposes is to maximize the potential of the individual by empowering them with a means to have a healthy and balanced psychological state. As this aligns well with the aims of many educational institutions, it follows that consciously building an environment that fosters this maximization of potential would be in the best interest of anyone dedicated to the goal of helping young people become fully matured adults. Embedding elements of Choice Theory into the fabric of a school's culture could potentially create a scenario whereby the students and staff would internalize a mindset of responsibility and autonomy while recognizing the effects that their actions had on one another in an interdependent social group.

In concluding this literature review, I would like to connect the three ideas within it to my research question. From what I have read, alternative schools encompass a wide range of frameworks and purposes. On some level, most of these purposes revolve around a variety of attempts to satisfy student needs that are not being addressed in the mainstream school system. Connected to satisfaction of needs, we have seen that William Glasser's Choice Theory offers a theory that is comprised of a constellation of needs that if not met, or met in unproductive ways, cause psychological stress. This psychological stress within students can connect to undesired behaviour in school. Transformative education focuses on the power of the education enterprise to transcend the simple concept of school as training for the capitalist workplace or as a means of "character building" within a Western hegemonic framework. This philosophy instead advocates

for the development of critical reflective capacity in students so they may realize their position within various interconnected systems and create real meaning and purpose in their lives. My intent is to blend these three streams of thought together in questioning how a course in Control Theory influences personal and cultural transformation at an alternative school. The means by which I intend to gather and analyse data are described in the following section.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

Rationale for Using Phenomenology to Inform my Methodology

I initially intended to conduct this study as an ethnography where I would examine the culture of The School via observation, interviews, and subsequent analysis of cultural elements within the physical and social environment of the school site. However, the scope of this idea exceeded the time and resources available to me within the bounds of a master's thesis and I reworked my research question to focus on a more specific aspect of the research site's culture, this being thelocal option Control Theory course.

With this newly refined topic, I initially considered my research methodology to be that of a basic qualitative study. When looking at my research question of student and teacher perspectives on the transformative intents and impacts of the local option control theory course at The School, I decided that this question could be best answered by using an approach informed by the processes and perspectives of phenomenology. Although I did not use a strictly phenomenological methodology to carry out the study, I used some of the philosophical underpinnings of the approach to guide my research and to give shape to my thoughts on how to design and conduct the study as well as in structuring my approach to analysis. I decided on phenomenology as opposed to other methodologies based on my focus being on exploring the *essence* (Creswell, 2014; Mirriam & Tisdell, 2016) of transformation as a result of learning Control Theory. This *essence,* or *essential invariant structure,* is referred to by Creswell (1998) as being a single, shared meaning of the experience that many individuals have of the phenomenon. Laverty (2003) states that phenomenology's focus is on the description of the structure of experience. In my approach to exploring the structure of the experiences of students and teachers with Control Theory, I was interested in seeking commonalities between the

participants' descriptions of their experiences of transformation to try to understand what a shared concept, or structure, of the experience of "transformation" might be within the aggregate of the participants' individual perceptions.

Phenomenology

The roots of phenomenology as a cogently philosophical school of thought can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, especially to the thinking of Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). According to Laverty (2003), Husserl was interested in discovering a universal foundation for philosophy and science and devised his concept of *pure phenomenology* as tool toward this end. Smith (2006) relays Husserl's own definition of phenomenology as "the science of the essence of consciousness" (p. 2). Husserl was critical of psychological researchers of his time, who were working in a predominantly behavioralist mode of thought (Laverty, 2003). He believed that the method of comparing stimulus/response that these researchers were using discounted an important element – the perception of the individual as to the meaning of these stimuli and the appropriate responses that should follow exposure to them.

Laverty (2003) goes on to describe Husserl's conception of phenomenology as a means by which researchers might "reach true meaning through penetrating deeper and deeper into reality" (p. 23) through exploring the shared qualities of subjective experiences of existence. By doing so, it would seem to be a method of breaking down the barrier set up by Cartesian dualism between the individual experience of reality and reality itself. Cartesian philosophy makes a distinction between mind and matter and the only certainty is the reality of the mind. From this basis, it follows that the world outside of subjective experience is essentially unknowable, or at least can never be proven to truly exist. Husserl's philosophy revolves around the idea that consciousness is the intentional perception of phenomena as experienced from a first-person

perspective (Smith, 2006) and this perception creates a subjective reality based on the knowledge acquired through experiencing both mind and objects (Laverty, 2003). He goes on to theorize that through focusing the intent, one could develop descriptions of differing realities and by realizing the essence of these experiences, the "ultimate structures of consciousness" (Laverty, 2003, p. 23) could be identified.

Although this exploration into the meaning of consciousness itself is not the focus of this study, in understanding the importance of exploring the common elements of subjective experiences of many individuals it is useful to understand the larger context of what is being explored within the expanded philosophical structure. Within the bounds of my study, I draw upon the lofty philosophical concepts of attempting to find a common, underlying essence of reality through examining commonalities amongst multiple subjective experiences. I limited the philosophical scope by investigating the shared essence of transformation that individuals experience through learning Control Theory. I attempted to identify this shared essence by listening to and interpreting the lived experiences of the students and teachers at The School as communicated by them through their conversations with me.

Mirriam and Tisdell (2016) typify phenomenological studies as examining "intense human experiences" (p. 26) and based on the scholarship I read and featured in my literature review, I suspected that the process of transformation would be just such an experience for many. In my discussions with participants, I certainly found this to be true. Ravich and Carl (2016) describe phenomenology as a way to explore the lived experience of individuals as a phenomenon. This, they claim, can range from a single event occurring at a point in time to an ongoing process or experience. In the case of my study, I considered the process and experience of transformation through learning and applying Control Theory within the context of the school

environment to be the central phenomenon under examination. Ravich and Carl (2016) and Butler-Kisber (2010) also assert that phenomenology revolves around valuing the perceptions of the actors involved in the phenomenon as a primary means of identifying the character of the phenomenon. Thus, it seems that phenomenology aligns perfectly with my research question, where I explicitly question teacher and student perceptions of their experience with learning Control Theory, further pointing toward phenomenology as an appropriate methodology. Webb and Welsh (2019) indicate that the goal of a phenomenological study is not to solve a problem per se, but to collect and interpret individual perspectives of an experience. Taking their cue, the research question that guides this thesis is not intended to solve a problem, but to explore the experiences of individuals and thus aligns well with these authors concept of the methodology. The differentiation between method and methodology is pointed out by Laverny (2003) that phenomenology should be considered to be a methodology as opposed to a strict method. She describes methodology as being distinct from method in that methodology "is not a correct method to follow, but a creative approach to understanding, using whatever approaches are responsive to particular questions and subject matter" (p. 28). Her outlook resonated with me as I did not know what exactly to expect going into this study and was open to being somewhat spontaneous in my research approaches in order to attempt to answer my research question. The philosophical underpinning of exploring participants experiences and looking for shared themes would remain constant, but I anticipated flexibility in how I might achieve that aim.

According to Smith (2003) there are three main ways that phenomenological researchers carry out their inquiry. His list includes interpretation, analysis, and bracketing. Interpretation is described as a means of reflecting on an intentional activity and interpreting the meaning of it through placing it within a significant, everyday context. Analysis employs methods of rigorous

logic to examine the form and structure of our consciousness of familiar experiences. Bracketing is a practice of phenomenological methodology in which the researcher reflexively positions themselves in context of the research and acknowledges throughout the research process any preconceived notions, biases, or other factors the researcher may hold that may influence to how they approach, conduct and analyse the research. I used a combination of what Smith (2003) describes as interpretive and bracketed phenomenology in this study. I made this choice because I felt that it was important to have some separation between all of the preconceived notions that I had attached to the school during my experience working there, and because I would be interpreting the meaning of the experience the students' and teachers' experience of learning Control Theory through my data analysis. Analytic phenomenology was discarded as an option because I did not feel that I was knowledgeable enough about the strict logical processes that I felt were necessary in order to deduce the form and structure of the consciousness of the participants. I am certainly interested in the analytic approach that was described in the literature and plan to expand my knowledge on the subject in order to have it as an option in future studies.

Phenomenological Reduction, Bracketing or Epoche

Smith (2006) presents Husserl's original conception of "bracketing" the aspect of consciousness that was under investigation by focusing only on the content and form of the experience itself. I felt that this process of bracketing or *epoche* within phenomenology was very important for me within this study. Within phenomenology, Ravich and Carl (2016), Creswell (1998), and Lavertny (2003) describe bracketing as a setting aside of assumptions, judgements and past experiences on the part of the researcher as a means of attempting to more accurately see and convey the characteristic essence of the phenomenon in question. As I had previous experience teaching at the research site and had extensive preconceptions about the positive

transformative potential at the site, I determined that it would be necessary for me to develop an awareness of my preconceptions throughout planning this entire research project. In addition to maintaining a self-conscious awareness of my preconceptions and reflexivity throughout the research endeavour, I made a number of conscious decisions about my research design, implementation, and analysis that I felt would keep me aware of my preconceptions and allow more room for the complete essence of the lived experiences of the students and teachers at the school to enter into the discussion.

To encourage a broader spectrum of viewpoints to both allow for a richer understanding and to balance my positive assumptions about the capacity of the school's culture to transform people, I sought a wide range of opinions about transformative education, alternative schooling, and Control Theory in my literature review. In addition to recruiting students and teachers who had positive experiences with Control Theory, I made an effort in my participant selection process to recruit dissenters who believed that Control Theory had little to no transformative effect on their lives. This idea was first suggested by my committee member during the early planning stages of my research. While reflecting on why he might suggest this, I came to the conclusion that it would be beneficial to include them as participants because it would provide rigour and validity to my findings by providing as broad a range of experiences as possible. Through bracketing my preconceptions, I also deduced that including dissenters might be useful to provide a counterbalance to my existing positive notions of the transformative potential of the school. When designing my interview questions, I worked to structure them in a way that was as neutral as possible and made a point of examining when I was making assumptions about the positive transformative potential that I believed was present. The questions were designed to

allow the participants to simply convey their own perspectives without my colouring their response by leading them.

By maintaining a self-consciousness of my role in the interview process, I restrained myself from agreeing or disagreeing with what was being said or encouraging the participants to think in certain ways. If I found myself leading the conversation, I would turn control over the conversation back to the participant or move on to another question. This happened multiple times during the interview process and I found it difficult to maintain a somewhat neutral stance in my opinions and views. I thought that it was important to have the participants communicate their thoughts and impressions about their experience with Control Theory without reinforcement of certain ideas on my part.

In my analysis of the interviews, I made a special point of looking for perspectives that reflected a negative attitude toward the transformative potential of Control Theory and tried to give equal weight to supportive and dissenting views. Finally, during the data-analysis phase of the research process, I sought out mentions of limitations and difficulties that participants experienced in learning and applying Control Theory and included these mentions in generating codes and themes.

Interviews and Question Design

In keeping with Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) description, the interview guide contained a mix of structured questions and unstructured questions which were all used flexibly. The interview guide that served as the reference for my interviews can be found as Appendix A. I used the interview guide to provide direction and grounding in the questions that I prepared in advance but I paid close attention to the conversation that ensued to elicit further unexpected, and potentially relevant information throughout the interview. There were many instances where

"going off script" yielded unexpected and fruitful trains of thought that provided me with insights that I would not have had otherwise. An example is the extensive discussion of the importance of Control Theory as a language by which to communicate internal behaviour and awareness, which I had not considered before. The data that I collected were largely kept specific and focused on student and teacher perceptions of the individual and social transformative potential of Control Theory at the research site by referring back to the interview guide periodically as the interviews unfolded. This being said, I was open to student and teacher perspectives that expanded on transformational qualities of Control Theory and made use of local knowledge that was particular to the school culture in identifying any other transformative influences at the school or any unexpected perceptions of the influence that Control Theory might have had on individuals or the school culture.

As communicated on the participant recruitment letter (see Appendix B), interviews were scheduled for thirty minutes in length. Some of the interviews were as short as twenty minutes, others were nearly one hour. This letter also outlines the risks, rights, responsibilities, and rewards of participation in the study.

In addition to data gathering connected to my research question, I had a few informal discussions with the principal, a past course instructor, and the current course instructor. I also sought out any documents pertaining to the course creation, history, and delivery. The purpose of these discussions and in reading these documents was not to collect data for analysis but to gather background information that provided a richer context within which to analyse the data that I did collect.

As I used semi-structured interviews for data collection, the design of the questions was both flexible but focused on exploring student and teacher perspectives on the transformative

potential of the local option control theory course at The School. In keeping with the theoretical framework of transformative education, I included questions that call upon the participant to notice changes in their perceptions of self-awareness and autonomy, social justice, ecological awareness, their social conditioning, among other topics related to critical pedagogy. This alignment with a philosophical orientation is suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and I believe that it was an effective tool to use in guiding the creation of questions as I sought perspectives on transformation from the participants. I divided the questions into three distinct sections.

In designing questions for this study, I initially intended to have separate questions for staff and for students. In the end, I decided that since I was looking for commonalities amongst the individual experiences of participants, I would keep the questions consistent between the groups. I altered the focus of the questions slightly by talking with the students and student alumni about their experience with the local option course and with the teachers about their training course. I discussed the broad experience of Control Theory in and out of school with all groups.

The first section consisted of technical questions about the terminology of Control Theory. The intent was to make sure that the participant was familiar with the language and was understanding what I was talking about in subsequent sections. The first question that I asked was how they would define Control Theory. I found it interesting that every answer was slightly different yet revolved around similar themes of self-reflection and practicality. The second section was designed to look at transformative experience and explored self-described changes in perception that the individual experienced as a result of learning Control Theory. These questions asked the participant to look at differences in self-perception, then to differences in

their perception of their close social circles, then through increasingly abstract relationships up to and including asking them to describe how their relationship with nature had changed. As the interviews went on, I simplified the questioning cycle and engaged in conversation that revolved around this expanding circle of awareness without formally going through the levels. The third section was designed to delve into changes in participants' views of how the influence of external power impacted their life. My thinking was that this could be connected to development of a more critical consciousness that recognizes the role of power in creating structures of oppression in society. I took a similar approach to section two in having the beginning questions form a common frame of reference concerning what external power means in Control Theory and then asking questions about external power that ask the individual to move their awareness from the personal through to the global. This line of questioning was much more intuitive and I ended up working through the different levels fairly linearly, ending the line of questioning at whatever level that the participant could not find examples. This section led to some very interesting and political conversations with a good number of interviewees and provided quite a few insights that I had not expected.

My reasoning for structuring the questions for both students and teachers as I did was inspired by Mezirow's (1997) idea of transformative education being about changing habits of mind and frames of reference. I was interested in self-described instances of personal transformation where the participants experienced either a change in their habits of thought or in the way that they frame their reality. In using the language of Choice Theory, clarifying the terminology with the participants, and forming the conversation around transformation, I predicted that individuals would have some response that supported one of these two aspects of change. The different levels of questioning were inspired largely by Dyson (2010), O'Sullivan

(1999), and Taylor's (2008) ideas about transformative education being about expanding one's perception, consciousness, and awareness outward from the personal to the social, ecological, planetary, and universal as a process in the evolution of human growth and understanding. I was interested to see how far each individual recognized changes in their perception of this range of ideas as influenced by learning Control Theory in terms of these expanded circles of awareness.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected from both teacher and student populations within the school in question who have either taken the local option Control Theory course in the case of students, or have been trained in Control Theory in the case of teachers. As previously stated, in addition to inviting individuals who were familiar with Control Theory, I sought out and made a special request for students who have taken the course and did not find it impacted them. This invitation to include dissenters in the group of interviewees was noted on the poster and the recruitment letter. One limitation of this type of recruitment was that no dissenters came forth. Only one student in all of the interviews that I conducted could be considered to be somewhat dismissive of Control Theory but even this participant had some positive remarks and noted that learning it had a positive impact on their life even though they did not use it to the extent of many of the other students. I attributed this to the voluntary nature of the recruitment process assuming that since the personality of dissenters would be such that they would not be interested in participating in a university study, they would not make the effort to reach out.

I had initially capped the number of student interviews at six but extended it to seven due to the fact that an individual who was recommended to me by the school staff as a great source of information expressed interest late in my fieldwork. Since all teachers are required to work toward becoming certified in Perceptual Control Theory when they are hired at the school, all six

of the long-term teachers and the principal were asked to participate in the data-gathering phase of the study. I was expecting that not all of the teachers would wish to participate so I estimated a total of six adult interviewees with a desired minimum participation of three. All teachers and the principal agreed to participate and I ended up interviewing all of them by the end of my fieldwork. Of particular interest to me as a participant was the course instructor. I was especially interested in her perspectives on any changes that she perceived to occur in the students and any changes that she had noticed in the broader school culture during her time teaching the course.

Students under the age of eighteen who were interested in the study were provided with a consent form that required the signature of their guardian (see Appendix C). Students over eighteen and the staff who were interested were provided with a consent form that required only their signature (see Appendix D).

In addition to data-gathering, I engaged in interviews with individuals who could give me a richer perspective on both the reasons for creating this course, the curriculum, and pedagogical aims of teaching it. I contacted the initial creator of the course whose contact information had been provided to me by the school principal. I also interviewed the current course instructor, as mentioned above, who has been teaching the class for a number of years. I was interested in the particulars of the curriculum and pedagogical approach that she uses in the classroom when teaching the Control Theory course. I was also fortunate enough to be able to speak with the previous Control Theory instructor who is still a teacher at the school. Through these conversations, I learned a great deal about how they treat the curriculum as well as the pedagogical approaches that each teacher of the course has used over the years.

Technical Aspects of Conducting, Recording, and Transcribing Interviews

I conducted two types of interviews in accordance with participants' preferences. The primary method of interviewing was face-to-face with the spoken interview being recorded with a handheld digital audio recorder. I used a Sony PCM-M10 model handheld digital stereo audio recording device. I placed the device between myself and the interviewee with the microphones aimed at the speaker's head. Interviews were conducted in the principal's office, a career counselling room, a therapeutic counselling room, and a multi-use classroom. I found that interviews recorded in quieter rooms generated a more accurate automatic transcription through Google speech to text as well as being much easier to manually transcribe. In future interviews, I will make sure to pay more attention to ambient noise to facilitate transcription.

After recording was completed, audio files were transferred to my computer for storage and for use in manual transcription. I also created a document in Google docs and connected the audio recorder's output to my computer's input. I used Google's "speech typing" tool within Google docs to record the input of the audio recording into a document. This process yielded between approximately 50% to 80% accuracy in transcription and it was still necessary for me to revisit each interview and make changes to ensure as much accuracy in transcription as possible. I believe that the use of the Google speech typing sped up my transcription process considerably. Manual transcription was carried out using *VLC* software as my audio player running alongside *libreoffice* as the word processor.

My secondary interview format was directly within Google docs. Two of my participants were more comfortable typing their responses instead of coming to the school for a face-to-face interview and to simulate the real-time dynamic of a conversation I chose to use Google docs to record the typed conversations. I sent invitations to share a document to each of the participants.

We arranged for a time to meet and typed our conversation. This was convenient as the interview transcript was created in real time and required little in the way of formatting after the fact. The limitation of this method was that it was quite time consuming. One interview spanned nearly two hours and the other ended up lasting forty-five minutes. From my perspective, this is actually less time than a transcription would take, however, even though neither participant expressed feeling any inconvenience, I felt that it was a burden on them.

Transcription documents were formatted as I went and final transcriptions were uploaded to Atlas.ti cloud software (Qualitative Data Analysis Software [QDAS]) for analysis.

Interview Procedure

I interviewed three of the teachers first as a set of pilot interviews (as per Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), beginning with the school principal. She and I have a trusting relationship and she has a deep awareness and knowledge of the student and teacher dynamics at the school. I asked her to give me honest feedback on the appropriateness of the questions that I had prepared. She affirmed that the questions that I asked would be appropriate for the students. I also debriefed with the other two teachers to get their perspectives on whether the questions will make sense to the students. The other teachers also thought the questions were good. As I progressed through my interviews, I reflected on each session to refine both my questions and my questioning technique (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) so that I could get the richest data possible from the students. Students under the age of eighteen were presented with an information sheet drawing their attention to the importance of their mental health and offering contact information for local mental health organizations (see Appendix E) in case the student was troubled by our conversation.

Data Analysis Methods

I used a method of data analysis consistent with phenomenology (as per Creswell, 1998) beginning with horizontalization of the raw interview data and treating everything said with equal weight. I then moved on to dividing the data up into clusters of meaning through coding and finally collecting and distilling these codes into major themes that described what was experienced by the participants and how they experienced it. My process was similar to that outlined in Webb and Welsh (2019) where they present an iterative, six element approach including

> turning to a phenomenon of interest, investigating experience as lived rather than as conceptualized, reflecting on essential themes, describing the phenomenon through writing and re-writing, maintaining a focus on the phenomenon, and balancing the research by considering the parts and the whole (p. 172).

As my research question revolves around student and teacher perceptions of the intents and impacts of learning Control Theory, my approach to analysis of the data focused on identifying instances where students and teachers made mention of how learning and applying Control Theory created transformation in their lives. I approached transformation as a spectrum that begins with personal reflection and transformation and extends to acknowledging student and teacher awareness of their ability to transform not only themselves but to act as transformative agents in the world. As a springboard toward organizing thematic material, I initially looked at satisfaction of needs as a path to transformation. I drew some inspiration for this connection from Bowles and Gintis's (1976) critical assertion that "workers are neither machines nor commodities but rather, active human beings who participate in production with the aim of satisfying their personal and social needs." (p. 10). Within the context of their

discussion, this statement implies that the social constructs of school and work are designed to provide human need fulfillment in exchange for capital within an exploitative system. It stands to reason therefore, that there exists a system that could fulfill human needs in a more humane way. Since one of Control Theory's main themes is the satisfaction of needs, I was interested to see if there is the potential for transformative learning to occur as a result of students taking a course in Control Theory at The School. However, with the decision to approach the study phenomenologically, I discarded this idea of a pre-conceived analytical framework and chose instead to use a process of *horizontalization*, as per Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Creswell (1998). I initially treated all of the data as having equal weight and proceeded to methodically sift through them to generate codes and themes.

I conducted analysis of the interview transcripts using an inductive method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) whereby I explored the transcripts repeatedly and generated codes through interpreting the meaning of what the subjects said. These codes were generated on-the-fly and the concepts behind them were informed both by reflection on my literature review, my personal background, and by iterative analysis of other interview transcripts (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Examination of the data in this emergent way provided me with novel insights and a richer picture of participants' experience than I had expected.

The coding process consisted of reading through each transcript looking for mentions of experiences of Control Theory that were related to transformation at some level. As I selected these sections of text, I thought about the essence of what was being said and create a code that briefly described that essence. As an example, the quotation "sometimes when kids are learning it they don't like it because they do have to look at their lives" was assigned the code *aversionToSelfAssessment* as I felt that this code distilled what was being communicated by the

individual here as the essential meaning. Reading through the transcripts, I created new codes whenever the participants talked about novel impacts, but after creating several codes I noticed that some comments aligned with codes that I had already created. An example of this related to the above example would be assigning the *aversionToSelfAssessment* code to the quotation "some people are not open to the idea of being in control of their actions and emotions because then they have to take responsibility for what they are doing" from a separate interview. Since the basic essence of this quotation is similar to that of the previous one, they share the same code. I continued through each transcript line-by-line and classified new bits of text either to the pre-existing codes or created new codes as needed if the essence of the statement was not reflected in a pre-existing code. I went through the transcripts twice with the second time being for the three purposes of examining duplicate codes that could be combined into one idea, ensuring that my initial interpretation of the meaning of the coded texts was accurate, and of catching passages of text that had not been classified. A complete list of all of the codes that I was using at this point can be found in Appendix F.

In all, I ended up with 123 unique codes from which I generated themes that were emergent from the codes that I created based on the phenomenological approach of organizing the significant statements defined by the codes into *meaning units*, or themes, that describe a broader essence of meaning. To continue from the previous example above, I grouped the *aversionToSelfAssessment*, *needForOpennessToExperience,* and *desireForPersonalChange* codes, among others, into a sub-theme that reflected the challenges and pre-requisites at the introductory phase of learning Control Theory. Use of the "groundedness" sorting tool in Atlas.ti helped me to begin organizing which themes were more prominent than others in order to group sub-themes into broader units of meaning. The tool allowed me to look at the codes that

appeared most often in the data. I identified the codes that appeared most often and used these as the basis for creating the larger main themes. For example, the most numerous code was *selfEvaluation* and thus, I created a theme called *self Evaluation* that was populated by all of the coded instances of text connected by this theme. Once I decided on the themes, I reviewed the coded excerpts that did not share the same name as the theme and used my own judgement to determine how these quotations might fit within the scope of the larger theme groups. At this point, some of the coded data that did not fit within a theme group was either re-coded to fit a theme group or discarded, depending on whether I thought it was relevant within the broader context of the study.

In organizing the themes and sub-themes, I created a separate Word document that outlined all of the them in a hierarchy tree (see Appendix D). I then went through the Atlas.ti codes and blocked them accordingly in different colours based on the theme that they were most related to. Once the codes were organized under themes by colour, I downloaded each colour's transcript quotations from Atlas.ti as excel spreadsheets. I copied quotations from these spreadsheets under their corresponding heading in the outline until an entire "theme family" of quotations was populated. Then I went through these groups in order to organize the data analysis into a more readable form. Once I had this system in place, the data analysis process went smoothly and my writing began to feel much more cohesive and "story-like."

The story-like structure that developed through using this process led me to further refine themes which I divided temporally. Doing so created a structure where transformation took place through stages through which the participants communicated how they were introduced to Control Theory (pre-requisites and motivations), their experience learning Control Theory (experiences), and subsequently how they observed transformation through their learning of

Control Theory through applying what they learned (outcomes). Outside of this three-stage structure, I also identified two themes attached to ideas of Control Theory as transformative critical pedagogy. These two themes were related to participants' understanding of external control within Control Theory and how this understanding transformed both their ability to recognize abuses of power at multiple levels and their perception of their own ability to confront those who abuse power.

The use of the organizational system in my analysis resulted in a nested group of themes that paint a picture of shared experiences through time, but also uniquely subjective experiences across the participants. The following analysis presents the relevant data that were collected during my fieldwork and organizes and explains what I interpret the meaning of them to be.

Chapter Four: Analysis

In this chapter, I discuss the conversations that I had with the participants of my study and place these conversations in the context of my research question. Since my research question focused on intents and impacts of the local option Control Theory course on the students and teachers, I divided the data analysis into the two broad categories of intents and impacts. The intents of the course were described in interviews with teachers, but I also included elements from curriculum documents that I read on site and conversations with past teachers and the course founder to provide a picture of the intended aims of the course. In terms of impacts, I drew solely on data contained in the interviews. These data were much more extensive than the intents data and the conversations that took place that describe the impacts paint a picture of Control Theory as a life-changing means of self-evaluation that, if properly utilized, can be quite empowering. There were three distinct groups of interview participants: current teachers at the school, current students, and student alumni. I used pseudonyms throughout. I also edited the transcripts for readability by omitting repeated and extraneous words without detracting from the meaning conveyed by the quotations. I also removed certain sections of long quotations that are irrelevant to the discussion. These gaps are marked by the presences of ellipses (…) in the text.

Intents

My examination of the intents of the Control Theory course are informed by a combination of the conversations I had with the participants, especially the teachers, by looking through a variety of texts including the teaching binder for the course. Reading books about Control Theory that are used by the teachers at the school site, including the course textbook, equipped me with the purpose of the course and how it aligns with what I encountered in the interviews. The themes related to intents include the stated aims that were mentioned in

conversation with teachers and students, the curriculum and pedagogy around Control Theory which includes discussions about curriculum and pedagogy that I had with the teachers and students and reading the current teacher's teaching guide, and looking at the hidden curriculum of Control Theory as it appears in the day-to-day personal interactions and philosophies enacted throughout the school. The latter is referenced primarily in conversations with the teachers, students, and alumni.

Texts That Inform the Curriculum and Pedagogy

The main text that is used in the Control Theory course is entitled, *In Pursuit of Happiness: Knowing What You Want, Getting What You Need*, written by E. Perry Good (2007). The frontispiece of the book contains an acknowledgement that the contents are "largely based on Dr. William Glasser's work on Reality Therapy and Control Theory," and this is apparent on examination of the text. The topics covered in the text echo a number of ideas that were mentioned by the teachers and students that I interviewed. The terms that were prominent in the interviews, especially with teachers, include signals, pictures, behaviours, needs, and relationships, which are all found in the table of contents in Good's text.

The book has more in common with a self-help book than with a school textbook; the artwork throughout contains cartoon illustrations of snails playing out some of the concepts. This gives the text the feel of a book geared toward elementary school-aged children if it were not for the complexity of the subject matter and the fact that the text is clearly geared towards adults, not high school students. This simplicity makes the book accessible and not intimidating which given the importance that many teachers put on creating an atmosphere of safety and belonging seems appropriate to the spirit of the Control Theory course. One of the first things that I noticed was that the book communicates love, power, fun, and freedom as basic needs while Glasser's

model includes a need for survival. The idea that survival needs are so obvious to most people is given as the reason in the text this need is omitted; the distinction is made between survival needs as physical needs and the other four needs as mental needs. These psychological needs, the author asserts, are the needs that most people do not consider. In discussion with one of the teachers, I learned that the students and the teacher read the assigned sections of the text aloud during class.

The other main text that I used to investigate the intentions of the course was the teaching binder that was assembled by the current instructor. I carefully read the contents of the binder, made notes, and took photographs of pages that were particularly interesting for later reference. The preliminary intentions of the classroom experience are to establish a classroom culture based on shared beliefs. The first activity listed is for the students to create belief statements, which are to be the guiding principles for the conduct of everyone in the classroom. There are also activities that encourage students to get to know one another and to work in teams. Although the class focuses on personal self-evaluation, almost all of the activities involved working in groups.

There are a number of assignments including watching films and having the students reflect on topics of Control Theory that are present, creating collages, writing an essay, journaling, and a final presentation. From what I could discern, much of the activity in class is based on role-playing and practicing Control Theory skills of self-evaluation and co-operation. Topics such as perception and cognition, heuristics and biases, behaviour, goal-setting, boundaries, and conflict resolution are included in the course curriculum, all of which are tied in some way to Control Theory ideas. It also seems that many of the assignments that are evaluated are evaluated based on a system devised by the students as a group. In turn, the students also have a chance to evaluate their own performance on some assignments.

Through my examination of the teaching binder, it seems that the intents of the course as indicated by the priorities of its instructor revolve around encouraging students to take authentic responsibility for themselves, work well with others, and practice developing skills of self-evaluation.

Participant Groups

To clarify between teacher and student interviewees, I have included behind each individual's name an indicator of (T) for teacher and (S) for student/student alumni. This is to assist the reader in identifying which viewpoints are coming from teachers and which are coming from students.

The teachers that I interviewed for this study were Doris (T), Leslie (T), Rachel (T), Sarah (T), Tom (T), Richard (T), and Connie (T). Doris (T), Leslie (T), Tom (T), and Richard (T) have all been trained in Control Theory, as discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis. Doris (T), Leslie (T), Tom (T), and Richard (T) are fully "ACT 3 certified" which means that they have participated in three weekend-long training sessions as well as three practicum periods that were supervised by an accredited Perceptual Control Theory (PCT) instructor. In the interviews, all teachers discussed their use of Control Theory in their day-to-day interactions with students at the school. Doris (T) is the principal of the school. Leslie (T) is the current teacher of the local option Control Theory course. Rachel (T) and Sarah (T) are former students of the school and are now staff members with Sarah (T) working with Leslie (T) as an educational assistant in the Control Theory course. Tom (T) is a former teacher of the Control Theory course and works at the school as both the classroom math teacher and as the Control Theory counsellor for the students. When students want to talk about their problems in the language of Control Theory, it is his semi-formal role in the school to counsel them. Richard (T)

is the social studies classroom teacher and is one of the newer employees at the school. Connie (T) is the school counsellor.

The current students who volunteered to participate were Dave (S), Alice (S), and Tanis. Since nearly the entire student population was involved in the classroom math class for the entire time that I was on site, there were fewer current students that could be involved in my study than I had hoped. This limitation was exacerbated by the fact that I required that participants had taken the Control Theory course. However, the three conversations I did have with current students painted a varied picture of the impacts that Control Theory had on their lives and coupled with the four conversations that I was able to have with student alumni, I believe that I have a rich variety of experiences from which to draw.

At the suggestion of a number of teachers and the principal, I sought out participants who were students at The School in the past who the staff felt would be good sources of information. Daphne (S), Fuller (S), Danica (S), and Wendy (S) volunteered to be interviewed. These former students graduated from the school between 2012 and 2019 and have thus had a good variation of time away from the school culture and of life experience in the interim. Daphne (S) graduated in 2013 and is now an elementary school teacher in the same city as The School. She also attended the Control Theory professional development session with four new staff members of The School and me. Fuller (S) graduated in 2012 and is an aspiring artist who had recently returned from art school in Nova Scotia. As a special note, they self-identify as being a trans individual and therefore are referred to as “they” throughout this section. Danica (S) was a music student of mine and I saw a marked transformation in her confidence during my time there. She graduated in 2019 and had moved out of the city to look for work at the time I interviewed her. Wendy (S) graduated in 2012 and is employed in the same city as The School.

Impacts

Through the interviews that I conducted, it became apparent that Control Theory as a philosophy has had significant impacts on not only the teachers and students at the school but on the entire school culture. In fact, although I focus on the local option course in the data analysis section, it is nearly impossible to tease the effects of the course apart from the experience of being immersed in the school culture as Control Theory is such an important part of the school's social fabric.

A number of major themes emerged from the interviews revolving around impacts. On a personal level, students and teachers shared ideas ranging from factors that allow a person to learn Control Theory to some of the limitations that the theory presents. I have broken these ideas down using the process described in the previous chapter into the major themes of *pre-requisites and motivation*, *experiences with the process of learning Control Theory*, and *outcomes of having learned Control Theory*. The full theme and sub-theme structure are outlined in Appendix F. Supplementary to these three phases of learning, I include sections related to changes in the participants' views of external control, which is an element of critical and transformative education that I was interested in.

Relationship-Building as an Entry Point for Learning

In explaining the importance that Control Theory puts on developing positive relationships, Doris (T) told me that "most issues period are relationship issues when it comes down to it. That's a core belief of Control Theory". Self-evaluation, as discussed below, is essential in promoting the creation of positive relationships and reducing the number of, and potential for, negative ones. Empathy seems to grow out of self-evaluation and appears to be a factor in the development of positive relationships. As such, discussions around interpersonal

relationships whether in school, at home, or in the wider society were a theme in every interview. The key to developing and maintaining these positive relationships seemed to be in learning the language of Control Theory. Richard (T) stated that the "initiation piece is being comfortable knowing what the language means and then at a later time going in-depth, then kind of internalize what that means." Language-learning, as initiation into the process of Control Theory and culture of the school, begins with the introduction to the course and the concepts of Control Theory.

There was a variety of experiences amongst the participants concerning their introduction to Control Theory at the school. Only one of the participants, Connie (T), had a background in Control Theory before coming to the school. All of the other participants were introduced by either one-on-one mentorship under a teacher, taking the teacher-training course as a requirement for being hired, or taking the local option course as a student.

A number of the students and teachers described the prerequisites for learning Control Theory in the context of their own experience. Richard (T), Tom (T), and Rachel (T) describe being introduced to the language and ideas through the mentorship of another teacher before taking the formal training course. Richard (T) said,

> This language of being on your back wheels… that's something I remember. I was like well what is that? [My mentor] Tom (T) said well maybe I should just sit down with you, we'll talk about some of these things and then that way you can even – before your training starts – you'll have the language so that's how it started.

Tom (T), in turn, was mentored by one of the school's founders, William.

> We just met once a week and he would teach me some stuff. Start with the needs of course and certain questioning patterns that was in the reality therapy – it was a series of

> questions so we focus on one thing – I try that for a week working with the students and come back and talk to him, And then we'd talk he'd teach me more and I'd go out and try more.

In Rachel (T)'s case, William acted as a mentor while she was a student at the school. It seems that he worked primarily with her on her personal life instead of school. The effect that Control Theory had on the participants' personal lives was a running theme throughout most of the interviews. Rachel (T) said,

> I was working with William before I started, while I started at The School, and then William and I would meet once a week. … It started really basic just learning the needs and that stuff and then it just went into almost role-playing [and] problem-solving but with my own personal life. We would leave school out of it and discuss my life and so I put it into a personal use before I started using it.

I found that the introduction of the students to Control Theory often took place through one-on-one interactions with Tom (T); both Wendy (S) and Danica (S) mentioning his suggestion that they take the course being a major factor in their decision to do so. As students, Daphne (S) and Dave (S) were introduced through discussions with other students who had taken the course before them. Nearly all of the participants described some sort of basic mental requirement for being able to get something meaningful out of learning Control Theory. Descriptions of such meaning were consistent across teachers and students with both groups relaying the importance of the individual having the desire to engage in self-assessment and to be willing to examine their life with the intent to change it. From the perspective of the teachers, the most important element in engaging the students with learning Control Theory is what they often termed "*involvement*." This is essentially getting to know the students on a human level and

developing a trusting relationship based on mutual vulnerability. The importance of this element is summed up by Tom (T):

> I've always found once they can feel comfortable – when I've taught them with me or when I meet them one-on-one– I get *involvement* with them which is the first thing in reality therapy, get *involvement* with the person right…that they feel comfortable then they're more open to sharing.

Variations on this theme of being involved authentically with the students and working to disrupt their expectations of authority at the school run through a number of the teachers' comments. One of the teachers who had been a student at the school reflected on their experience on both sides of this relationship, saying that

> When I first started and they had those conversations with me without even…with me not even knowing that I was being, or not being "control theoried" …but I think that that is it - they don't realize. So when you start asking them [students], in talking about what did you do to make that happen or what did - how is what you were doing helping the situation?… they're not as reluctant to self-analyse or self-evaluate the situation.

Parallel to his intentioned relationship-building with the students on the part of the teachers, the students indicated that it is important for them to feel connected to their classmates. This connection created a safe space for them. Danica (S) commented on the fact that in the class "everyone was connected" and Dave (S) shared that the presence of his best friend in the class not only motivated him to take the class but gave him the confidence to share his problems.

> For me it was my friend group, like my friend was like I really want to take this course. I was like, well, you're excited to take it and like I'm your best friend why not? I'll come take it with you. And then I actually really enjoyed it after, even though it was stressful at

> the start and I don't like talking about my issues. I got used to it and just the people I was around so I was - it turned out pretty easy to open up and I knew if he was there it'd be like I'd feel more comfortable talking about those things cuz I already told him probably almost everything I've gone through. So it's like having that one person that knows and supports me. Feels a lot safer in that room than having a bunch of random faces staring at me.

Danica (S), Daphne (S), and Dave (S) all asserted that an open mind is a necessity when approaching the class with Daphne (S) emphasizing that openness is even more important than having a desire to change.

> Just having an open mind and, y'know, not necessarily going in like ahh I want to change but thinking … I don't really know what this course is about but I know that it might challenge me and I'm going to give it a try and see how it goes.

The topic of change, reflected in desires to create personal change, to solve problems in life, and to increase knowledge of oneself, were other factors that both students and teachers deemed necessities in learning Control Theory. This desire for change is summed up by Tom (T) who conveyed "I think teenagers especially are searching for who they are so this kinda gives them some things to help them on that journey."

From a student perspective, the desire for change may be more personal, as in Alice (S)'s case where she stated that she took the course because she thought that it taught skills related to "changing your mental aspect to make you have a healthy mind to have a healthy body and I was having difficulties with my body weight because I was under weight and I need to have a healthy body weight which was a struggle of mine." She went on to describe a number of other personal changes that occurred in her life as a result of taking the training but this was one of her primary

motivators. Richard (T) viewed this desire to change as being reflective of a certain "level of maturity", which he repeatedly mentioned as a requirement for being open to Control Theory. With this in mind, a distinct barrier to entering into learning and absorbing the ideas is an aversion to self-assessment, reflected in an aversion seemingly based on difficulties grounded in shame and fear as described by Sarah (T).

> Because doing that means they really do have to look at themselves and their situation. Their habits, what they're doing, and that might be scary for them right because they know somewhere deep down that they do have to change to become the person they want to be, but [are] not ready to maybe do that right at the moment

Many of the respondents, both teachers and students, confirmed the difficulty in approaching self-assessment. Danica (S), Daphne (S), Sarah (T), Tom (T), Richard, Wendy (S), and Dave (S) all described this aversion in the context of their own experiences. Their resistance may present a further challenge because of drug use, as described by Richard (T), who describes the combination of students not wanting to come to terms with their situation and their masking this feeling with drugs as being especially challenging.

> When there's drugs involved, it's masking pain and so then to go and actually get sober enough to look at you have to navigate that pain and that's really hard. Really, really hard.

Richard (T) believes that there are at least two levels involved with reaching students with drug dependencies. They must learn to stop masking their emotions with drugs and then face their pain head on in the course, which for many of them is too difficult. In contrast to these

difficult problems, Wendy (S) offers her reflection that her resistance came not from fear or shame but from simply not wanting to take responsibility for her thoughts and behaviors.

> I thought just mostly like psychology-based stuff. But Tom (T) had told me a big point in the class was that you are in control of your emotions at all times. And because I was an angry teenager going through a lot I thought that was bullshit cuz who wants to take accountability for being certain emotions sometimes.

These conversations concerning the early stages of participants' introduction to Control Theory lay the groundwork for describing some of what they experienced during the teacher training course, in one-on-one interactions, and in the students' local option course. Once these initial introductions took place, their experience in learning and using Control Theory began.

Self-Discovery and Expression as a Transformative Classroom Experience

Student experiences as compared to teacher experiences in the Control Theory classroom showed predictable divergencies due to the different roles that students and teachers adopt in a school environment. However, due to the nature of the pedagogical style of the teachers, the division between teacher and student becomes blurred as an intentional technique of the teacher demonstrating her humanness in order to encourage students to share their own experiences. Leslie (T) communicated the unique approach one needs to take in teaching this class and shared one of the personal stories that she tells students to encourage their opening up to thinking and talking about their internal lives.

> *Leslie (T):* Y'know it's not-in a normal class, like in a math class, you wouldn't be sharing stuff like that but this is different…we had just bought a brand new couch and a leather couch sectional so it was really expensive. [It was] in the basement and my daughter's cat went to jump up on the back and slipped and like sliced it and I just was

like… and I'm not I'm not a really angry person, but I just like snapped and went right onto my back wheels and I picked up the cat and threw her over the top. She landed on her feet-like it wasn't like I… but that's not how I do it. But I made that decision-I made that decision on my back wheels. It was a poor decision and the worst part about [it]- I didn't hurt the cat cuz she just landed on her feet - but my daughter, that's her cat, and she just watched me throw her…and she was just horrified. So I was like okay… those are the kinds of things you do when you're on your back wheels so it's like if you're 'throwing your cat angry' you need to not be making any decisions…that's on your back wheels. That's big time back wheels behaviour, like I made that choice, and it was a poor choice.

Michael: And you find that kind of stuff helps the students relate?

Leslie (T): Well especially the animal lovers…but I do. And I give the example of my dad because I know there's a lot of absent parents…and then there's often addictions and things like that play into it.

Michael: So you really try to be real with them?

Leslie (T): Mmhmm I do give specifics where I would never give that in a normal situation.

Leslie (T) worked as a high school science teacher before taking the position at The School. She indicates at the end of this story that she would not be this candid with students in a regular classroom situation, but the Control Theory class requires her to be more open in order to prepare students for sharing their own experiences.

The approach of being vulnerable with the students is echoed by Rachel (T) in her comment about being a genuine person when relating to the students instead of as just a teacher working at the school:

> I mean for me I find that it's really important. Like if they're going to be honest and vulnerable with me I choose to be that way with them too…so that they know that I'm … I am who I am I'm not just putting on a fluffy this is my job thing.

The feeling of vulnerability was similarly manifest with students. This is evident when Wendy (S) says "I think it was more then I expected. I didn't think it would affect me that much but it did during lessons and made me emotional during classes which I didn't expect at all," created some unexpected moments of emotion for her as a student in the class.

Not all students, however, commented on the emotional impact of their experience in the course. Danica (S) remarked simply "I really liked it, I really liked how hands on it was" in reference to how she was engaged by the activities in the class. One activity was journal writing. She stated "I loved how we did journals that helped us look into ourselves more." She went on to explain one memorable experience of an in-class activity that resonated with her:

> one of the things we did as an activity in Control Theory was the behaviour car….it was an activity where you had four people and they all had different positions to play I forget what they were called but it was along the lines of someone would play the accuser, reff, and the guilter; there was one more and I know those aren't the right names for them but that activity has stayed with me.

In reflecting on their expectations of and the experience that they had in the class, many found that the class exceeded their expectations with only one student stating that the class was what they expected it to be. When asked if the class met her expectations, Danica (S) stated that

it "actually went over them" while Alice (S) said "honestly, it was more than what I thought it would be." Fuller (S) recalled that they "thought it was going to be a lot more sitting around in the circle and talking about our feelings I guess. I wasn't expecting it to be as practical as it was." Interestingly to me, Fuller (S) described the content of the class as "very much assignment. It was more the paper class than I thought it was going to be."

Dave (S) shared that his experience in the class was unexpected, but pleasant, and ultimately positive.

> I thought it would be less about like ourselves but … it was just like pretty much all about ourselves… it was pleasant but then some of the things were hard to talk about like personal life experiences and stuff so… over all I think it was good…. more positive view on life…how to control my feelings.

These experiences set the stage for learning Control Theory and for some of the students and teachers, this phase was where the transformative potential began to be realized. For most of the participants, however, it was in the outcomes of learning Control Theory where they communicated the most transformation.

But is it really life-changing?

With the experience of having taken the class and in beginning to use the information in their day-to-day life, the students and teachers discussed a number of what I term "outcomes" of the learning, meaning aspects of their lives that they see differently or behaviors that have changed as a result of learning and practicing Control Theory.

The discussion of the outcomes of learning Control Theory was by far the most talked about topic that emerged from my conversations. In analysing the transcripts with Atlas.ti, the code "Self-Evaluation" presented itself 42 times while the second and third most mentioned

themes were “Empathy” at 28 times and “Language Helps With Communication” at 20 times. I have included all three of these three sub-themes under the “Outcomes” heading, which I believe makes this the most relevant section of the data-analysis chapter in terms of creating of picture of the participants’ experience in learning Control Theory and applying it in transformative ways to their lives.

Ideas revolving around the importance of self-evaluation in both learning Control Theory and in the powers of self-evaluation granted by internalizing Control Theory was the most prominent topic discussed by both students and staff. In describing the way Control Theory approaches self-evaluation, Doris (T) emphasized that “it changes your way of thinking about how you should think about self-evaluation” calling it “a new way of examining your behavior.” Daphne (S) echoed this sentiment, stating “you start kinda analyzing your own behaviour differently trying to change it at least." Her focus on self-evaluation for personal change was also mentioned by Danica (S), who conveyed the idea that “you start to look more into yourself when you are in situations. You start to ask yourself why am I angry? What can I do?”

I believe that the difference she referred to is that it focuses on developing a finely-tuned awareness of one’s feelings, physiological responses to stimulation, and behaviors. Leslie (T) stated that

> It’s all about awareness and a lot of Control Theory is awareness. One of the first things we do is talk about signals and your signals are just your body's response before you even realize you're feeling a certain way.

Through taking the Control Theory course, Daphne (S) believed she was able to use the tools of self-evaluation that she learned to break out of her established worldview and be open to

new ideas at University. She told the following short story of her first encounter with the concept of white privilege:

> When I started University in my first year, we started talking about white privilege and being a white female, when white privilege is brought up I was floored. I was so mad. I never heard the term before and I thought it was most ridiculous thing I'd ever heard and I was just rattled. I was so mad and over the top. Over time, though, …I was able to work through that and really think about those kinds of things. I honestly think that there's aspects of that class (Control Theory) that made me capable of bringing it down a level and really thinking about well, what is my professor trying to explain to me here … At first I was definitely thrown off but I got there, and I think that's because of the way I changed my thinking. I guess it definitely could have been easy for me to stay in that spot where I was defensive and didn't want to understand what they're trying to tell me.

The example of Daphne (S)'s story is a standout from my interviews of the transformative potential of taking the Control Theory class. Through the immersion in self-evaluation, she was able to transcend their established habits of mind (Mezirow, 1997) and move toward a more socially aware worldview.

For some students, the transformative potential of taking the course did not change the way that they viewed the world but it did force them to take a look at themselves and their own behavior, which brought about a realization of traits that they had not noticed before. Wendy (S) summed it up nicely when she said

> I just know before I took the course that I didn't think there was a damn thing wrong with me or my attitude, and there was. It took looking at it from doing lessons and stuff on Control Theory to make me take that hard to swallow pill.

Tanis shared a similar observation in telling me “I think it kind of made me realize like how much I acted out and how easy it really was to do better than like blow things completely out of proportion.”

The outcomes of Control Theory training were communicated by Fuller (S) as being much more useful in managing their life than other tools offered by the various psychologists that they visited. They make special note of the simplicity of the approach and their ability to really understand the concepts to enact change in their day-to-day life.

> Recognizing the patterns that form around your own behaviour in response to any stimulus. I mean like even just the needs chart like breaking things down in such a deceivingly simple way … being like, you need to meet your survival needs otherwise you can’t meet other needs after that. Saying it plainly like that makes … I would have problems remembering to eat or sleep or these sorts of things and then I would be having all these issues and [psychologists] would try to … the way that it would be discussed was more complicated in that I didn't get out of it ‘Oh yeah if I'm hungry it's not gonna be easy to feel good about things.’

Richard (T) shared with me the fact that because the idea of self-evaluation permeates the school culture, its importance extends from the personal to the institutional level whereby the staff and students are constantly engaged in evaluating the school and trying to improve it.

> In general, I would say that all schools strive to be the best place they can be but when you are trained in Control Theory there are possibilities for looking at [things like]… what can the students do to provide the environment or to build the environment to foster that environment themselves? … because self-evaluation and going back and assessing is such a deeply rooted part of Control Theory that we're always going back and looking

> and seeing okay well this is what we tried. Did it work or not, and then really going back and looking and trying new things all the time.

To me, Richard (T)'s comments addressed Dyson's (2010) model of transformation moving from the personal outward to increasingly broad areas of influence (see the chapter 2 for diagram). For many students and teachers, self-evaluation led to a change in perception both of themselves and of how they interact within society. Rachel (T) commented on how the training gave her the tools to understand how to change her view of the world, stating that

> It was a good feeling to be able to understand that life doesn't happen to you, you choose what happens in your life you know? Like I kind of always lived on that philosophy but actually see it in practice and be able to use it correctly that was like a game changer for me.

Dave (S) echoed this idea of learning the importance of knowing he has a choice over his behaviors, saying,

> Before I took [the Control Theory course] I was getting angry over the little stuff. Like my brothers would do something that would trigger me and I'd get real angry at them and then kinda take it out on everyone else in my life. Then I realized that like if I just choose not to even get mad in the first place there's nothing really it can affect.

Both of these participants, one a teacher and the other a student, changed their perception of what role choice played in their life by learning Control Theory. Alice (S)'s view of her appearance was changed by taking the course through understanding that the perspectives of others are different than her own. She learned to accept the positive perspectives that others had of her as she points out when she shared that she

> did a lot of self-shaming before. Like I wasn't happy with how I looked. [I was] just

> judgmental over my own self so that [Control Theory] helps me be like okay. I'm pretty even though I don't like people telling me I'm pretty. If I think I'm not pretty, I'm pretty.

Leslie (T) shared a similar notion in that "you can say yeah I know other people have different perspectives but Control Theory really really emphasizes how different people's perspectives are" This focus on developing an understanding that everyone has a different perspective seemed to support the development of a certain degree of empathy through learning Control Theory in many of the participants.

A change in feelings of empathy for others was another common topic in my discussions with participants. These feelings of empathy came from different sources based in Control Theory knowledge including basic assumptions, needs fulfillment, and self-awareness. Doris (T) uses one of the basic assumptions of Control Theory as a source for feeling empathy for the behavior of students and in understanding their family dynamics.

> I'm looking at kids or parents or parenting and one of my core beliefs is that everybody's doing the best they can with what they have at any given time. That is a core belief of Control Theory … which automatically lends itself to having empathy and understanding ….

Doris (T), in discussing criminal behavior and drug use, shows empathy for individuals who are locked in unhealthy cycles. She goes on to explain her understanding of these acts as being attempts at needs-fulfillment. She says that in Control Theory

> people are behaving in certain ways in order to meet certain needs right? … so for a lot of criminal behavior it could be a survival need if they were stealing for food or money … in order to provide for basic needs. In an addict's situation, like [addicts] really believe that their next fix is their biggest need that is why it's survival to them right? ... When it's

> criminal activity, I think there are crimes of passion that relate to the love and belonging need. It's a twisted sort of love …. Power and achievement needs can be met in such healthy ways like through successes and attainment of knowledge and skills but power and achievement can also be met through gang activity.

Many of the participants also attributed this sense of empathy to understanding the Control Theory concept of needs-fulfillment. Danica (S) stated that "we all have needs and we all try and find ways to fill those needs whether that be in a positive light or a negative one." Sarah (T) shared her experience of thinking that "a lot of the kids or even my friends or whoever will be like something's wrong you know I betcha it's their love and belonging need they're trying to meet." Meanwhile, Daphne (S) said that after learning Control Theory, she can "definitely see that there's a reason or a role for whatever way they're behaving." Rachel (T) gave the following example of seeing students trying to meet a need in an unhealthy way and feeling empathy for them.

> I think when I when I see a student acting out, my mind goes to 'okay they're not meeting their power need in a healthy way'. They need that power and achievement need. They're not feeling successful maybe in their schoolwork … so they want that power and so they would act out to get power … as opposed to doing it in a positive way by like getting good grades or studying.

Extending his circle of awareness and empathy to strangers, Richard (T) shared his thoughts about his changed opinions of the behaviour of people he sees in his daily life. He said that Control Theory

> has in some ways allowed me to be more sympathetic to people - to not be as judgmental - so if I see somebody at a department store and they're berating the checkout clerk for

> instance, in the past I might have thought 'wow what an asshole like what a really terrible person to do that to somebody'. Now I'm much more inclined to think okay what happened to this person this morning? ... like I know you're being an asshole but that doesn't mean you are an asshole. What is the underlying cause there … you're not getting a love and belonging need met or what have you or so I would say it's allowed me to be more sympathetic and even empathetic with people that I wouldn't know or even care to know.

Leslie (T) even extended an empathetic understanding of motivation based on needs-fulfillment to U.S. President Trump's behavior, bringing the understanding of the impacts of needs-fulfillment to a global level.

> *Leslie (T)*: For Trump I mean his need would be probably achievement - power like he's achieving all of this. Like everybody's - still not everybody - but a lot of people still love him cheer for him … y'know?
>
> *Michael*: So it's fulfilling his needs?
>
> *Leslie (T)*: Yeah.
>
> *Michael*: In a weird way?
>
> *Leslie (T)*: In a kinda negative way for the rest of the country and world.

Although many of the students and teachers attempted to attribute certain behaviors to attempts at fulfilling needs, Tom (T) said that "it's up to them to self-evaluate. I can take a guess at why but it's for them to once they know the needs." This understanding of the reasons another's actions without trying to read the mind of the other person is akin to empathy but is in line with the Control Theory idea that one can never really know what another person is thinking except by asking them. Tom (T) expands on this in stating "I can take my best educated guesses

as to why something is and maybe they're correct but you don't know until you ask that person and you have to have that relationship with that person to get an honest answer." His statement points out that although one may feel empathy for others, that empathy does not actually reveal the motivations driving the other person's behaviors. It also re-emphasises the importance of developing quality relationships within Control Theory.

Fuller (S) acknowledges the fact that one can never know what is actually motivating another person's behaviour but asserts that the empathy they feel comes from the cultivation of self-awareness and from seeing the behavior of others reflected in their own behavior.

> It's a bit more difficult when you can't imagine someone's motivations but when you're aware of your behaviours, when you're feeling certain things, and when you see other people behave in those ways, then you can directly sympathize because you're like, ah yes, I have had this feeling and behaved this way before or behaved at a lesser level than that but at a more extreme level than that, but similar enough that you can make that connection to personal experience that makes your ability to sympathize more genuine.

Daphne (S) brought up a theme that ties in with empathy which has to do with desire for having control over others as a motivator for behavior. When discussing needs fulfillment as motivation, she also commented that "control sometimes can make people feel like they're meeting their needs but they're not really cuz it's not even what they think it is in the first place." The idea of a misplaced sense of what would fulfill one's needs is interesting to me because it implies that she believes seeking control over others is a way that people think they can fulfill their needs but that it actually does not do so. She related her own experience of needs fulfillment where she said that she would "divert my problems and not deal with my problems so

I think that's why I took that position of control because I felt like I had no control of my own life so I'll just try and control somebody else's."

In the context of fulfilling one's needs at the expense of others, a different sort of empathy was mentioned by Daphne (S) and Doris (T) that centered around Control Theory helping them to recognize the impacts of their own needs-fulfillment-motivated behavior on those around them. Doris (T) described her experience with Control Theory as "a framework by which to self-evaluate in that you look at not only yourself and your actions I also look at myself for my actions and how they impacted others that's the key thing for me." Daphne (S) went into depth about her self-evaluation and the revelation of the effects her actions have on others around her.

> Taking Control Theory has taught me how to identify the things that I want or need and figure out how to meet them without hurting people because before [learning Control Theory] all I wanted was my wants and needs met and I just didn't care if I hurt people to do it.

It seemed from my conversations that perhaps the single most important aspect of approaching both self-evaluation and developing empathy was learning the specific language of Control Theory. As stated in the introduction to this section, language is an initiation into the culture of the philosophy and the school. Once students and staff have learned this language, they understand not only themselves more thoroughly, but also one another.

Every person who I interviewed indicated that after learning the language of Control Theory and what was being described by its language, they saw their life in a different way. A few of the participants delved deeply into the impacts that learning the language had on helping them to understand themselves, Tanis providing an insight in the context of developing a more

nuanced way of naming feelings and examining the reasons for those feelings that "lot of people don't understand their emotions, kinda like they can be like oh, I'm sad but that doesn't explain what they're actually feeling." Richard (T) presented his view on why learning the language is so important is that Control Theory presents "such abstract ideas and concepts that the language makes them navigable … it's like you and I can be talking with two separate things but we can if we share the same language then we're there." The language also helps in understanding other people, and helping to communicate what they need and want from others. Fuller (S), in discussing the Control Theory class, said "I really do think of it as a language type of class." They went on to describe their belief in the necessity of learning a language of interpersonal communication just as one would learn another language in school.

> We learn all sorts of languages for communicating … and I think that it is ridiculous that we have not had a class that covers just that basic interpersonal communication. It's because people think it's too subjective y'know but it's like more and more we know it's a lot less subjective than it was, that actually there are more similarities between people and more feelings that are easy to assign words to and scales to … I think that I would like to see [Control Theory] or something that is taught in schools because like it or not it, would be useful for improving just our general ability to communicate.

Fuller (S) was by far the strongest advocate for the power of the Control Theory language to transform people. Daphne (S), although not addressing the language aspect, also mentioned that "I think it should be a class offered in all high schools." Most of the other participants see the importance of learning the language of Control Theory reflected in their experiences at home and at school.

A number of individuals shared the experience of using the language not only at school but at home as well. This movement of the language from the school into the homes of the teachers and students points to the potential for the ideas involved to expand into broader society, as discussed by Dyson (2010) as being a goal of transformative education. Fuller (S) went so far as to go out of their way to conduct formal lessons with those whom they are involved in personal relationships.

> I ended up teaching a like mini-form Control Theory class to my roommate and my partner in my first year University and it was just because I kept saying things like, you know having this signal that I'm feeling this way … I was talking the Control Theory language around them to navigate our various situations.

Sarah (T) and Rachel (T) shared stories of their families surprising them by using the language of Control Theory without being trained. Rachel (T) communicated her shock and surprise with a story about her husband and young daughter using the language around her.

> He was using the language and I was like I looked at him and said you're using Control Theory and he goes ya, I know. Wow, so you have been listening to me? That's good yeah. and Corinne, my new daughter, I don't even know - she uses the language too once in a while like Mom don't go on your back wheels right? She does it. Like, where'd you pick that up? Oh from me? From you. So it's just a big - you don't even know you're using it. It just becomes part of your life. It becomes part of your life.

Sarah (T) shared a similar situation.

> I was talking to my daughter and I can't remember exactly what we were talking about but I said something that somehow she perceived as guilting and she's six and she said 'mom you're trying to guilt me' and I didn't even realize that I've been ingraining this in

my kids because I think it's just a way of life now.

This adoption of Control Theory as a "way of life" was described by many participants as being, in fact, "life changing." Tom (T), Richard (T), and Sarah (T) all used these exact words when describing the effect that learning Control Theory had on them while Rachel (T) referred to it as a "game changer." Richard (T) went so far as to say "there's a before and there's an after" when discussing the training that he did. Fuller (S), referring to a significant other that he had taught Control Theory to told me that "they explicitly said that their life was improved" while Richard (T) commented on his experience of seeing students' lives changed and his hopes of seeing more of this phenomenon.

> I hope that the kids who've taken this and have internalized it can have their lives changed on it because we've seen that happen and it's fun to watch…life changing, it can be life changing…if they buy in, yeah as with anything.

According to a number of individuals, this life-changing effect is permanent. When asked about the permanent change they experienced in learning Control Theory, Sarah (T) and Tanis agreed that it is indeed permanent. Daphne (S) said that the learning is "definitely something that just sticks" while Dave (S) agreed that the change was permanent and said that the information "stuck there and it's like wow, kinda blew my mind a little bit." Richard (T) asserted that "it is hard to go back … hard to shut the door on that knowledge and go back." He went on to say that "you don't have to change your life but to know the knowledge I think if it's there your eyes are then open." Similarly, in discussing the permanence of the change in her life, Leslie (T) agreed that it was permanent but mentioned that "it took a while to sink in – right away I could see different dynamics in my family … but it really took it a while to sink in." This period of time for the knowledge to take effect was also pointed out by two teachers in their observations of

students. Tom (T) related that some students "learned it … but it's years later they kinda start using some of that stuff like geez you know start thinking about my needs now" and Sarah (T) confirms this in her reflection that

> they might not have it right away but years down the road … me and Leslie (T) when we do the class can give them all the information and then what they do with it after is up to them but a lot of them it might be a couple years.

In addition to "being ready" for the learning to become permanent or even to take effect, the "sinking in" seems to come about through practice. Danica (S) said that "Control Theory never ends just because you finished the class doesn't mean you're done. You have to apply what you have learned to your everyday life" and Doris (T) admitted that "every day is still a struggle. You still are always learning and growing." Leslie (T) said "I think [for] some people, it's hard work to always be making conscious choices and to not be able to say I just reacted poorly." Some participants similarly note that although the ideas are always in their minds, it is often a challenge to keep practicing. Leslie (T) goes on to say that Choice Theory is "not a magic wand" and that "you get tired some days and have less patience sometimes and you have less energy for being Choice-oriented." Richard (T) and Fuller (S) both mentioned that it is the immersion in the culture of Choice Theory that allowed them to incorporate it into their daily life. Richard (T) attributes his internalization of the ideas to being because of where he works.

> I work in an environment where that culture is ingrained but I think for me if I had taken the training and went and worked on my parent's farm or went and worked at a different job where the where the language wasn't present everyday - where my colleagues weren't trained in it and where the ethic and ideas weren't always around I think it would have been harder to stay fresh.

Fuller (S) also mentioned that being around others who speak the language of Control Theory is integral to staying in practice and that he "kind of fell off the bus a few times throughout University because it's very difficult to maintain this language when you're not around other people who speak it." Wendy (S) even admitted outright that "I don't really use it anymore because honestly I stopped trying to use it and then forgot most of it."

As practice seems to be necessary to keep the ideas of Control Theory active in one's life, it would seem that there is a divide between the permanence of the information and the life-changing power of using that information. Although the information is permanent in people's mind, it is through being immersed in an environment and culture that speaks the language of Control Theory and committing oneself to using it daily that creates the life-changing effects mentioned by many participants. It could be that the effect is more one of perception than action where one acquires a heightened sense of self-awareness and awareness of others. It is up to the individual what to do with this information. In the context of transformative education, I believe that this is an important consideration as without the support of a like-minded community, the effort involved in maintaining a transformed state of mind seems to be prohibitive to continued growth. The major element that I was interested in from a transformative and critical perspective in my questioning revolved around the possibility for Control Theory to be a tool in eliciting a change in awareness and mindset around social inequity and mis-use of power. As Choice Theory is a theory of self-regulation that centers around learning that power and control exerted over others is undesirable and, according to the theory, actually impossible to maintain in the long run while also maintaining relationships with others, I was curious as to whether the teachers and students developed an awareness of how power is used against them socially,

politically, and ecologically and even if they had developed a resistance to this external power as a result of learning the philosophy.

Influence on "Fighting the Powers That Be"

I asked the participants a series of questions concerning their perceptions of external control beginning with what they understand it to be in Control Theory terms. I also assessed their awareness of the presence of external control influence in their lives from their personal use of it up to asking their thoughts on the global/ecological impacts of external control. Although every participant acknowledged their own use of external control, only a few brought their awareness of the potential for external control behaviours to the global/ecological level.

I began with a question asking participants if they have used external control to get what they want in the past. Some of the interviewees were unsure of what external control meant but after I provided some prompts of "guilter", "persecutor", and "victim" based on their Control Theory training, every single person said that they had used external control in the past at some point. These responses ranged from a simple "oh ya" answer in the case of Sarah (T) or "yes I have, oh totally, everybody does" in the case of Leslie (T), to more complex responses that detail personal recollections of using external control. Danica (S) admitted that "in the past when I didn't go to school I would use strategies to get out of going" and Alice (S) stated that "whenever I had like problems with my past boyfriends I was a guilter," with "guilter" being an external control term that is used in Control Theory language meaning someone who tries to control another person by making them feel guilty about something. The most interesting response from an educational point of view came from Tom (T), who told me that he used external control

> even in teaching. I mean, I started with a behaviour modification program that I taught on lunch that was totally externally controlled… good behaviour they earned - I taught in

> Marsden, Saskatchewan, so I had 'Marsden Moolah' I called it - this fake money I made … and they would earn money for good behaviour and then they could - I had chips or they could earn to work in the hallway whatever with so much money.

I had never considered a seemingly innocuous classroom management technique like this to be an example of exerting external control and this connection actually creates some interesting implications for typical classroom teaching when it is looked at from a Control Theory perspective.

Beyond the recognition of personal use of external control tactics, I asked the participants about their perception of others using external control. Universally, across all interviews, there was a negative perception of those who use external control. Alice (S) considered it to be "very unhealthy and it's not how you should be" while Wendy (S) stated plainly that "I think guiltin' people to get what you want is wrong and not the way you should go about things." Doris (T) described the relationships with people who use it as "unhealthy, or they're fake" while Richard (T) called the use of external control simply "harmful." Tom (T) elaborated on the school context by pointing out that by using external control

> All we're helping people do is stay in that failure side when we use it right because they're gonna think geez I'm no good. Why am I doing this? They don't have that success identity where they're meeting their needs positively so we're just helping reinforce their failure identity when we do that.

I began asking about impressions of external control with questions about the participants' family, friends, and co-workers: people with whom they share time and space regularly. All participants except for one related to me that they did indeed see this external control play out. The only exception was Sarah (T), who, when asked, replied "not really not that

I can think of I mean I don't hang out with a lot of people my work friends and that's about it." This is not surprising as she had earlier told me that one major change that she made in her life after taking Control Theory was removing negativity from her life, which included distancing herself from friends and family that she considered to be negative. It could be possible that by so doing she has removed those who would be using external control on her from her life. Tom (T) saw guilt as a popular tool for external control, as communicated in his statement about the use of external control that "there's lots of people I mean cuz guilt usually works pretty good on people." Dave (S) told me a story about a friend of his:

> *Dave (S):* like you want money he'll be like I'll give you this and then you owe me $10 instead of owing me $20 he just tries to guilt you into giving him more money and it's like it's not going to work; I never saw before and I was really surprised when I realized like he's been doing it for a while and I never even knew
>
> *Michael:* Oh wow was it like after you took the Control Theory course you were like hey he's trying to guilt me.
>
> *Dave (S):* Ya and like he doesn't know. Like I know like he's never taken the course so he wouldn't know and he's just doing what he does so I don't take it out on him to be like oh you're doing this you're guilting me you're blablabla. I don't think it's my place to like talk cuz he hasn't had an education.
>
> *Michael:* Right right so you just kind of like accept it but you don't cave into it anymore?
>
> *Dave (S):* Ya exactly…I don't let it affect me but I notice it.

Dave (S) recognized the external control because of his Control Theory training and by seeing what's going on in the situation is able to not only resist his friend's control but also, interestingly, to empathize with him. Richard (T) echoed this empathy to a certain extent when

talking about understanding the motivations of powerful people using external control. He admitted to feeling sympathy but

> on the one hand you can, ya okay, I know where you're coming from like that comes from a sense of inadequacy or fear or whatever and on the one hand you can be a little bit sympathetic to that but on the other hand it's like dude get it together… you're in a position of power and you're acting like that?

Next, I asked the participants if they could think of anyone in a position of power that used external control methods to get what they wanted. At this point, not everyone had examples that they could draw upon. Immediate responses included "politicians" from Danica (S), an individual within the local school administration from Leslie (T) and Doris (T), and "Trump" from Sarah (T), Leslie (T), and Richard (T). Sarah (T) vented her opinion of Trump saying that "he's the most self-centered person ever right? Doesn't care about anything, anybody else and is negative and yeah I mean bosses people right?" Richard (T) also mentioned that he saw external control being used by "almost every boss I've ever had." In describing the external control of the administrator, Doris (T) said that he "has a reputation for being…just do whatever he thinks is best whether it's the good decision or not… he has a reputation for being a strong external controller." Richard (T) actually went into great depth regarding his reasons for considering Donald Trump as not only someone who uses external control to achieve his goals but as an individual who because of their reliance on external control and the immense power he has at his disposal, poses an existential threat to all life on the planet. While discussing the use of external control by powerful members of society, without prompting, he told me:

> Well to be honest with you I think it endangers the entire planet. Like if we're talking about like - let's use the elephant in the room - Trump for example. I mean he plays

> victim on a daily basis and when he's not victiming [*sic*] he's persecuting or guilting. He lives on the triangle… and to try and make decisions when you're operating from your emotional brain necessarily means that those aren't the best decisions. So when you have somebody with a nuclear arsenal at their disposal, when you have the threat of climate change potentially going to destroy the entire planet, when you have these very nuanced decisions that you need to make but you are thinking about a tweet that the Democrats have sent out or something you know when your ego is wounded like that all the time I would say there's real like existential danger there… you don't even have to think of Trump you know? When politicians are operating from that emotional mindset it limits their ability to make rational decisions for the rest of us and I think it's a huge danger.

His observation of the global impacts of the use of external control led into my final round of questions concerning the impacts that the use of external control by powerful individuals has on society and on the planet itself. Danica (S) sees "businessmen or a big corporation trying to use external control to try and build something bad for the planet" and Tanis sees the end results of the quest for power as an empty exercise that would not have any benefit for anyone, including those who seek power when she says "so basically I think power wouldn't even matter in the end after they've ruled because they've only like turned everything downwards instead of like brought it up kind of thing." Leslie (T) views the mindset of allowing the livability of the ecosystem to be degraded in the pursuit of power to be a result of fear and an "every-man-for-themselves" outlook.

> I think it creates toxicity everywhere because then people care more because you're scared, you're looking out for yourself. You're not comfortable and looking out … because that type of mentality is every man for themselves. It creates every man for

themselves which is what's destroying the planet.

The potential for external control creating fear was mentioned quite often at all levels of relationships from the personal to the global. It manifests in the workplace, as Leslie (T) confirms as part of a longer story about the above-mentioned administrator, “it makes a toxic work - a toxic, fear-oriented work environment.”

Related to fear, Richard (T) shared that since learning Control Theory, fear has less effect on him.

> Control Theory has allowed me to realize or recognize that you don’t have power over me you have no power unless I give you power… If I don't allow you to have power over me, because you can't, then I’m not afraid of you.

He acknowledged, however, that there is a limit to this when external control related fear is coupled with power.

> I’m not going to speak truth to power necessarily if my job is on the line. As much as I would like to and as much as I might feel justified in doing if I know that somebody who's going to use external control on me can end my career … unfortunately I still might be impacted by that … as empowered as I feel I mean there still is real world connotations there if he or she throws the hammer down.

Thus, even with the self-awareness and tools that Control Theory offers to manage one’s life, due to its central theme that the only thing one has control over is one’s self Control Theory is confronted with a paradox from the point of view of creating change in the world. There are certain situations where the power of others will have ramifications that are uncontrollable. Within the scope of Control Theory, there is still a choice in Richard (T)’s case. From his perspective, he could choose to lose his career in exchange for speaking truth to power. In

reality, however, this may not be a viable option. Despite these challenges, many of the students and staff felt that by being trained in Control Theory, they were better equipped to challenge power and to work toward creating positive change in the world around them. This belief manifested in a number of interesting ways.

Control Theory and External Control: Creating Positive Change in the World

For Doris (T), learning how to ask the right questions gave her the ability to combat external control by questioning those who are using external control against her to "help them self-evaluate whether or not that was a good or a good or bad decision." Tanis believes that she was "equipped for it" and went on to say that she thinks "anyone could do that they just have to mostly believe in themselves and that they can stand up for what is right kind of thing." She also said that challenging power "would be easier to do it like with Control Theory instead of just like straight up saying how you feel cuz not everybody takes opinions lightly." Dave (S) affirmed that his confidence in speaking truth to power increased because after learning Control Theory, he understood that "you're… telling the truth to someone that has more power than me right… so I don't know what I think about it it's like why would I lie about it and make them happy when you can tell them the truth and… it's like you don't gotta worry about nothing and they can just think about that for a while." By learning the Control Theory ideas that everyone is responsible for their own behaviour and no one can force others to change, Dave (S) is able to put the responsibility for negative outcomes of external control onto those who have power and let them decide what action to take based on his telling the truth. He does not feel the need to convince them of anything. Richard (T) examines the roots of his confidence in challenging mainstream society, stating that understanding that he had control over his own life helped him

to recognize his own autonomy, which served as a means of challenging power through becoming more conscious about mainstream consumer society.

> For me, Control Theory gave me a sense of independence and sovereignty and freedom from social pressures because I knew - I recognized early on that it was my choices - that my choices had more of an impact on my life than I was thinking. That these big Power structures or …these ideas of the economy or even y'know the political Juggernaut or whatever were impacting my life. I felt like I had more independence and so if people are not feeling comfortable or not buying into that mainstream idea of consumerism and you know the latest fads and so on it might allow people to step back and say no I don't need to be a part of this and become …feel more comfortable stepping away from not having the latest gadgets or the latest shoes…and being more of an individual.

After learning Control Theory, Danica (S)'s perspective changed on how she might effect positive change in the world. She related to me that she now believes "you can't fight/change people who don't want to change … that I can still make a change but doing it in a positive light for myself. Instead of reading hate comments I read books, watch documentaries expand my knowledge on subjects." She now sees the path to creating change in the world as being through empowering herself instead of trying to persuade others to change. Similarly, Alice (S) communicated an approach of increasing her self-power as a means of challenging external control when she said, "it's unhealthy to have power over other people so then how I would get myself more power is by like me getting a career and doing things that will make me feel like I'm achieving a certain goal or success in my life … which gives me more power over myself."

Tom (T) sees his role as an agent of positive change to be reflected in his job as a teacher. He stated that "well, hopefully as an educator, I'm making changes in the youth so hopefully

they can have a better successful life so I don't know I guess that could be a change in the world." Part of doing so is creating and working in a positive school environment, which is something that Sarah (T) mentioned when I asked her about using Control Theory to enact positive change in the world. She said that

> Well maybe not the world but like even here like to the students and that y'know if you're thinking positive all the time if they're thinking negative it will help them flip their thinking … you just have to be positive and then it does help … and I think they do appreciate it … it's better than us walking around [saying] "awww y'know life sucks and this sucks" and complaining all the time … ya so I hope it helps anyways.

These two teachers saw their ability to create change as manifesting in their day to day life at school and both were hopeful of the changes they were making, not positive about them.

In the context of empowering students to create positive change in their school, Richard (T) was quite confident that learning Control Theory contributes to their involvement in crafting school culture.

> I couldn't give you numbers on that but I would say the vast majority who end up taking the class do end up internalizing at least part of it and that I think allows them to take a larger role in their own life personally and professionally here at the school. …[they] are then much more willing to share their opinion in class meeting to craft policies for the school and even to buy into the culture of the school at large because then they can recognize … they can recognize Control Theory as it comes from the staff. They can recognize some of the Control Theory that's built into the policies. They feel more - I can't speak for them - but I would say they feel more a part of school in general … and are comfortable now looking at where they are and their lives and deciding where do I go

> from here and having that sense of ownership or, you know assertiveness I guess, to go out and actually say this is what I think I deserve, this is what our school should be … and I wanted, what can we do to make this happen?

The tendency to work together as a group and to communicate their wants and needs to solve problems was reflected by Dave (S), who sees politics and the power struggles that appear there as "just a giant kerfuffle but ya I look at it different now be like just come together something solve something instead of just fighting each other." Fuller (S) looks at cooperation around solving the problems of the common good through a Control Theory lens of needs fulfillment, more specifically, attending to survival needs. When asked about needs they told me:

> I think that part is useful. I think it definitely influences my beliefs around things like Universal Health Care. If I take Control Theory and I directly believe that you have to meet your survival needs before you can meet any other needs then how can I imagine that we will live in a safer happier society if we're not collectively working together to make sure that everyone's survival needs are met first? … like the other needs ya you have to y'know take a bit more of a personal approach to it but the survival stuff that's stuff that we can so easily achieve together so why not?

In Fuller (S)'s statement, we can see how they have framed not only the function of society as being a vehicle for providing for the survival needs of the population, but they see it as a collective effort. This collective approach may or may not be influenced by Control Theory thinking but given Control Theory's focus on the development and maintenance of positive relationships between individuals, it is not inconceivable that the theory has an influence on perceptions of the value of cooperation.

Chapter Five: Control Theory as transformation at The School

Some Preliminary Personal Reflections: Relationships and Control Theory

By exploring student and teacher perceptions of the intents and impacts of learning Control Theory, I came to see that relationships are just one part, albeit possibly the most important part, of the complex web of culture that revolves around Control Theory at the school. The two most surprising things that I learned in my research was how embedded Control Theory is within the cultural fabric of the school and the far-reaching influence that it has as a life philosophy for all of the staff and most of the students. In this concluding chapter, I reflect on student and teacher perspectives on the impacts of the major themes that emerged from the data and put them within the context of my own reflections.

Student and Teacher Perspectives on the Intents of Control Theory at The School

As far as the intents of learning Control Theory at The School, it seems that learning and applying the theory is primarily aimed at two outcomes. The first is the creation and maintenance of positive mental health amongst both students and teachers and the second is for the purpose of instilling a sense of agency and responsibility for one's thoughts and actions (as per Jones, 2014 and McGee & Lin 2017). From what I have discerned through my analysis, the aim of establishing more positive mental health is taught through developing self-awareness and in learning to recognize negative trains of thought and move one's thinking toward more productive patterns of behaviour. The end goal, it would seem, is to lay the foundation for a happy life (Glasser, 1975/1998; Good, 2007) and in some cases, a better world (O'Sullivan, 1997) through becoming more responsible, self-confident, and self-aware, which are all positive learning outcomes within the framework of transformative education (Arends, 2014; Cranton, 2002; Dyson, 2010; O'Sullivan, 1999; Leonardo, 2004; Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008). This aim

includes improving school performance for the students but goes beyond this to encompass encouraging positive change in students' lives outside of school as well. As many of the students at this school have backgrounds that work against their having a happy and contented life, one of the major goals of using Control Theory at the school is to teach the students tools that they can use throughout their lives to empower them to manage their thinking and behaviour in order to have a better chance at feeling fulfilled and contented after graduation. At The School, self-evaluation and self-maintenance are coupled with a sense of responsibility for one's actions, which according to Jones (2014), Glasser (1991), Niell (1992) and O'Sullivan (1997) are desirable concepts in the educational endeavor. The intent is to steer the students, and to a certain extent the teachers, away from the tendency to blame others for their unhappiness. The "freedom=responsibility" motto of the school reflects the intents described above and learning Control Theory is the main means by which this aim is pursued. The combination of self-confidence and personal agency seems to have the intent of creating a more cohesive, involved, and caring student body who understand one another and can work together to create a safe and supportive school culture (as per Cruz, Max-Neef & Stahel, 2009; Max-Neef, 2008; McGee & Lin, 2017; Mills et al., 2015; Niell, 1992; O'Sullivan, 1997; Quinn et al., 2006).

Reflecting on the Major Themes Impacting Students and Teachers

The concept of self-evaluation emerged from analysis of participant interviews as both the greatest challenge and the most valuable outcome in learning Control Theory, thus its impact on both students and teachers was significant. It was brought up more than once by students and teachers that their perception was that Control Theory provided a clear and concise way of getting to know one's self. From my discussions with staff, gained a picture of a group of people who each have a well-developed sense of self and who are all generally happy in their jobs and

their lives. According to them, their state of mind was a result of their practicing the skill of self-knowledge through Control Theory and applying the knowledge in their professional and personal lives. In speaking with students, I found that many of them had a more refined sense of who they were and what they wanted than I remember having at their age. Their degree of self-awareness and understanding of the subconscious motivations behind their own behavior was surprising and at times inspiring. In short, based on analysis of the data I collected based on the perceptions both students and teachers, there was a near-universal perception amongst there is indeed transformation (as per Arends, 2014; Cranton, 2002; Dyson, 2010; O'Sullivan, 1999; Leonardo, 2004; Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008) with regard to developing skills for effective self-evaluation by learning and practicing Control Theory in this school environment.

Through my conversations with students and teachers, I also found that many of them considered that with empathy comes an understanding, through a Control Theory lens, of why people behave the way they do. Their perspective seems to transcend the intents of learning Control Theory as a utilitarian means of improving student behaviour and mental health. This, to me, is an interesting insight that further supports the potential that learning Control Theory has in provoking transformative experiences beyond what is intended or expected. In most cases, the development of empathy gave participants the ability to suspend judgement on another's actions. In a few cases, awareness and empathy led to a desire to share what they had learned about Control Theory with others. The best way I can think of to conceptualize this process is as a circle whereby students are empowered by their teachers to become teachers themselves. One needs a teacher who is self-aware enough to have self-confidence and empathy for others outside of their close social group. Confidence combined with empathy allows teachers to be vulnerable with strangers with whom they are trying to get involved. In the case of The School, these

"strangers" would be the students. Once teachers have established *involvement,* students are more open to learning about the basics of Control Theory because they have a level of trust in not only the teacher, but in what the learning might offer them. In the cases of Sarah (T), Rachel (T), Daphne (S), and Fuller (S), this learning creates a cycle whereby the students adopt the role of teachers and pass the learning to ever-expanding circles of people.

The ability to teach and learn Control Theory hinges on the language that goes along with it. As such, learning the language of Control Theory acts as an initiation into the culture of the community. According to the student and teacher participants, the initiation through language impacted them profoundly. Many of them related that learning the language allowed them to share a common means of communication about both their inner and outer behaviour. The language element ran through all stages of learning Choice Theory. For some participants, it was interest in learning the language that sparked their desire to take the course. In all cases, it was the language that allowed them to learn, practice, and internalize the concepts. Some of the students used the language to teach others about Control Theory while, for some other participants, the language was adopted by those closest to them, spontaneously. The language served as an initiation of sorts into the school culture, which implies that the culture of the school is influenced heavily by Control Theory. This might explain why there was such an interest among students to learn the language in order to be able to be fully included in the culture of the school. The transformative potential of Control Theory seems to rest in the individual being open to developing a practice of self-examination, developing a sense of empathy around the behaviour of others, and in having the opportunity to be immersed in an environment that supports this mode of thinking through communicating in a shared language and being surrounded by a common philosophy.

Control Theory: Impacts on Critical and Transformative Education

As Carspecken (2012) points out in his discussion of critical research, human society is defined by communication, and change within human society happens through discussion. He goes on to describe that this discussion toward creating the potential for more personal and collective freedom in society is inhibited and curtailed by ideologies and power structures. In our society, this inequality of voice between the powerful and powerless often sees the powerless using social activism as a means to have their voices heard. In speaking with the participants, a common theme arose of personal change coupled with the assertion that the only change that individuals can create is change within themselves. This points to the logical conclusion that many attempts to persuade and convince others are limited by the receptivity of those who are the targets of persuasion. Poor relationships develop when individuals feel that they are being controlled or manipulated (Edwards, 2009; Tanrikulu, 2014), which is an impediment to eliciting self-evaluation and openness to experience. At the same time as Control Theory demonstrates the limited potential of activism to persuade those who are not ready to listen, the conversations that I had with both students and teachers point towards some tools that could be used within critical and transformative pedagogy to nudge individuals toward transformation and open them up to considering personal change, which is the pre-requisite within both transformative education (as per Arends, 2014; Cranton, 2002; Dyson, 2010; O'Sullivan, 1999; Leonardo, 2004; Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008) and Choice Theory (as per Glasser, 1975/1991/1998; Walter, Lambie & Ngazimbi, 2008; Zeeman, 2006) to broader social change.

As mentioned in interviews, this receptivity is encouraged by developing what the teachers refer to as "*involvement*" where they nurture a connection that allows the students to accept the teachers into their quality worlds (Glasser, 1991/1998). In using Control Theory for

critical and transformative education, this is a vital step. Without first establishing a link to the quality world of the listener, arguments revolving around personal, social, or planetary scale change will likely not be accepted (Glasser, 1975/1991/1998).

Another path toward critical transformative education within the Control Theory framework could be through communicating change through needs fulfillment (Jones, 2014). Both teachers and students discussed elements of change that were initiated by reflection on positive and negative ways that people address their needs. A number of participants shared that, by learning Control Theory and asking themselves Reality Therapy-based questions, they recognized that personal decisions to fulfill needs in negative ways were not working for them and they were willing and able to consciously find more positive ways to fill their needs. In their interview, Fuller (S) extended this positive and negative needs-fulfillment to consider the purpose of human societies to be the means by which individuals have their needs met, specifically in their case for survival. Much of their conversation revolved around looking at activism in this needs-oriented fashion. This view aligned with Max-Neef and Stahel's (2009) models of Human Scale Development and was the only appearance of this connection between needs-satisfaction and the role of social organization that appeared in the interviews.

The ability of the teachers to connect with students, the process that the staff termed *involvement* in the interviews, is something that I think would be worthy of study in itself. It seems that the keystone in the *involvement* process is being genuine and vulnerable with the students and not forcing them to do anything that they are not ready for. This act of being genuine is a direct outgrowth of effective self-evaluation and appears to be part of creating empathy. In thinking about the type of empathic transformation that was described by some of the participants, I was reminded of Parker Palmer's (2017) words:

> If we embrace the promise of diversity, of creative conflict, and of 'losing' in order to 'win,' we still face one final fear – the fear that a live encounter with the otherness will challenge or even compel us to change our lives …. Otherness, taken seriously, always invites transformation, calling us not only to new facts and theories and values but also to new ways of living our lives – and that is the most daunting threat of all. (p. 39)

Self-Reflexivity on the Experience of Being a First-Time Researcher

I was fortunate enough to have my first experience of doing research under the aegis of an institution be within the walls of a familiar and welcoming place. The connection that I have to The School and the people who work in and attend it enabled me to bring an authentic engagement with them and their stories to this work. The relationships that I had built and maintained with staff and students also put them at ease in sharing these stories with me in open and sometimes extremely candid ways. On one hand, I feel that an environment of trust generated a great deal of reliability and validity in the data that I collected, but on the other hand, I was constantly faced with trying to maintain a balanced view of the negative and positive aspects of The School. In addition, although my initial foray into research was an incredible experience, I am concerned with my ability to conduct future studies in less inviting environments. An ability to create rapport and connection with a community of people without extended experience working alongside them will definitely be a skill that will be necessary for me to develop in preparation for future research projects.

Reflecting back on some improvements that I could have made to the study, I think that crafting a more well-designed interview guide would be the most important change I could have made. When listening back and analysing the transcripts, I took notice of the number of questions that elicited simple yes and no answers. Although I had thought I was very mindful of

this when preparing my questions, in retrospect, I believe that I would have been able to have the participants share much more with me if even more care and attention went into the question design. This will certainly be a major consideration for future studies.

Another learning experience for me had to do with my attempts to impose an external framework for data analysis prior to collecting data. In the field, as the interviews progressed, I realized that the plans that I had for data analysis using an already-established framework was not going to work in analysing the data that I was collecting. This realization forced me to let go of my preconceived notions of how to treat the data and simply let the data show me how to treat it after the fact. To this end, I adopted an interpretive phenomenological approach (as described in the methodology chapter) which worked very well in getting the most out of the data that I had collected. In the end, unexpected themes emerged that, in my opinion, offer a richer discussion than my initial idea for a framework would have supported. This acceptance of the flexible nature of qualitative research is also something that I will carry into future inquiries.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

In my opinion, this study was limited mostly by my enthusiasm. As much as I wanted to maintain an air of "scholarly detachment" and to accept having my preconceptions shattered by discovering findings that ran counter to my expectations, I consistently found myself falling into biased thinking about what I perceived to be the positive qualities of The School. In many respects, I'm sure that this subconsciously coloured everything from my initial thesis, to my review of the literature, to my research design, right through to data collection and analysis. Since this place was so near and dear to my heart, I don't know how these biases could be completely overcome. It seems that the only solution is to acknowledge this bias here and let the reader determine for themselves whether my research is limited by it.

The fact that I was unable to find strong dissenters also factors in as a substantial limitation to providing a balance in the study. One former student that I interviewed was on the edge of being a dissenter in that they did not find that they were using Control Theory in their life but they still admitted that the experience of learning Control Theory changed both the way they self-evaluated and in how they examined their relationships with others. I think that the problem of finding dissenting voices could be solved in a future study by consulting with teachers and administrators beforehand to identify dissenting voices and then by reaching out to the students identified as potential dissenters instead of waiting for them to volunteer. This limitation was also exacerbated by having very little lead time to do recruitment. As my research ethics board approval was granted in the week before I began my data collection, there was not much time to organize for advertising the study to the student body. Better planning on my part in the future so that ethics board approval is granted with more lead time would alleviate this and allow me more time to consult with school staff in recruitment and in advertising the study.

Another limitation is that the demographics represented by the study are markedly restricted to straight, white, middle class individuals. Although there is roughly an equal representation of males and females in the study, all of the participants except for one were white and only one individual identified as being of a non-binary gender. From the standpoint of critical pedagogy, this could be seen as a limitation as it excludes voices of marginalized racial, social, gender, and cultural groups. On the other hand, the community that The School is situated in is predominantly white, which is reflected in the fact that the majority of the students at The School are also white. Based on my knowledge of the city's population, the collection of participants in the study is representative of the community. As this is a qualitative study that is

primarily focused on examining the perspectives of a select group of people within a limited community, it is not clear to me whether or not the study is limited by narrow demographics.

In writing the final words of this thesis, I feel affirmed in my belief that this school is a place of transformation for both students and staff. Such transformation took place in an alternative school that focuses specifically on at-risk, marginalized, and bullied youth, and speaks to the efficacy of Control Theory in being an effective means of eliciting positive change in youth and teachers. It seems to me that the barriers to producing positive changes in thought and behaviour would be much higher in this environment but at the same time, it would be interesting to see if there might be a difference in transformative potential if Control Theory were implemented in a "mainstream" school with "mainstream" students and teachers.

The conversations that I had with everyone pointed to self-perceived changes in their ways of seeing themselves and the world that were a direct result of not only learning Control Theory in the classroom and training sessions but by being immersed in a school culture that is driven by Control Theory-based ideas. It seems to me that the course itself is just one part of the larger network of connections that are necessary for true transformation to take place. By this, I mean that the course alone would not be enough to create lasting transformation in people. As many participants indicated, the course conveys information about self-evaluation and it is up to each of them to decide what to do with it. Within the bounds of the classroom and the activities involved, students and teachers create a community of support for one another to explore these hard-to-deal-with parts of themselves. The community of the classroom acts as a catalyst for change, enabling students who may not engage in introspection to do so with the support of their teachers and peers. Although this practice of introspection is taking place within the school walls, many of the people I interviewed also expressed the opinion that upon being removed

from the supportive atmosphere, it becomes very difficult to keep up the practice of applying Choice Theory to their lives. For the teachers, the atmosphere is maintained year-to-year by their working at The School and engaging with students using Control Theory, but what of the students who graduate and are removed from being immersed in it on a daily basis?

It seems that the most serious impediment to creating lasting change through the Control Theory course is ensuring that those taking it have opportunities to maintain their ability to practice using the skills on a regular basis. Exploring ways in which this might be accomplished could certainly be an avenue for further research. Other fruitful research that might flow from this study could include more close examination of the use of Control Theory in the broader culture of The School. In the research I conducted for this thesis, most of my focus was on the transformative potential of learning Control Theory through the students' local option course and in the teacher-training course. However, in speaking with students and staff about their experiences, I found that Control Theory permeates the school culture in many unexpected ways. I believe that it would be interesting to study the ways in which these different levels of using the philosophy interact both with one another and with other factors of the school culture in generating transformative potential.

A consideration of factors external to Control Theory could also be a topic of further study. From my experiences at The School and from my discussions with the participants, it is not only Control Theory that plays a part in transformation at the site. It might also be of interest, therefore, to include this school in a larger embedded case study involving other alternative schools to compare how they differ in their capacity to transform individuals. Doing so could serve the purpose of determining some "best practices for transformative potential" that

transformative-education-oriented administrators and teachers could consult in structuring both alternative and mainstream school environments.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide

The first set of questions will give me an idea of how the teachers and students perceive Choice Theory. The questions ask what it is and what it is useful for and ask simple questions about how the students and teachers understand the terminology.

- Describe Choice Theory to me in a couple sentences. What is it all about?
- Explain to me what "needs" mean in Choice Theory?
- What do you think "external control" means? How does it work? Do you think it is a good thing?
- How would you describe a quality world and why do you think it is important?

The next set of questions draws upon Dyson (2010) and O'Sullivan's (1999) transformative educational ideas of a progression from self-reflection to an expansion of a circle of care to include the local, global, and ecological communities.

- How, if at all, do you feel that learning Choice Theory made you think differently about yourself than you did beforehand?
- How, if at all, do you feel that Choice Theory made you think differently about other people at the school than you did before taking it?
- How, if at all, do you feel that Choice Theory made you think differently about the people you know outside of the school, for example, friends and family, acquaintances, etc. than you did before taking it?
- How, if at all, do you feel that Choice Theory made you think differently about people who you don't know. For example, strangers in your community, people in other communities in this province, Canada, North America than you did before taking it?
- How, if at all, do you feel Choice Theory made you think differently about people from other cultures and those who live in other parts of the world than you did before taking it?
- How, if at all, do you feel Choice Theory made you think differently about your relationship with the natural world than you did before taking it?

The following set of questions are intended to challenge the participant to consider how

taking Choice Theory may have kindled a critical awareness of broad social and ecological issues and the degree to which they might consider themselves to be empowered agents of change within these issues. As with the previous set of questions, this set works from the individual level out to the local, global, and ecological.

- After learning Choice Theory, what are your feelings about your ability to create change to improve your own life as compared to before you took the course?
- Given what you know about the potential for yourself to make change in your life, what do you think about the ability of others to make changes to their lives?
- After learning Choice Theory, what are your thoughts about people who use external control to try to fulfill their needs?
- Can you think of anyone you know personally that uses external control to try to fulfill their needs?
- Can you think of anyone in positions of power that might be using external control to try to fulfill their needs?
- What do you think the effect of powerful people doing this might be?
- Can you think of how the use of external control to try to fulfill needs might affect society as a whole?
- How do you think trying to use external control to fulfill needs affects the planet?
- If you have a desire to change things, what do you think about your ability as an individual to challenge those who use external control to try to fulfill their needs at the expense of depriving others of their needs?

Appendix B: Participant information letter

Lakehead UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Education

Dear Potential Participant:

Would you be interested in participating in Perspectives on Glasser's Choice Theory as Transformative Education: An Alternative Secondary School Context? This is a research study that I am undertaking that explores the influence that the Control Theory class has had on your life and on how you see the world.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. Before you decide whether or not you would like to take part in this study, please read this letter carefully in order to understand what is involved. After you have read the letter, please ask any questions you may have through the email below or in person. My name is Michael Lyngstad and I am a former music teacher at The School. I'm currently working on my Masters of Education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. I will be visiting the school during the week of October 15-18, 2019 to do some interviews with staff and students. I am hoping to get your opinions and ideas of how Control Theory either changed your life or didn't: either way.

If you want to participate, we will set up a 30-minute interview during the school day to have a chat about what you think of the Control Theory course at The School. You just need to show up to our appointment and we will have a talk about what your experiences and thoughts are.

Your rights, risks, and rewards

I would like to let you know in advance that:

- You don't have to participate and you can withdraw at any time without any consequences
- your decision to participate will not affect your marks or your job
- From time to time I will remind you that you can withdraw whenever you want

Participation in this study will offer an opportunity to reflect on the successes and positive qualities of The School and the reasons for these factors to exist. It will also provide a means of recognizing places where the school is failing and will hopefully offer some considerations for improvement. You will also receive a CD recording of classical guitar music whether you choose to participate or not. By request, all staff who participate will receive either a copy or an executive summary of my completed thesis. I can't think of any real risks to you. If you can think of one, let me know.

Confidentiality

To keep everything as confidential as possible, I will get you to make up a fake name for yourself that I can use when I write my thesis. Apart from this, any interview material that identifies you will be put into a secret code that only I know and I will destroy the decoder when

I am done with writing my thesis so it will be very difficult to figure it out.

I will only use what you say in the interview to write my thesis and in creating academic presentations or academic journal articles that talk about Control Theory at The School. After recording your interview, the transcripts and the audio will be stored on a password protected hard drive in a locked cabinet for five years as per Lakehead university policy.

What happens afterward?

If for some reason, you want a copy of my thesis or any journal articles that I might write about the school, or if you want me to tell you if I am presenting at a conference, let me know and I will make sure to either get you a copy of the thesis/article when it is complete or tell you about the conference.

What if you want out of the study?

If you ever want to drop out of the study, you can just let me know either by email, phone, or tell me in person. I am not forcing you to do anything against your will so if you're not feeling comfortable at any point, I am more than happy to let you withdraw.

If you are interested in participating, contact me, Michael Lyngstad using the email address below. I will send you some consent forms to fill out and sign. Once these forms are completed and returned to me we can set up an appointment.

Researcher Contact Info
Student Researcher: Michael Lyngstad
Email: mlyngsta@lakeheadu.ca

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Gerald Walton
Email: gwalton@lakeheadu.ca

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca.

Appendix C: Student and guardian consent form

Lakehead UNIVERSITY Faculty of Education

Consent Form: Student and Guardian Consent Form

I agree to the following:

- I have read and understand the information contained in the Information Letter
- I agree to participate
- I understand the risks and benefits to the study
- That I am a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time, and may choose not to answer any question
- That the data will be securely stored in the student researcher's office for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the research project
- I understand that the research findings will be made available to me upon request
- I will remain anonymous
- All of my questions have been answered
- By consenting to participate, I have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

_____	_____	_____/_____/_____
(Print Parent Name)	(Parent Signature)	(Date)
_____	_____	_____/_____/_____
(Print Student Name)	(Student Signature)	(Date)

I hereby consent to be audio recorded as indicated by my signature below.

_____	_____	_____/_____/_____
(Print Parent Name)	(Parent Signature)	(Date)
_____	_____	_____/_____/_____
(Print Student Name)	(Student Signature)	(Date)

Please sign, date, and return this form to the student Researcher, Michael Lyngstad.

Researcher Contact Info
Student Researcher: Michael Lyngstad
Email: mlyngsta@lakeheadu.ca

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Gerald Walton
Email: gwalton@lakeheadu.ca

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca.

Appendix D: Adult consent form

Lakehead UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Education

Consent Form: Adult Participants

- I have read and understand the information contained in the Information Letter
- I agree to participate
- I understand the risks and benefits to the study
- That I am a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time, and may choose not to answer any question
- That the data will be securely stored in the student researcher's office for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the research project
- I understand that the research findings will be made available to me upon request
- I will remain anonymous
- All of my questions have been answered
- By consenting to participate, I have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

_____ _____ _____/_____/_____
(Print Name) (Signature) (Date)

I hereby consent to be audio recorded as indicated by my signature below.

_____ _____ _____/_____/_____
(Print Name) (Signature) (Date)

Please sign, date, and return this form to the student Researcher, Michael Lyngstad.
Researcher Contact Info
Student Researcher: Michael Lyngstad
Email: mlyngsta@lakeheadu.ca

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Gerald Walton
Email: gwalton@lakeheadu.ca

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca.

Appendix E: Mental health reminder

Faculty of Education

Remember: your mental health is important

- You don't need to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with.
- We can end the interview at any time.
- If you require counselling as a result of participation in this study the following resources are available to you in the community.

You can contact:

The school counsellor

Any teacher at the school (all are trained counsellors)

Or

Cypress Health Region –

mental health and addictions services intake number: 1 877 329 0005

Appendix F: Initial list of codes

abilityToChallengePowerIncreased
abilityToCreateChangeIncreasedWithCT
aimsOfTheSchool
allowsCalmness
allowsOpennessToExperience
aversionToSelfAssessment
awarenessImprovesPersonalRelationships
awarenessOfPositiveNegativeRelationships
barriersToUsingCTInWiderSociety
beliefThatCTIsWorthwhile
changeLifestyleToStayHappy
changeOfSelfPerception
classExceededExpectations
classMetExpectations
classroomPedagogy
classShouldBeInAllHighSchools
closePersonalContactsLearnItWithoutBeingTaught
collaborativeMindset
constantPracticeNeeded
controlTheoryAsHiddenCurriculum
createsConsideratinOfOthers
CTAllowsPositiveMentalHealth
CTAsClassroomManagement
CTasConflictResolution
CTAsResiliency
CTAsSelfAcceptance
CTBecomesPartOfYourLife
CTCanCreateACommunityOfCare
CTDefinesUniversalsOfHumanBehavior
CThasNoEffectOnRelationshipWithNature
CTisExhausting
CTTrainingBecomesPersonal
CTTrainingVulnerability
dangersOfMisuse
definitionOfControlTheory
desireForPersonalChange
desireToShareCTWithSignificantOthersToImproveRelationships

desireToShareCTWithStrangers
developingAnIdealSelf
disrespectForThoseUsingExternalControl
doesNotSeeExternalControlBeingUsedInFamilyFriendsCircle
educationAsChangeInTheWorld
empathyForBehaviourOfOthers
engagementByHandsOnActivity
exampleOfAppliedKnowledge
existentialCrisisEqualsLackOfControl
externalControlAsPedagogy
externalControlBadForRelationships
externalControlCreatesAnger
externalControlDoesn'tWork
externalControlInPowerLeadsToFear
externalControlIsIsolating
externalControlPowerIsBadForThePlanet
flexibleCurriculum
focusOnPositivity
hasUsedExternalControl
idealSelfAsProfessionalRole
importanceOfAskingAboutThoughtsOfOthers
importanceOfBalancingNeedsInRelationships
importanceOfBeingGenuine
importanceOfExaminingSelfAsOpposedToOthers
importanceOfMeetingNeedsWithoutHurtingOthers
importanceOfPersonalInvolvementWithStudents
increasingSelfPoweAsMeansToChallengingPower
individualTeachingAugmentsLearning
introducedThroughPersonalContactWithATeacher
languageOfCTHelpsWithCommunication
languageOfCTHelpsWithSelfUnderstanding
learnedTechniquesForHelpingOthers
learningLanguageAsInitiation
lifeChanging
limitationsOfCT
limitationsOfTheSchool
loveAndBelongingAsFirstNeedMentioned
loveAndBelongingAsMostImportantNeed
maintianingAPositiveEnvironmentIsWorldChanging

maturityIsEssentialToAcceptingCT
mayNotRealizeUsingExternalControl
meetingNeedsNegatively
needForExistingLevelOfSelfAwareness
needForOpennessToExperience
needsPosOrNeg
needsSatisfactionAsLongTermSolution
needsSatisfactionAsSocialGoods
negativeViewOfThoseUsingExternalControl
noBackgroundGoingIn
noEffectOnAbilityToChallengePower
notAMagicWand
overtCurriculum
partOfBeingAtMaverick
permanenceInTransformation
planetaryHealthAsNeedsSatisfaction
positiveTransformationStory
powerfulExternalControlCreatesSocietalDiscord
practicalApplicationToEverydayLife
preexistingAwarenessEnhancedByCT
purposeOfTheSchool
qualityWorldIsDependentOnUpbringing
reasonForUsingExternalControl
recognitionAndRemovalOfToxicRelationships
recognitionOfExternalControlInOthers
recognitionOfExternalControlInPowerPositions
relationshipsAreKey
resistanceToExternalControl
responsibilityForOwnBehaviour
secondaryAlternativeTeachersTrainedAsElementaryTeachers
selfEvaluation
senseOfConnectionToClassmates
somePeopleLikeToBeControlled
standoutConceptFromCourse
stillUsesExternalControl
stoppedUsingControlTheoryAfterSchool
studentSuggestion
takeAChanceOnTheCourse
teacherDesireToWorkWithDifficultStudents

teacherSuggestion
thoseUsingExternalControlAreUntrustworthy
trainingAsRequirement
unclearMemoryOfTerminology
understandingDeepensWithTime
useOfCTCanStartLater
usesExternalControlLess
usingExternalControlWorksForSome

Appendix G: Themes and sub-themes

Prerequisites, motivations, and introductions

- Introductions
  - Teacher introduced one-on-one,
  - Teacher suggestion
  - Student suggestion
  - No background going in
- Pre-requisites and Incentives
  - Importance of personal involvement with students (teacher-student), Sense of connection to classmates (student-student)
  - openness to experience
  - maturity
  - Training is required by the job, All staff required to do the training
  - Take a chance on the course
  - Self-motivation for personal change, Desire to solve problems in their life, Need to want to change, pre-existing level of self-awareness, Desire for self-knowledge
- Barriers
  - Aversion to self-assessment

Experiences

- Experience in class
  - Classroom Pedagogy
  - Hands on activities to engage students
  - Importance of being genuine
    - Personal information is shared
    - Emotionally Vulnerable moments
- Individual Pedagogy
  - Individual teaching augments classroom learning
    - Different than expectations
    - met expectations

Outcomes

Self-Evaluation
Self-Evaluation
Learn importance of responsibility for own behavior
Importance of examining self instead of others
Language helps with self-evaluation
Desire to develop an ideal self
Uses external control less
Pre-existing awareness enhanced by control theory
Change of self-perception

Empathy for Others
Recognition that bad behavior is attempt to meet needs negatively
Needs positiveornegative
Importance of meeting needs without hurting others
Seeing existential crisis of survival on Earth as reason for poor behavior
Understanding of reasons people use external control
Creates consideration of others (is this synonymous with empathy?)

Language of Control Theory
Language Helps with Communication
Language acts as initiation into a culture
Desire to share with significant others
Close personal contacts learn it without being taught

General Observations

Assertion that it is life changing
Change is permanent
Delayed reaction to the learning
Constant Practice Is Needed
Understanding deepens with time
Allows openness to experience

Effect on Awareness of External Control Factors

Awareness of External Control
- Recognition of personal use of external control
- Recognition of others' use of external control
- Recognition of use of external control in positions of power
- Does not recognize external control being used by family/friends

Views of External Control
- Negative view of those using external controls
- Disrespect for those using external control
- Those using external control are untrustworthy
- External control works for some people
- Some people like to be controlled

Perceptions of effects of external control
- External control creates anger
- External control is isolating
- External control creates fear
- External control by powerful is bad for the planet
- Powerful external control creates societal discord
- Dangers of misuse

Resistance to external control
- Confidence challenging power
- CT increased ability to challenge power
- Increase in self-power as means of challenging power
- Education as means of creating change
- Maintaining a positive environment is world changing
- Ability to challenge power was unchanged
- Development of a collaborative mindset (is there a better name for this?)
- Can allow creation of a community of care