

***The Lighting of a Fire: The Value of Dialogic in  
the Teaching and Learning of Literature for  
EF/SL Learners at the University- level in UAE***

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*Nayyer iqbal ali chandella*  
Signed:

## **Dedication**

*'To my brother, Zahid; for his care, understanding and support...with love and gratitude.'*

## Acknowledgements

### *Praise and gratitude be to Allah the beneficent, the merciful.*

Research for me is a travelled path lined with lamp posts, shedding light and showing the way. There are many people I can think of, for being those ‘lamp posts’ of light for me. I thank them all (My teachers and family).

This research would not have been possible without the generosity and support of my family, my parents (though not in this world now) who nurtured me with loving care and infused in me the love for learning and humanity.

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Most importantly, I am indebted to my incredibly wonderful brother, Zahid, for his unconditional love, support and tangible endeavours. I give my special thanks for sharing my tears and smiles and holding my hand every step of the way. It was his belief, will and energy that led me to complete this study. I have no suitable words that can fully describe my appreciation. This thesis is dedicated to him!

## **ABSTRACT**

Dialogic pedagogy involves students as critical inquirers, who can analyze their perspectives and attitudes. Dialogic creates liminal space (Buber, 1965) where conversation generates knowledge and personal relations. I intend to explore these ‘dialogic spaces’ where a group of 20 students and their teacher engage in dialogue around literary texts in an advanced English composition and literature major class of female students of one university in United Arab Emirates (UAE). My study takes further, growing interest in the value of dialogical process in second language learning. It describes the ways in which learners engaged in dialogical process begin to challenge perspectives and power relations. Because of the positive response that followed the sessions (conducted for the pilot study), I wanted to explore the process in relation to gender and culture. My dissertation research takes further the questions raised in the assignment study. I want to consider the conditions that will allow perspectives to remain in dialogue. My research explores how dialogic literacy practices function in relation to particular cultural and ideological discourses (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 1996; Luke, 1991).

The data include: class observations, field notes, semi-structured interviews (of students and the teacher) and writing assignments. The study employs an exploratory research design to discover and understand perspectives of the people involved (Merriam, 1998). I therefore emphasize that the analyses of the data are offered as partial and unfinished interpretations based on a specific theoretical framework. Although the research findings cannot be generalized across all female students in the UAE, they provide some insight into the learning experiences and preferences of Emirati women.

Knowledge is finding light in darkness and staying warm in the cold. This is the knowledge our students must acquire. Not facts and theories, but a deep knowing (O’Reilly, 1998). Thus it seems appropriate to me to call this study, ‘the lighting of a fire’ (W.B.Yeats).

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	1
Dedication	2
Acknowledgement	3
Abstract	4
Table of contents	5
List of Appendices	9
List of figure	9
List of tables	10
List of acronyms	10
CHAPTER-1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY	11
1. INTRODUCTION	11
1.1 My research motivation : evolving concepts of learning	12
1.2 Background of the Problem	13
1.2.1 How and why my research question evolved	14
1.2.2 Theoretical context	14
1.2.3 Research problem	15
1.2.4 Research design	15
1.3 Significance of the research study	16
1.4 Road map of my dissertation journey	17
1.5 Closing Thoughts for chapter one	18
CHAPTER-2: THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	20
2. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT	20
2.1 Locational Context	21
2.1.1 Religious and cultural values: a peep into the past to understand the present	21
2.1.2 The cultural comfort zone	23
2.1.3 Women in focus	24
2.2 Development of UAE education system	25
2.3 EF/SL teaching in the UAE	26
2.4 The Research Study Focus in Context	28
2.5 Summary of the chapter	28

CHAPTER-3: LITERATURE REVIEW	29
3. INTRODUCTION	29
3.1 An historical story: how my work fits into this story	30
3.1.1 Dialogic researching practice	32
3.1.2 Questions that haven't been addressed before	33
3.2 My concerns: definition of constructs	34
3.2.1 Social references and issues of power	35
3.2.2 Culture and context	35
3.2.3 Gendered perspective	38
3.2.4 Concern about silence	41
3.3 The conceptual frame work	43
3.3.1 Theoretical Perspective	45
3.3.2 Critical social theory	45
3.3.3 Relation of Constructivism and socio-cultural Theory with Dialogic.	45
3.4 Dialogic Format: philosophies and practices	46
3.4.1 Lamps of knowledge: old and new	47
3.4.2 The T/S model	47
3.4.3 From T/S to dialogue	48
3.4.4 Dialogic discourse	49
3.4.5 Dialectic or dialogic	50
3.4.6 Socratic ideals and Maieutike	50
3.5 Theoretical precedents: Critical dialogic theorists	52
3.5.1 Critical pedagogy	53
3.5.2 Critical pedagogy (CP) in EF/SL	55
3.5.3 The possibilities dialogic offers.	58
3.5.3.1 Construction of new perspectives: The agentive turn	59
3.5.3.2 How dialogue leads to transformation?	59
3.5.3.3 Agents of Change: some possibilities	60
3.5.4 Dialogic pedagogy and the Risks involved	61
3.6 Thoughts about the review process	62
3.7. My odyssey begins...	63
CHAPTER-4: Methodology	66

4. INTRODUCTION	66
4.1 The research paradigm	66
4.1.1 The feminist tilt	67
4.2 Rationale for Choice of Approach	68
4.2.1 Research Design	68
4.3 The Research Site	69
4.4 The researcher, students and the teacher	70
4.4.1 The Teacher: a critical pedagogue	70
4.4.2 The Students	70
4.4.3 The Researcher	71
4.5 Data Collection	72
4.5.1 Observations	73
4.5.2 Field notes and analytic memos.	74
4.5.3 Conversational interviews	74
4.5.4 Students' written response	76
4.5.5 Value of Multiple Data Sources	76
4.6 Data Analysis	76
4.6.1 Transcripts	77
4.6.2 Selecting Dialogic Turn Counting	78
4.6.3 Data Reduction: coding	79
4.6.4 Discourse analysis.	81
4.6.5 Thematic Analysis	82
4.7 Credibility and trustworthiness	83
4.7.1 Triangulation of the Data	84
4.7.2 Limitations	84
4.7.3 Ethical Considerations	85
4.8 Some concluding thoughts	85
CHAPTER-5: ANALYSES, AND DISCUSSION	86
5. INTRODUCTION	86
5.1 Hearing Their Voices... My sojourn in the dialogic space	87
5.1.1 Descriptions of the dialogic sessions	87
5.1.2 The bamboo blind	88
5.1.3. Odeipus the Rex	90
5.1.4 The ministers' black veil	90

5.2. Analysis and Discussion of Data in response to	91
Research Question 1	
5.2.1 Farhan, students and power dynamics	91
5.2.2 Overcoming Resistance and Barriers	93
5.2.3 Alien cultural references	96
5.2.4. Intercultural sensitivity	98
5.2.5. Silence and dominance.	101
5.2.6 The solution: establishing Safe Space	103
5.2.7 Recognition and Agency: Farhan relegating his powers	105
5.2.8 Farhan's interactional strategy: interaction and analysis	107
5.2.9 Orchestrating dialogue	108
5.3 Research Question 2:	
Influence of dialogic Process on Thinking and perspectives	111
5.3.1 Dialogic Process Influence upon thinking	112
5.3.2 Using and giving space	113
5.3.3 Engaged discussions that challenged previous perspectives	115
5.3.4 Farhan's perspective on 'perspectives'	119
5.3.5 Understanding difference	119
5.3.6 Modern Socrates!	121
5.3.7 Making connection.	122
5.4 Research Question 3; dialogic as a learning strategy	124
5.4.1 Open and Closed Patterns of interaction	125
5.4.2 Dialogic and High-level Thinking about Text	128
5.4.3 Reasoning transferred from Discussions in Writing Tasks	131
5.4.4 Role of Questions	133
5.4.5 Dialogic's Transformative Perspective	135
5.4.6 Social Critic and Conscientization	136
5.5 Would dialogue be in any sense possible?	138
5.6 Closing thoughts	139
CHAPTER-6: DISCUSSION &IMPLICATIONS	140
OF MY RESEARCH JOURNEY	
6. INTRODUCTION	140
6.1 My Study and New Understandings	140



6.2 Summary of the Key Findings	141
6.2.1 Participant Perceptions about Influence of the dialogic on Thinking about Text	141
6.2.2 Evidence that Students Applied Higher-Level Thinking	142
6.2.2.1 Evidence of higher level thinking through Students' Writing.	142
6.2.3 Dialogic: a learning strategy	142
6.2.4 Minimum Intervention by Farhan	145
6.2.5 Tensions in implementing critical dialogic with adolescent girls	146
6.2.6 Absence of dialogic moments.	148
6.3 Implications for teaching and practice	150
6.3.1 Implications for Further Research	154
6.4 Contributions of the Study	155
6.5 My journey towards tomorrow	157
Bibliography	158
Appendices	175
Table-4.7: Discourse Features	175
Table-5.2: Farhan's teaching strategies	176
Initial interview question for student /teachers	177
My reflection log; 1	179
Transcript conventions	180
Consent Form	181
Certificate of ethical research approval	182
<b>List of Figures</b>	
Figure 1.1: Graphic description of dissertation chapters	18
Figure 3.1: Resistance & barriers to critical dialogic	64
Figure 4.1: Framework for Analyzing the Discourse of Discussions	80
Figure 5.1: Farhan's 'dialogic space'	104
Figure 5.2: Dialogic strategies	126
Figure 5.3: Indicators of high-level thinking	129
Figure 5.4: Excerpt from Discussion Showing High-level Thinking	130
Figure 5.5: Excerpt from compositions showing developed reasoning	132

### **List of Tables**

Table-4.1: Focal Students	71
Table-4.2: Data Tools	72
Table-4.5: Dialogic/non dialogic traits in sessions	77
Table-4.6: Turn counts	79
Table-4.7: Detailed dimensions of discourse features (Appendix).	183
Table-5.1: Attributes found in dialogic sessions	88
Table-5.2: Students' Views of Dialogue	118
Table-5.2a: Farhan's Teaching Strategies (appendix)	184
Table-5.3: Attitudes towards cultural specific gender roles & bias	120
Table-5.4: Exploratory Talk Turns	127

### **List of Acronyms**

UAE:	United Arab Emirates
T/S:	Teacher/Student
EF/SL:	English as a secondary or foreign
SLA:	Second language acquisition
IRE:	Initiation response evaluation
IRF:	Initiation, Response and Follow-up
FN:	Field notes
MOEY:	The Ministry of Education and Youth
ZPD:	Zones of proximal development
CELA:	Center for English Learning and Achievement
CP:	Critical pedagogy

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a collaborative experience related to the lives of students. The transferring model is limiting while the collaboration is liberating or humanizing (Freire, 1972). Dialogic pedagogy involves students as reflective, critical inquirers, who can analyze their perspectives and attitudes. Dialogic creates spaces (Buber, 1965), where conversation generates knowledge and personal relations. I intend to explore these dialogic spaces where students and their teacher engage in dialogue around literary texts, in an advanced English composition and literature major class of female students at one university in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). My study explores the possibilities ‘dialogic’ offers to teachers and the students. To examine implications of critical dialogic pedagogy and how educators negotiated dialogue in practice, I conducted a pilot study. The data from the pilot study revealed evidence of changed perspectives and a new understanding of issues. Although the response was positive, gauging the extent of transformation to actual classroom practice was beyond the scope of the pilot study. Because of the positive response that followed the sessions (conducted for that study), I wanted to explore the process further and investigate how it relates to gender and culture. I wanted to consider in what ways conditions will allow perspectives to remain in dialogue. Drawing from critical and socio-cultural theory, I explored dialogic spaces as sites of understandings. My research explores how dialogic literacy practices function in relation to particular cultural and ideological discourses (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 1996; Luke, 1991).

I know a little bit about lighting a fire including an understanding of how to light the fire of learning. So the quote by W. B. Yeats, ‘*Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire,*’ (In the handouts given by Dr Troudi) plunged me into deep thought. What is this fire that Yeats is referring to? What is the art of lighting the fire for learning? Knowledge is finding light in darkness and staying warm in the cold. This is the knowledge we owe to our students. Not the facts and theories, but a deep knowing (O’Reilly, 1998). Thus it seems appropriate to me to call this study, ‘the lighting of a fire’.

The study explores complexities of interaction between students and their teacher. Acknowledging that a representation is always incomplete and from a perspective (Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997; Ochs, 1979), the findings may carry the marks of my cultural and gender bias. I present my analysis as a situated perspective, not as a complete or objective interpretation. My focus thus is dialogue as a response to the Teacher/Student (T/S) model. I want to investigate why the dialogical form could be regarded as the paragon of education. To provide a context for these issues, I will describe in detail some key concepts and practices in the third chapter (literature review).

### **1.1 My research motivation : evolving concept of learning**

*'Critical is an invitation to discover new truth, to free the young from mental slavery and from the tendency to conform, which mentally enslaves them to the forces in society'* (Luigi Giussani).

Educational practices are mostly (in Pakistan too) hierarchical. The structure is rigid and that rigidity reinforces the status quo. While distributing authority is a challenge, there is also the dilemma of teachers not having enough authority. In some cases, lack of authority interferes with critical and power-sharing process. The authority teachers bring to class varies according to the teacher's gender, age, condition of employment and other factors. Students who develop socially subordinate identities feel insecure in joining an unfamiliar critical process. Although dialogic offers enormous possibilities, moving beyond the customary practices and experimenting with new ways is perceived risky. Change is difficult as ideals of schooling have remained stable over decades. Most of the time, schooling does not stress critical inquiry and social justice (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). This is particularly true in educational climates that emphasize fixed instruction and consider literacy as a neutral process (Edmondson, 2004).

Most of my teachers (in Pakistan) did not take risks in their teaching and did not encourage learners to think outside the cultural paradigm but my upbringing ensured that I would not be one of those students who would shun opportunities to learn about issues not usually discussed in school. Thus when I embarked upon the journey of teaching (rather learning), I was aware of the limitations of my cultural context.

Therefore my challenge was to find ways to take risks with my students so that they as individuals would work for change. This challenge led me to explore the possibilities and outcomes of placing a social justice agenda at the center of my teaching. So my concern was whether the time-tested methods could accomplish what I wanted for my students. I wondered if we allow the students to take control of their learning, what could be the rewards. It has been my conviction that the educator is not simply a facilitator, encouraging tolerance for multiple perspectives. Instead, s/he should let learners recognize that perceptions are colonized by languages, norms and dominant patriarchal ideologies. I wanted to understand the dialogic process, identify the challenges that would emerge during the process and to find ways to address those challenges. Even though 'Dialogic' has been at the center of educators' attention, little is known about how dialogue is manifested in classrooms and the tensions involved in implementing dialogic with adolescent girls.

The interaction of teacher and students does not take place in a vacuum. People bring with them their cultural expectations and social discriminations. Therefore, it seemed important to me to explore the challenges of dialogic in a different cultural context and with a gendered perspective. These have been my teaching concerns that ultimately became motivation for my doctoral research. I hope my research would add a new dimension to the research already done about critical dialogic pedagogy.

## **1.2 Background of the problem**

Holland (et al.1998) used the theories of Vygotsky (1986) and Bakhtin (1981) to explain that intellect originates from culture or society and that cognitive development relies upon social and interpersonal interactions. Vygotsky (1991) believed that learners learned in various ways that make them members of particular communities or cultures (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Wells, 2000). To understand these processes and reflect on their implications for language learning, researchers must take into account individual's respective positioning, in particular social and cultural contexts because gender and culture may influence learner's overall success in language learning.

As a result, it seemed important to me to consider, the way gender and culture may affect learning of English as a secondary or foreign (EF/SL) language through

dialogic process. What are the circumstances, and audiences, for which the ideal of dialogic may not be sustained? Pedagogical communication is not a fixed relation of communication (sender-receiver), as the educational process also communicates knowledge of cultural codes (Bernstein, 1990; Bourdieu, 1991). My study thus explores dialogic discourse in relation to a specific cultural context. The next chapter elaborates and provides the context in which the study is situated.

### **1.2.1 How and why my research questions evolved**

The relationship between interaction and acquisition is an important issue in second language acquisition (SLA) research. Hatch thinks structure of a language is learned through interaction rather than learning grammar (1978). Although interaction may not be necessary, it is the means by which learners obtain data for language learning, because the input obtained through interaction is more conducive to acquisition than input received in other ways. In spite of this potential, dialogic is rarely practiced in educational settings (Mercer, 1995). Instead, most classroom interaction is an initiation response evaluation (IRE) sequence (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1998). Most classroom discussion is teacher centered, reproducing what is already known by the teacher (Michaels & Cazden, 1986; Nystrand, 1997). Finally, a limited amount of research suggests that when discussions are controlled by the teacher, the roles of the teacher are often described as manager, evaluator, controller and students remain passive observers (Alvermann, 1996; Nystrand, 1997). Thus researchers described classroom discussions as mostly teacher-fronted and I could locate few studies that discuss dialogic aims translated into valid practices (Almasi, 1995; Lemke, 1995; Mercer, 1995; Nystrand, 1997; Wood, 1995; Wortham, 2001). Few researchers have focused on techniques for fostering dialogic discussion (Mercer, 1995; Wood, 1995), consequently, little is known about the outcome of implementing dialogic in academic scenes. Culture also plays a major role in shaping our social realities and learning experiences. Thus it seemed important to me to examine dialogic discussions within a particular cultural context and from a ‘gendered’ perspective.

### **1.2.2 Theoretical context**

This research was informed by a combination of a constructivist and social constructivists’ theoretical framework. The constructivist frame allows me to look at

the nature of social reality and learning from the individual's perspective. Constructivists view people as constructive agents and view the phenomenon of interest as built, instead of passively received by people whose ways of knowing are specific to their 'selves' (Spivey, 1997). Discourse theory says that every word draws its meaning from social practices. Thus language is inter-textual, involving the history of its previous uses (Bakhtin, 1981). My research is an attempt to capture one of the shades of constructive learning that allows each voice to speak in all its uniqueness and at the same time to be part of a larger whole. It presents the world in heteroglossia: multiple voices of a given culture and people (Bakhtin, 1981).

Clark (1993) stated that transformational learning shapes people in ways both they and others can recognize. Since developing competencies is a transforming process, transformational learning theory provided a valuable theoretical lens to this research. I will discuss in detail (in the next chapters) the theoretical and contextual weave that supports my exploratory study.

### **1.2.3 Research problem**

Learning is deeply connected to the realities of the students' lives. Acknowledging these links between a student's social reality and the classroom is a challenging task. To my knowledge no qualitative exploration has been conducted about dialogic and its relation to gender and culture. There are a few published research projects, like: Polite and Adam's, *'Improving critical thinking through Socratic seminars'* (1996), Chesser, Gellatly and Hales, *'Do paideia seminars explain higher writing scores?'* (1997), Wortham's, *'Ventriloquating Shakespeare: Ethical positioning in classroom literature discussions'* (2001), Mercer and Wegerif's Thinking together project (2004) and Fitzgerald and Billing's, *'Dialogic discussion and the paideia seminar'* (2002). None of these excellent pieces of research examine dialogic discussion from a gendered perspective. It is therefore, the intent of this research to explore this aspect.

### **1.2.4 Research design**

This research reports on multiple perspectives and a process that focuses on how people make meaning during dialogue. Because of this emphasis, an exploratory approach seemed a suitable choice. My dissertation research is an exploratory

qualitative study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000) of an innovative approach to literacy education, involving a group of twenty female students enrolled in the English department of one of the universities in UAE. The study aims to discover and understand perspectives of the people involved (Merriam, 1998). My research questions explore the potential of dialogic in institutionalized educational settings. I will investigate the following research questions:

- i) What are the contextual circumstances that encourage University-level female students [in the UAE] to engage in dialogue effectively?
- ii) To what extent does the dialogic process foster participants' ability to construct new understandings that influence a shift in perspective?
- iii) What possibilities does 'dialogic' offer to teachers/learners?

I intend to examine dialogic process from a descriptive perspective in which the qualitative richness of the processes is captured.

### **1.3 Significance of the research study**

The term banking education (Freire, 1972) implies a strong hierarchical relationship between teacher and student, and a conception of knowledge independent of social conditions and power relations within society. Teachers are molded into this model of teaching and do not move out of it by themselves.

Languages and language teaching have political aims, and language teachers are political actors (or instruments). Taken from this position, EF/SL teaching seems inadequate in many ways and we cannot change the situation without taking into account social and cultural factors. This means constructing classroom spaces where students can see differences not as obstacles, but as opportunities for understanding. If we as teachers value dialogue because of its open-ended potential for transformation, then we must promote sustained dialogue, because it is only through dialogue that learning can flourish. In an earlier unpublished assignment study, participants (of the study) thought that dialogic moved them to an informed and expanded understanding. Therefore, I felt it would be significant to understand what happens during a dialogic process and how students' perceived transformation is shaped by the interactions. This could be important to educators. The benefits may include a deeper understanding of



how socio-cultural constructs influence the learning process through the dialogic format. There is great diversity in the discussion formats examined by researchers as dialogue exhibits complexity and richness. As educators prepare students for high stakes tests that include open ended questions and writing assignments, dialogic is the process that can meet these challenges well. Teachers that I interviewed in my assignment study felt that dialogic increased reading comprehension, depth of understanding and critical thinking.

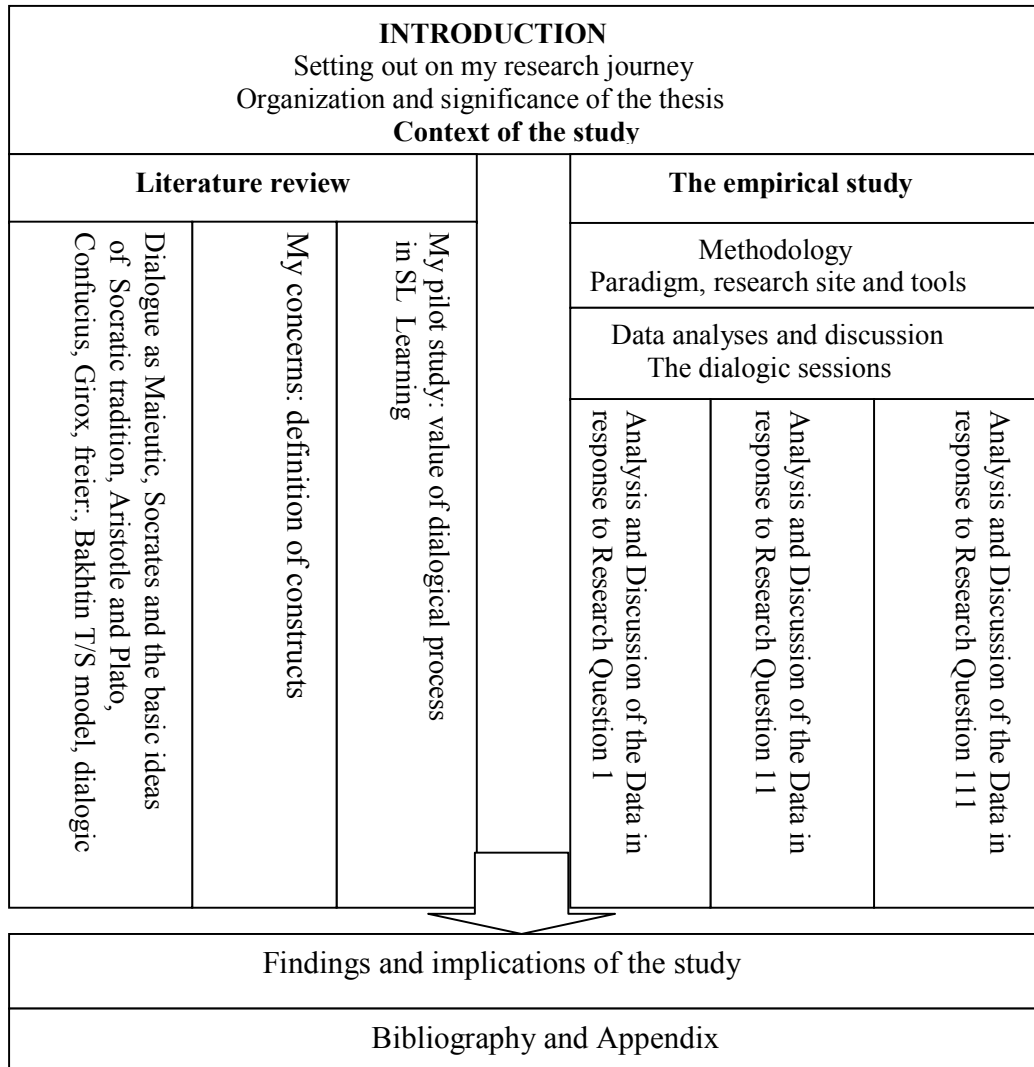
Indeed rather than definitive answers, this research poses more questions. In addition to advancing understanding of Dialogic learning, I hope this research will stir further international research in dialogic and transformative learning. The possibility that students may initially respond negatively can be uncomfortable for those with less experience. However, every teacher takes risks when critically engaging students and it is within these risks that the fertile learning spaces reside. These spaces offer the possibility of transformation. My hope is that this study provides a contribution to that end. These are just some of the reasons why I think a ‘dialogic approach to learning’ is an important area of research. I believe this research is long overdue and that better understanding of gender and cultural context will have implications upon how we can make students’ learning experience more meaningful.

#### **1.4 Road map of my dissertation journey**

I have presented a ‘miniature sketch’ of my research, its aims and design as the introduction of the research. This introduction and the overview will be followed by five chapters. In the second chapter, I will describe the background and the context of this study. In chapter three I review the literature. It presents a review of traditions relating to the dialogic process, both quantitative and qualitative research that demonstrates how little dialogic discussion occurs in schools and why. The attributes of dialogic traditions will be discussed and a review of my unpublished assignment study on the value of dialogic process is included in the literature review as it compliments my empirical study.

The fourth chapter discusses methodology and argues the case for the chosen design for this study. It describes the design of the study, the participants involved, and the setting. The fifth chapter presents the data and analyses, where I address my research questions. Chapter 6 presents findings and implications for classroom practice as well

as implications for future areas of research. The figure below presents my research journey graphically.



**Figure-1.1: Graphic description of dissertation chapters**

In each chapter I engage with the appropriate literature, and articulate for my reader my understanding of the dialogic process.

### 1.5 Closing thoughts before the journey ahead

Knowledge exists in the minds of cognizing beings existing in a socio-cultural environment (Tobin, 1993). There is more to reading than just decoding words. The key finding that I identified as results of my pilot study imply that dialogic is a

complex process. Teachers need sufficient time to develop an understanding of the concept. My aim therefore is to build a bridge between the practitioners and the dialogic ideal. That bridge is illuminated by context, and understood through a process in which people interact and communicate, since individuals cannot be unconnected with the society.

*'For he who can view things in their connection is a dialectician; he who cannot, is not'* (Plato Republic, VII 537)

## CHAPTER 2: THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

*True knowledge is not simply a memorized accumulation of facts but rather a light which floods the heart (Al-Ghazali, Ihya\_ulum al-din, Faris, translation).*

### 2. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The purpose of my research is to explore dialogic learning, thereby developing an understanding about Emirati women in their higher education journey. As my research focuses upon the dialogical process in the socio-cultural context of university students in UAE, I explain here the context of my research study. This chapter is set within a historical context established by reading of institutional documents/planning archives, newspaper archives and the exchange of views with (via telephone or email) fellow educators working in UAE. The changes occurring in the UAE reveals an amazingly quick transformation of the social and physical landscape. However, this process of transformation cannot represent change that involves human beings. An awareness of cultural context is a first step towards avoiding the costly mistakes of importing an expatriate educational culture wholesale without due consideration of local beliefs and attitudes.

It is acknowledged by researchers that Learning is a historical and local reconstitution and thus a situated practice (Green & Meyer, 1991). Learning is a joint activity of members as they collectively construct themselves through learning. Moreover, the self has a history that cannot be ignored. Languages are not deployed in isolation; they demand significant others, such as parents, siblings, or teachers (Mead, 1934). These significant others play a role in our learning languages. Even where the subject chooses who he or she is, this choice takes place against a background of shared values and aspirations. Bakhtin (1981) thinks that context into which words are delivered, holds primacy over text. Words carry histories and take stances. This notion is significant for literacy classrooms. What we believe results from the lenses we brought to the text. These lenses are connected to the context surrounding the readings of those words. Therefore I considered it necessary to give an account of the forces working for or against the dialogic spaces I am going to explore.

## **2.1 Locational context**

Culture involves human practices that are situated in people's contexts which make their social worlds (Moll, 2000). Fluid cultural identities present a more complicated picture. Young people today are exposed to otherness in a ways that their parents were not. The complex picture of UAE includes factors such as Arabic as a national language, Islam as the state religion, post-colonial mindset, close ideological and political links with other Arab countries, a small indigenous and conservative population, a much larger expatriate community and the rapid modernization as a result of oil wealth and federal statehood gained in 1971. It is necessary to discuss the unique cultural and historical factors that have shaped Emirati society and thus their educational setting.

### **2.1.1 Religious and cultural values: a peep into the past to understand the present**

Islamic beliefs and practices govern all aspects of life for the Emirati people, as well as other Arabs. Islamic traditions shape the practices of government, education and business systems. Because of their strong influences, religious beliefs must be taken into consideration.

The fundamental principles of Islam apply to both dimensions of human life, the intrapersonal, which emphasizes life-long learning (from the cradle to the grave), and self-cultivation (the pursuit of harmony with oneself and others). Self-cultivation means self-regulation of material and physical desires for the sake of virtue, benevolence, and the observance of the rules of propriety. The second dimension of human life is the interpersonal. It involves creating a harmony within the individual, family and society.

In the nineteenth century Ottoman intellectuals considered modernization as essential in preserving a social order which seemed willing of its own decline. In spite of differences in approach, there was some common ground between the Ottoman rulers and the intellectuals, namely, the high value they placed on the importance of promoting higher education (Mahdī, 2001).

The significant achievements of early Muslim philosophers included the development of a strict science of citation, the *Isnad* or backing; a method of open inquiry to disprove claims, *Ijtihad*; the willingness to both accept and challenge authority within the same process. *Kalam* referred to the Islamic tradition of seeking theological principles through dialectic. Many medieval Muslim thinkers pursued humanistic rationale in their search for knowledge and values. A wide range of Islamic writings on love poetry, history and theology show that medieval Islamic thought was open to the humanistic ideas of individualism, skepticism and liberalism. Important developments by Muslim logicians was Avicennian logic that introduced hypothetical syllogism and inductive logic (Davidson, 1992; Gohlman, 1974). In the area of formal logical analysis, they elaborated upon the theory of terms, propositions and syllogisms as formulated in Aristotle's categories by most of the major Islamic Aristotelians. Analogical and inductive reasoning were introduced in *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *Sharia* (Islamic law) and *Kalam* (Islamic theology) with the process of *Qiyas*, before the Arabic translations of Aristotle's works. Later during the Islamic golden age, there was a debate among Islamic philosophers over whether the term *Qiyas* refers to analogical reasoning, inductive reasoning or categorical syllogism. Ibn Sina (known as *Avicenna* in the West), in one of his books, wrote a chapter dealing with the *maktab* entitled, '*The Role of the Teacher in the Training and Upbringing of Children*'. He wrote that children can learn better if taught in classes instead of individual tuition from private tutors, and he gave a number of reasons to support the case, citing the value of competition and emulation among pupils as well as the usefulness of group discussions and debates.

Muhammad Ibn Sahnun thinks there are two ways of making a thing comprehensible: first, by causing its essence to be perceived by the intellect, and second, by imagining it through the similitude that imitates it. Assent is brought about either by demonstration or by persuasion. Thus instruction is an interactive process that involves both the teacher and the student. Al-Farabi argues that instruction be a student-centered process, in which the teachers facilitate their students' educational voyage (Alavi, 1988; Hassim, 2010).

According to Sebastian Gunther (2006), without knowledge of the past we may remain busy with self-postulated problems, the solutions to which are available in historical knowledge. I have briefly discussed this rich past as I believe we can deal with today's educational issues successfully when we know their historical contexts

and have an adequate understanding of them, since today's issues in education are often rooted deeply in the historical grounds. If modernity is willing to learn from the past it can recreate that which seems to be lost and so restore an education system that gives importance to human development as a whole. It is impossible to separate education from the inherited values in the society. However, with such rich traditions, the snag might well be the cultural comfort zones.

Although some misconceptions prevail about gender roles and responsibilities specified in religion, gender roles are constructed more by cultural practices than by the Quranic injunctions. Over the years, certain pre-Islamic customs have reappeared (Jawad, 1998). Cultural customs that deny women equality have become entrenched in the Arab culture to the point that they are often accepted as Islamic rules. Many of the customs cannot be found in Islamic texts.

Cultural traditions and practices justified, and carried on in society still prevail today, due to the hegemony of male power. Some cultural traditions and practices have prevailed by keeping women illiterate. Official schooling for women in Saudi Arabia initiated forty years after men's education (Hamdan, 2006). Women will remain passive if they do not know their rights in light of Islamic teachings. If Islam gives rights to women, than 'they need to know these rights' (Ramadan, 2001, p. 55). Thus emphasis on education and critical dialogue is all the more necessary.

As said earlier my research aims are building an understanding for the challenges involved in implementations of dialogic discussions within a particular cultural context and from a 'gendered' perspective. I would like to focus on these challenges.

### **2.1.2 The cultural comfort zone**

Memory, in particular, plays an important role in both ancient and modern education. According to Hofstede (2009) some societies are more loosely bound as compared to other societies where family and social bonds are much stronger. A woman's role in Arab Muslim societies is prescribed by society. The molded roles for men and women govern politics of education (based on memorization and authoritarianism) in Arab Muslim societies. According to Hooks (1994), though boys and girls develop firm ideas about their prospective lives at an early age, schools can bring some change in attitudes and aspirations. Dewey advocates that a student should interact with his/her

environment to change the world around him/her. Furthermore Dewey confirms education as the method of 'social progress and reform' (Bruner, 1962, p. 114). Education can enable the individual to go beyond the cultural world, though in small measure, to create his/her own interior culture. UAE educational programs are a teacher-driven learning environment with a strong test-driven and curriculum-driven approach towards learning (Wagie & Fox, 2006). However, educationists are recognizing the need for dialogue as a method of teaching within Arab education today.

### **2.1.3 Women in focus**

Medieval and early modern western ideas on female education were that, most women needed merely religious and ethical instruction that would instruct them in how to govern a household. After all the household was women's natural domain, therefore, they would not normally engage with the world at large as would men and did not need as broad an education as men. The idea of education for all (regardless of gender) was realized late by the west. I decided to keep my research perspective gender focused because I believe understanding Emirati women may be helpful for developing programs that would be successful in the UAE. Scholarly research focused specifically on the educational development of women in UAE is difficult to find.

However, things are changing. Educational opportunities are now open to women at all levels in the UAE. Shaikha Fatima has said that women have no choice but to excel in education to compensate for the years that they had endured without the light of knowledge.

On November 19, 2007, Shaikha Fatima Bint Mubarak, Chairperson of the UAE Businesswomen's Council, in her address encouraged women to be '*proactive and take their aspired role along with men in the development of their country*'. Women have embraced education in large numbers. In fact, 95 percent of Emirati females enrolled in Secondary schools apply for acceptance to colleges and universities (Al Abed et al. 2007). Therefore I believe this research that explores the experiences of Emirati women in the learning environment, will provide an understanding of the educational needs of Emirati women.



Women are constantly negotiating gender discourse and ideologies perpetuated in the name of Islam, to reinitiate the status granted to women in Islamic texts. They are exerting social ideas for inclusion, ‘as participants and as producers of new cultural ideologies rather than passive recipients’ (Limon, 1989, p. 476) who merely reflect cultural norms of gender. I believe my research can provide some important implications, a starting point for understanding Emirati female students in educational settings and beyond.

## **2.2 Development of UAE educational system**

*‘Education is like a lantern, which lights up your way in a dark alley.’*

(Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, late president of UAE).

Before the discovery of oil, the region was an arid desert area inhabited by Bedouin tribes. The education system of the UAE, in comparison to other countries, is relatively new. All UAE nationals have access to mainstream public education, which has strong Arabic influence. All mainstream public education is conducted in single gender classes and no expatriates are admitted (Gaad, 2010). Primary and secondary education is provided to all UAE citizens. The existing educational structure, which was established in the early 70s, is a four-tier system covering 14 years of education. In recent decades, education has achieved substantial growth with enrollments expanding dramatically. Yet observers question the tilt towards rote learning and the absence of subjective considerations. Students have a variety of opportunities, including private educational institutions, English-medium schools, religious-curriculum institutions, and studies abroad. Generally, opportunities for women have grown. As reported annually in the Ministry of Information and Culture's publication, United Arab Emirates Yearbook, public sector higher education shows a continuous expansion with more than 90 percent of national students leaving high school in the UAE applying to universities. This includes 95 percent women, reported to be the highest number of higher education admission per capita anywhere in the world.

### **2.3 EF/SL teaching in the UAE**

Each socio-cultural context has its own unique motivators that must be studied and understood so that teachers can better address the factors that contribute to better language learning. Better understanding of motivational factors may assist curriculum and instruction designers to develop language teaching programs that motivate and encourage learners (Midraj, 2003; Gardner and Lambert, 1972).

In many countries today, including the UAE, literacy in the mother tongue is no longer sufficient: students are required to become literate not only in one but sometimes more languages. They must speak Arabic, which is important for the preservation of culture. And they must be fluent in English if they are to make their way in the worlds of trade and commerce.

Bilingualism is essential for further study and for employment. As such, students in UAE schools today are in an advantaged position, but it is essential that they are able to take full advantage of the rich lingual environment that surrounds them. Unfortunately, the learners are not enthusiastic about second language learning. For many of them, learning to read and write in a second language is a negative experience. This negativity is a major contributory factor in low second language proficiency, which is identified as a major educational issue. Furthermore language learning may be cultural (a result of social conditioning). Research relating to gender differences (Alton-Lee & Praat, 2000) also calls for a critical literacy approach so that conventional gender roles can be understood.

Despite substantial expansion of educational opportunities, questions are being asked throughout the Arab world, about the quality of education. Transmission of knowledge has expanded but with a reliance on rote learning. There is a need to shift from methods of passive memorization to active student participation. Practices of rote learning and memorization exercises cannot inculcate problem solving and the application of theory to practical concepts.

According to Dr Farhan (participant of my research, interview, 15/3/2010), teachers rely heavily on their ministry-approved teaching materials, and usually believe teachers' guides are models of good practice. They think that English is to be

understood and learned, with the help of the teacher whose responsibility is to explain the language to the students. He pointed out that obsession with certifications and assessment (IELTS, TOEFL, and SAT) makes the learning experience stale.

Due to dramatic changes that are taking place in the world, particularly in the UAE, the education system has become the focus of critical analysis. This has resulted in severe criticisms about:

- i) Methods of teaching and learning
- ii) Inflexible curricula and programs

As Guefrachi and Troudi (2000) point out, there is increasing awareness in the UAE of the importance of English in the educational and economic sectors. This awareness has led to attempts to look critically at English language instruction in order to improve proficiency levels of all English learners in the country.

Issues of quality regarding curriculum and pedagogy are being discussed. The Ministry of Education and Youth (MOEY) has produced and revised policy documents outlining a strategy for further educational development in the UAE up to the year 2020. Vision2020 is a strategic plan to improve the education system in UAE. It concentrates on quality of output, developing thinking strategies, creativity and independence (UAE Ministry of Education, 2000:3). Specifically, Vision 2020 states: *The focus will shift from teaching to learning, from the teacher to the learner, from memorization to creativity, reflection, imagination and innovation. To attain this objective, continuous training for teachers and supervisors will be provided to change the traditional roles they play, into more effective roles to promote, develop and instill the culture of innovation* (UAE Ministry of Education, Higher Education Section, <http://mohe.uae.gov.ae/indexe.html>)

This emphasis validates the necessity and the importance of my research. I believe that attempts to teach English using programs that emphasize phonics and decoding skills cannot succeed with the majority of English language learners. There is more to reading than just decoding words. The development of thinking skills is an important goal of education. My research is an effort to emphasize the importance of dialogical, holistic ways of knowing.

## **2.4 The Research study focus in context**

Theoretical conceptual frameworks which emphasize the role of talk in learning support different aspects of talk in the classroom, such as the need to acknowledge the influence of the home (Bernstein, 1971; Wells, 1986), the value of group talk in generating constructive contexts for learning (Barnes et al., 1986), or psychological explorations of the interrelationship between talk and thought (Vygotsky, 1986). This research is an examination of relationships constructed, maintained or deconstructed in the classroom through talk, and the way in which these relationships influence language learning.

In response to each other, we construct what we think about ourselves and how we understand others in socially correct ways. I argue that individual researchers must understand the contexts that they attempt to fit in with their socially constructed selves (Shotter, 1994) during attempts to understand the realities of others. I have kept my culturally constructed self in mind as I observe to understand young Arab women in dialogue with foreign literature. Although research findings cannot be generalized across all female students in the UAE, my research may provide some insight into the learning experiences and preferences of Emirati women.

## **2.5 Summary of the chapter**

The interests of learners in UAE are as diverse as the learners themselves. There is a need to sincerely acknowledge the cultural context of learners. If we can create a learning environment that incorporates these principles, all students will have a greater chance of success. Change is never easy and can be difficult to implement in a traditional setting. In the Arab world, political, religious and cultural issues influence the concepts and instruction.

As H.H Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (Founding Father of the U.A.E) stated, *'Those who forget the past, compromise their future.'* I considered it necessary to develop an understanding of the contextual circumstances that influence female students' engagement in dialogue in educational setting.

The next chapter presents a review of traditions and research relating to the dialogic process.

## CHAPTER 3 : LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3. INTRODUCTION

Critical dialogue has been a focal point in many research projects and much has been written about the transformative potential of dialogic approaches to teaching (Friere, 1997; Hooks 1994). Scholars have explored dialogue as a means for helping students develop awareness of their agency to bring change in oppressive circumstances. Scholars brought forth dialogue's potential for social criticism (Andrews, 1989) and issues related to gender and culture (Campbell, 1991; Lenze, 1991).

Researchers stress the importance of language in the construction and (re)construction of social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) as language defines motives and influences our actions. However, despite importance of dialogic education based on social constructivist learning, research (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991) indicates that 85% of the school day is devoted to lecture and recitation. There seems to be a strong bent towards the transmission approach in academic practices. As some of the very best learning in my classes was the result of dialogic, I wanted to explore the possibilities of dialogic learning. Because of the outstanding essays that followed the sessions (by participants of my pilot study), I wanted to assess what makes dialogic successful and why. I wanted to investigate how the process may relate to gender and culture. I wanted to consider the conditions that allow 'perspectives' to remain in dialogue. Are the students expected, to be mere depositories of knowledge and give back only what the teacher has fed to them? (Freire, 1970)

According to Wegerif, dialogic space is characterized by relations of involvement (2005). When we think of dialogic we think of conversation that builds a relation. Whereas the relation comes first and it is this concept of dialogic as an end-in-itself that holds importance. Metaphorically, dialogic process is like building a fire: with enough kindling of the right sort and patience, the spark of engagement is possible.

Knowledge involves active participation by learners through transactions with the world around them (Brown & Cocking, 2000). In dialogue when we recognize differences, we allow a space for transformation of our 'selves', in connection with others (Hazen, 1993). Dialogic practices help students look at issues in broader

contexts, sharpen their abilities for critical inquiry and acknowledge multiple perspectives (Gay, 1997; Banks, 1997). The critical question is how to accomplish a dialogic space in classrooms?

Thus my study investigates whether critical dialogic pedagogy can be sustained within academic institutions? And how can educators overcome obstacles (if any)? Among other issues, I need to understand the circumstances, and audiences, for which the ideal of dialogue may not be sustained? I think we can find answers only in dialogic spaces. These spaces for dialogue bring understanding of literacy in relation to cultural diversity and social justice.

Engaging in dialogue is one way of broadening our understanding of complex issues related to literacy and diversity. Therefore, my research draws from works in the areas of critical and dialogic literacy studies. My research explores how literacy practices are socially, culturally, and politically situated (Green & Meyer, 1991) and how these function in relation to particular cultural and ideological discourses (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 1996; Luke, 1991). My research evaluates the implications of creating a dialogic, democratic classroom. It draws from works in the areas of critical and dialogic literacy studies.

In this review, I provide readers the conceptual framework and understanding for dialogic spaces. It seems from these accounts that students benefit when they are given opportunities to engage in critical dialogue.

In writing this review, I am aware that I am looking into a complex web of ideas. That said, my review starts by examining my concerns and theoretical constructs, to present the dialogic traditions, next I explore whether literature provides a blueprint for critical classroom practice. Finally, I wish to present my own understanding of possible ways for teachers committed to critical dialogic pedagogy, recognizing that such an understanding is partial owing to my gendered and cultural perspectives.

### **3.1 An historical story: how my work fits into this story**

Broadly speaking, the ‘critical’ in pedagogy is as old as civilization, practiced by Socrates and Plato in the West and by Chinese Confucianism in east. To Confucius,

learning could not occur without silent reflection (Confucius, 500BC). Within the Confucian tradition to realize one's inner self, one should be completely free from arbitrary opinions. The learning process that facilitates this meditative self is extended through dialogue with others. To Confucius, learning was much more than the acquisition of empirical knowledge. For him to learn without silent reflection was labor in vain (Kaizuka 2002).

Socratic image of the teacher as an intermediary between the student and the universe is one of the most ancient archetypal forms of teaching in the Western tradition. This image underlies many current visions of what the teacher (and student) should be, in Adler's *Paideia Proposal* (1982) and Lipman's *Philosophy Goes to School* (1988). These ideals can be traced back to Descartes' science of skepticism and extend to modern times with Freire's (1970) critical literacy and popular education, and Giroux's (1983) citizenship education.

Researchers Alvermann (1996), Applebee (1996), Nystrand (1997) and Wells (2000) assert that true dialogic discourse seldom occurs in the classroom and that most classroom discussions follow an IRE sequence in which the teacher initiates a question, the student responds, and the teacher evaluates the response. The purpose is evaluative; whereas, the purpose of dialogic is collaborative meaning-making, and a stimulation of higher order thinking applied to issues and values. Dialogue gained importance with the new school movement (progressivism). The theoreticians took anti-authoritarian positions, opposing the traditional school based on the authority of the teacher. Literacy was understood as a social practice of inclusion and exclusion, rather than a cognitive capacity that can be transported from one social context to another (Luke & Freebody, 1997). From this socio-cultural perspective, literacy instead of being an abstract and neutral pursuit is acknowledged to carry political dimensions. Thus agency could be attained through critical examination of language and culture (Luke & Gore, 1992). Therefore, a transformed view of literacy is needed, one that focuses on the political dimensions of language by bringing forth questions such as how language works in whose interests, on what cultural sites, and why (Kelly, 1997).

My research explores tensions that may arise during the sessions between the girls and their (male) teacher, to understand what happens when a teacher critiques social representations of gender and conditions that support oppressive representations.

Monologic epistemologies discourage diversity, heteroglossia and polyphonic viewpoints. They present a finalized sense of the world, whereas dialogic epistemologies privilege interaction of multiple voices. In a polyphonic world even agreement has a dialogic character that does not lead to merging of voices in a single impersonal truth (Bakhtin, 1984). Therefore every human gets the opportunity to act as a free, rationally acting person. Thus the question was whether these theoretical concepts could become pedagogical possibilities. Teachers that I interviewed in my class assignment, and the teacher who was the focus of this study, felt that dialogic develops deep understandings. My research tries to address my concern about the gap between educational philosophy and pedagogical practices.

### **3.1.1 Dialogic research practice**

Many people regard language as a neutral expression of meanings; while others take it to be constitutive of the meanings. These perspectives build understandings of knowledge as fixed or emergent, and determine the purpose of education. Bakhtinian notion that words carry histories and assumptions of the individuals is significant (1981). There is a need to change domination of teachers' voice in classroom. These were my personal concerns when I started work on my study.

My research journey began with the pilot study that allowed me to probe teachers' understanding about critical dialogic pedagogy. The importance of understanding students' gender and cultural context is an under-researched issue. I think this research will bring forward better understanding of implications of gender and cultural context in dialogic learning.

Dialogic as a discursive practice holds promise for developing accounts of dialogue that are rich, complex, and attuned to pedagogical practice. Dialogic therefore, cannot be viewed simply as a sequence of question and answer, but a web of relations among humans or texts. The teacher/student model, from this standpoint is one pedagogical communicative relation. Researchers have explored the extent to which classes



centered on issues of race (Smith, 1995), class or gender influence teachers' beliefs (Torok & Aguilar, 2000). While others have argued that despite talk about empowerment, practitioners continue traditional pedagogical practices (Corson, 2001). Dialogic Teaching suggests that dialogic pedagogies have brought a change into traditional patterns of classroom communication where learners' voices were barely acknowledged. This change however is slow as patterns of interaction are tied to culture and history (Alexander, 2001). Without understanding the conditions and contexts, change in discourse and practices cannot be sustained. Building on evidence from research, I explore the possibilities dialogic holds for educators today.

### **3.1.2 Questions that haven't been addressed before**

My research explores the dialogic process that involved a group of 20 girls and their (male) teacher. The value of dialogic discussion is not disputed, but research indicates that teachers do not practice it often. The reasons (given by the participants of my pilot study) were: they do not know how to conduct a dialogue and fear it changes the power structure in the class. A research would be beneficial in addressing these issues and may successfully meet teachers' concerns. Knowing how teachers create dialogic spaces proficiently would be helpful to all educators. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter the study also aims to broaden the perceptions about how group interaction is generated, supported and/or obstructed by the participants.

The problem of adjusting to dialogic practice is complicated because students and teachers have been programmed into banking models. Dialogic has to make an impact in a field crowded with anti-critical monologue. Freire (1970) complained that educators often considered one-way communication as dialogic. Teaching the purely technical aspects of the procedure is not difficult. The difficulty lies in developing attitudes, absent in our upbringing and education.

Patterns of interaction are tied to culture and history (Alexander, 2001) and in participants' consciousnesses. Without deeper understanding of these issues, change in discourses cannot be sustained. Research shows that intellectual achievements are higher, when learners are actively engaged in dialogue and argumentation (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). Studies of classroom communication indicate that certain patterns of interaction; exploratory talk, argumentation and dialogue promote intellectual

development by involving teachers and learners in meaning-making and knowledge construction. Applied classroom research, such as Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes' *Thinking Together project* (2000) and Alexander's *Dialogic Teaching* (2004), suggest that learners' voices should be appreciated.

My study is a unique addition as it stresses the socio-cultural and gender dimensions. So, from my position it seemed interesting to ask what allows learners to be more dialogic, is there a difference amongst us or should we try to look at a gap, what Wegerif has called, an interactive moment where two individuals make contact (Wegerif, 2004). I analyzed three constructs: the construction of new perspectives (transformation), social references and issues of power (contextual circumstances for engagement), and the possibilities dialogic interaction offers. My study portrays a dynamic classroom where the teacher attempted to empower his students by creating 'spaces' where identities of students and their teacher were influenced by and revealed through dialogue.

In the next section I present philosophical foundations with some examples of empirical studies. I start with a discussion of constructs central to my work.

### **3.2 My concerns: definition of constructs**

A classroom is a complex space. Any attempt to simplify that space means overlooking inherent complexities. Researchers suggest, when teachers become leaders, they encourage procedural interaction (Raising hands, answering a question) and build a procedural understanding (Edwards & Mercer, 1987). Thus teacher-led discussions place students in a passive role (Cazden, 1988).

My study explores whether teachers could achieve radical change if they challenge students' andro-centric readings of texts or their sexist and racist discourses as these arise in essays and class discussion? Can there be a truly safe space? Whether in our desire for a safe space we ignore that our differences as men or women have always existed? Traditional classrooms practice pedagogy of severity that is characterized by assignments that demand memorization, teacher-question and student-answer sequence, and assessment.

If teachers value dialogue (as do Bakhtin, Buber, Gadamer, Gusdorf, and Rorty) because of its potential for understanding and transformation, then they must promote sustained dialogue, because there is always a chance of changing or being changed in dialogue. I therefore investigated this ‘dialogic space’ of openness and possibility as the participants of my study confronted differences and authority in advanced English composition and literature major classes at a university in UAE.

### **3.2.1 Social references and issues of power**

According to Bourdieu (1991) language structure is guided by hegemonic cultural forces and the individuals’ interpretation is developed by filters that are generated by the values of the power structures of society. These filters prevent the language users from perceiving the power relations in language and communication. This explains why traditional views of reading overlook the social aspects of reading (Luke & Freebody, 1997). Critical literacy theorists view literacy as a political act that maintains the status quo (Comber & Simpson, 2001). Texts are viewed as communicating both explicit and implicit messages that promote specific ideologies and are socially constructed in ways that can either empower or devalue individuals (Gee, 1992). Critical educator wants readers actively engaged in uncovering the political messages found in texts. Reading then becomes an act of involvement with texts. Furthermore, students’ interpretations of the texts can be influenced by their social and cultural backgrounds (Au, 1998). Yet students search for correct answers in texts because they have assumed this to be as the correct way of reading and comprehension. The context plays a vital role in meaning making as learners are influenced by their frames of references. Meanings evolve and are surrounded by power structures and culture. Certain groups enforce what are regarded as ‘legitimate’ and ‘normal’ ways of viewing the world. Dialogic focuses on constructs that are dialogical (conversation, argument) and relational (community, culture, gender) (Popkewitz, 2004).

### **3.2.2 Culture and context**

Language teachers' understanding of social and cultural contexts shapes their approach and attitudes towards EF/SL teaching (Troudi, 2007). The importance of social context is a recent realization in language learning and research (Platt & Troudi,

1997). Ethnicity, geographic boundaries, traditions and religion form the cultural context or reference effecting people's lives. Culture is concerned with values, laws and custom which link internal and external worlds (Tyler, 1951). Knowledge therefore is embedded in cultural circumstances that produce discourses (Foucault, 1989) and curriculum (Bernstein, 1971).

The socio-cultural perspective on language learning views classroom as a socio-cultural community where students and teacher create shared meanings (Wells, 2000). Teaching thus becomes a thinking activity when teachers work with a critical perspective (Giroux, 1981). Classroom communication therefore can be a means of transformation. When learners gain power to perceive their existence critically, they learn to see the world as a reality in process, in transformation. Therefore, social relations are actively constituted and bring change (Freire, 2000).

Texts and readers are inseparable from the larger contexts in which they exist. It is important to explore the socio-cultural nature of readers' responses. As Bakhtin (1981) argued, that the language we encounter already has a history; the words that we speak have been spoken by others before us (the internal dialogism of the word). As a result, what we speak always means more than what we say; the language that we use carries with it implications and connotations that are partly intentional.

A concept central to dialogic discussion and to the analyses in my study is that we use language in social situations to negotiate roles and places (Lemke, 1990; Mercer, 1995). The speaker/writer must imagine other's reality as without this, the words carry no meaning. This is why it is important to understand the context or social situation. My research relies on this understanding. The dialogic space created by the participants of my study can only be understood when seen against the backdrop of the cultural programming of their 'selves.' Bakhtin (quoted. in Todorov, 1984) contends: *'There is no human being outside society. A human being is not born in the guise of an abstract biological organism---Only social and historical localization determines the content of his personal and cultural creation'* (p. 31). Therefore social situation determine the structure of an utterance (Bakhtin, 2001). Just as humans are influenced by the social context, their messages are also influenced by their social context. Vygotsky (1986) argued that knowledge can be co-constructed between people through dialogic interactions in social spaces that he refers to as zones of

proximal development or ZPDs. When constructing meaning, individuals draw from their cultural histories. Thus, whether or not others are physically present, learning is inherently social, and language becomes the medium for meaning construction and transformation (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). Learning and development are exclusively related to the hermeneutic relation between the individual and cultural values. Cultural meanings are the formative elements of a person. Keeping in mind the importance of context, my study explores the contextual circumstances and relations that encourage students to engage in dialogue effectively.

The context of my research, the Middle East is undergoing a quick transformation of the social and physical landscape. It is impossible to separate education from the values of society therefore I considered it necessary to connect with the past to understand the present. That's why I found it strange that despite rich traditions of humanistic ideas of individualism and liberalism, we do not see much research on critical dialogic in the region. Although there is little research done in the area of my focus I found some examples of innovative works based on Freire's concept of consciousness building, related to the cultural, religious and historical context of the Middle East.

Wachob's book presents a selection of studies related to critical pedagogical practices in the region (2009). The studies look at Critical and dialogic Pedagogy as it is perceived and practiced in the Middle East. The chapters in the book address questions of power within educational institutions. Changing teachers' beliefs leads to empowerment for teachers, and also for students.

Matbouli's study (in Wachob, 2009) on learner autonomy addresses gender differences. The study presents a classroom where females engaged more than males. Participants also acknowledged their responsibilities towards their own learning and were happier when consulted on activities. Matbouli confirms that it may not be difficult to empower females by creating linguistic spaces. Matbouli thinks women just needed encouragement to believe in themselves. While student beliefs show that they still cling to banking versions of education and the authority of the teacher. This seems to be the major snag towards empowerment. Lamey (in Wachob, 2009) takes the reader into her classroom and allows them to listen to her students and to her inner voice. She presents a voyage of discovery of a teacher who sees how deep-seated

beliefs about classroom control and the power of the textbook impact her students. Through reflection, she learns to share control of the classroom with her students.

Because of the importance of context, my study explores the contextual circumstances, practices, and relations that encourage students to engage in dialogue effectively. These stories focus on the search rather than the answer, and the process rather than the product, stories that seek transformation with heightened awareness of culture and community.

Learning and development are exclusively related to the individual and the objective cultural values. Cultural meanings are the formative elements of the person himself. One's social context and culture shapes his/her gender identity accompanied with unique individual experiences. One's gender is what s/he constructs through his/her life with the experiences which take place first in the family then in society. Therefore another important consideration was to look at the role played by gender in establishing dialogue.

### **3.2.3 Gendered perspectives**

Researchers have given due importance to gender differences and how men and women have different aims in communication (Gilligan, 1982; Lakoff, 1975). Every society has distinct gender identities and any individual may or may not comply with the presumed gender identity. In my study, the term *gender* refers to culturally constructed male/ female identity.

Research studies on subjectivity, gender and identity in Middle East and North Africa have increased understanding of how choices are experienced. I use the term gendered identity to signify a person's understanding of who s/he is, whereas subjectivity signifies self hood as constituted through language, power relations and experiences. According to Hasso, these features of society are constituted by individuals in the processes of dialogue (2005).

The status of gender and how it develops is due to multiple influences; which call for multi-dimensional approach. While gender is a central category in any society, its importance is related to cultural priorities and perceptions in that society. Both

religion and family are formative elements of Muslim societies and they call for consideration. The importance of this research lies in considering the dynamics of gender in an all female class taught by a male teacher.

Early works in the analysis of gender and discourse looked at the relationship between language and biological category of sex. This has now moved to an examination of the way language is used in relation to the socially constructed category of gender. Weatherall (2002; 102) explains that gender is a part of everyday interaction and is the product of social practices. Thus gender is a performativity, specific to the context (Eckert & McConnell-ginet, 2003). Performativity means that in saying something we become it. We learn to display being a woman/man in a particular social setting of a particular social class. These acts are not inborn; we acquire them through interaction with others. The dominance approach to language sees differences in the use of language as a result of men's domination over women. This view argues that women's language reflects their subordinate position in society (McConnell-ginet, 2003).

Saktanber argues that the women re-contextualize [religious and secular] dominant discourses in their everyday life through reflexive action, and demonstrate the difficulty of opposing an agentic subjectivity to an oppressed one (2002).

As gender is an issue with important theoretical and pedagogical implications in second language learning, it has received attention in language learning research (Oxford, Young, Ito & Sumrall, 1993). Jane Sunderland (2000) cited over twenty collections of articles devoted to this topic. There are outstanding research, such as *the relationship between gender and discourse* (Goddard & Patterson, 2000; Sunderland, 1998, 2000) and *women's needs and voices in EFL situations* (McMahill, 2001; Saft & Ohara, 2004). These studies show that gender can have a significant impact on how students learn a language. The influence of second language learners' cultural background and the choice of learning strategies is also the subject of several research studies (Green & Oxford, 1995). Cameron (1995) points out the pressure imposed upon female members of the society to monitor both the men's and their own language and change their faulty language in accordance to that. Women are trained since childhood to be less direct. In many cultures girls are traditionally taught to believe that they would be more appreciated for coyness than by directness. Block (2002) states that the view is essential as it is about having certain characteristics

which are determined by the environment. It is also conservative as it requires that women follow behavior patterns appreciated by society (p. 51-52). In the mid 1970s, most researchers linked negative evaluations of women's language to social domination by men. Because of such studies, most scholars called for nonsexist English language usage (Graddol & Swann, 1989).

However, according to the cultural difference model, men and women belong to separate but equal cultures (Block, 2002). Girls and boys are socialized into different ways of relating to one another in their interactions and, thus, acquire different communicative styles approved by their cultures (Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004). The cultural difference model does not perceive the differences negatively. It adopts the socially liberal position that men and women are different but equal: it is women's speech and communication styles and the relationship between the two that are problematic (Block, 2002). Therefore if communication breaks down between men and women, it's caused by misinterpreting the interaction (Tannen, 1993), not because of men's dominating power in the communication. What is needed is enhanced communication between individuals to understand the opposite gender.

Post-structuralists also believe that gender cannot be studied in isolation from other traditional sociological variables such as ethnicity, and class. These variables form an individual's identity and that gendered activity is an outcome of *communities of practice* (Block, 2002, p. 54). Women process information in a different way from men. In fact, they approach the whole process of communication differently.

Studies focusing exclusively on the connection between Arab Muslim women's educational pursuits and their gender perceptions are rare. Additionally, the factors that may influence an Arab Muslim woman's educational pursuits are seldom investigated. In researching Arab Muslim women's experiences diversity and multiplicity of race, ethnicity and class must be considered. However, I am not trying to generalize the experiences of the participants of my study onto all other Arab Muslim women. I attempt to discuss them as a group shaped by particular histories and culture. My research explores how the world surrounding us is gendered and how it affects our identities and expressions (Javiluoma, Moisala & Vilkkö, 2003).

I intend to explore relation between gender and dialogic discourse. In exploring the



gendered nature of learners' experience, I am concerned about silencing that women experience within the context of patriarchal structures in society. I take the position that ethnicity, gender and class are not experienced as discrete variables but are interconnected in complex ways. I think a progressive classroom can be a site for individuals to experience and acquire critical consciousness to end domination and inequity in all its forms.

Instructors must be sensitive to the differences between individuals and respect those differences within groups. One's worldview reflects one's group affiliations and social position. Therefore my research portrays a group of female university students, engaged in dialogue, enacted against these complex forces.

### **3.2.4 Concern about silence**

A dialogue is not a momentary engagement between people, it involves discursive relations. The positions of people put constraints upon who among the participants can participate in dialogue. Many educators worry about what will happen if they open the classroom to dialogue. They assume that a 'quiet classroom' is a learning classroom. They are concerned about what open dialogue might mean for their authority, schedules and their competent appearance in the eyes of administration.

The interpretation of silence depends on social locations. This is what Freire refers to as the culture of silence, when the dominant culture silences the oppressed through ignoring discourses that challenge its authority (Freire, 1972). Sometimes students' voices remain unheard in society. They cannot resist hegemonic structures imposed upon them in classrooms or society. As I engage with my students, I realize that we still practice models of learning that reproduce hidden domination (Warren, 1988). Nakane (2005) examined the silence of Japanese students in Australian university classrooms. The researcher observed that silences were not merely due to difficulties of adapting to Australian norms of interaction and the idea of turn-taking, but directed by an ethical position of showing respect and politeness. She found that gaps in assumptions about classroom communications between the Japanese students, fellow English-speaking students and their lecturer contributed to students' silence. She considered the results in relation to other issues such as teacher-student interaction modes, teacher control in the classroom discourse, timing in the taking of turns and

the Japanese students' perception of politeness and in particular, the hierarchy-oriented politeness system they were used to in their interactions. Silence poses difficulties about what constitutes silence and how it can be assessed, with silence having positive connotations, where silence is a reflection and negative connotations, where 'cultures of silence' fails to give voice to excluded groups (Freire, 1972). Silence can be a strategy to shut others out of an interaction by: talking over another, raising volume, interruption, and criticism. Silence is a rich medium of dialogic too.

Fairley's *'De-silencing Female Voices: the Use of Controversial Topics in the EFL Classroom'* advocates establishing linguistic space within the classroom for females in Egyptian setting (2009). Male dominance of classroom discourse is well-documented. The vision of the silent female in Egyptian culture is considered the main cause of female students' reluctance towards discussion. Fairley thinks the solution lies in creating space within classroom to equalize contributions of the genders.

Leander's study, *'Silencing in Classroom Interaction: Producing and Relating Social Spaces'*, presents silencing as an interactional achievement (2002). Just as talk is accomplished across participants so is silencing socially accomplished and distributed. The study illustrates the importance of silencing processes in interaction with respect to social relations and power. The study presents the analysis of discourse from a secondary school classroom which shows how one girl, Chelle is silenced by a group of boys. Izadinia (2009) thinks there's silence in classrooms due to lack of genuine communication between students and teachers. How could students develop communicative skills when their voices were barely heard? Therefore they could not succeed in breaking down the walls of silence in their classrooms.

I decide to take note of moments of silence too, as focusing discourse analysis to talk alone would have left out important insights about the nature of dialogue, negotiation of power, and relations between interaction and social and cultural 'selves.' My research therefore considers the meanings of silence in classroom settings and the assumptions about the nature of silence. Cultural constructions of silence were salient in my research context.

### 3.3 The conceptual frame work

Socio-cultural Theory and Constructivism emphasizes on individual perspectives, and formulations of meaning, create a theoretical context for my study. Because dialogic discussion is the focus of this study, the review of these constructs will relate directly to it. As a result of major shift in paradigms educators thought behaviorism could not explain the complex human transactions (Rosenblatt, 1978). Thus practice of a passive transmission of knowledge shifted to a more transactional view. Readers contribute to the process when they interact with texts to construct knowledge (Vacca, 2000). Thus a new understanding about learning depends on the word 'construct'. Constructivism is a set of assumptions about learners and the learning process, that are built on the ideas of theorists that include Dewey (1933), Piaget (1963), Vygotsky (1986), Gardner (1983), and Bruner (1986). There are many shades of the theory, but none portrays the constructivist vision better than Bakhtin who says, 'allowing each voice to speak in all its uniqueness and at the same time to be part of a larger whole' (cited by Applebee in his book, *Curriculum as Conversation*, 1996, p. 60). Constructivism is about learning that focuses on the multidimensional complexities as the learner, with unique perspectives, constructs understanding in their socio-cultural environments.

Learning is an ability to use knowledge, to make choices and to understand that choices come with consequences. Conventionally teaching was telling and knowledge was thought to be acquisition of facts. The question is, whether this could be regarded as true learning? Constructivists advocate a continuous process of construction of meaning when learners make sense by creating links with prior knowledge (Bennett & Dunne, 1994). Within constructivist approaches, learners are not empty vessels to be filled, they are active organisms seeking meaning (Driscoll, 2000). Constructivists view knowledge as built instead of passively received by learners whose ways of knowing are importance (Spivey, 1997).

The constructivist lens allows me to look at the nature of social reality and learning from the individual's perspective. Meaning-making in this framework is explained in terms of individual mind and its unique experience (Burr, 2006; Crotty, 1998). Social constructivists see human experience as culturally and historically mediated through social practices that are constantly changing. Social constructivists believe that reality

is constructed through human activity. Knowledge is also socially and culturally constructed (Gredler, 1997). Individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment they live in. Vygotsky (1986) believed that thinking was not a characteristic of the person but of the person-in-social-activities. Thus his view of education focused on the socio-cultural system within which students learn.

I will adopt a social constructivists' view of language, where, language is more than a system of signs. Culture provides framework of meaning in which concepts and categories are acquired and reproduced (Burr, 2006). From this perspective learning is a culturally sensitive, interactive processes in which both the teacher and learner play critical roles. Rather than learning through the transmission of information, students build understandings through participation (Vygotsky, 1978).

Thus knowledge and understanding is shaped by interactions and relationships of learners with others (Vygotsky, 1978). There is a need to study how teachers and learners interact to produce shared knowledge (Mercer, 1998). These interactions can help understand the teaching and learning process. Mercer (1995) advocates for dialogue in which the participants constructively evaluate ideas. Furthermore, languages are not deployed in isolation; they demand significant others (Mead, 1934). These significant others have a role in our learning and also in some measures shape our identities. I use the term social constructivism to indicate that although we construct knowledge individually, it occurs within a socio-cultural context.

The socio-cultural frame has complicated notions. Texts, readers, and contexts, each inseparable from the other, are also connected to their larger contexts. That's why researchers look at various disciplinary perspectives; sociolinguistic (Beach & Phinney, 1998), dialogic (Knoeller, 1998), critical discourse analysis (Beach, 1997), or critical/postcolonial theory (Blake, 1998) to examine how readers are constructed through language and discourses. In doing so, they reflect socio-cultural theory of learning that defines learning as occurring through participation in a collective activity mediated by cultural tools (Wells, 2000; Wertsch, 1985).

Within research on teaching and learning, there's growing interest in dialogue and that learning occurs in the contexts of social relations (Cazden, 1988). Therefore, the

context in my study was extremely important. The factors that worked for or against interaction were also considered.

### **3.3.1 Theoretical Perspective**

My study draws on hermeneutics theories, involving dialogue and interpretation. In this view, language is not a mirror that reflects a social reality objectively (Rorty, 1979). Rather, language is socially constituted and through it we create our reality. Bakhtin (1953) suggests that language lies on the borderline between ones' self and the other and that words are always 'half our and half someone else's' (p. 376). Thus interpretation is in light of one's socio-historical position. Gadamer (1974) suggests that understandings result from the fusing of understanding of another's meanings with one's own. This results in reconstructed understandings. From this point of view, understanding is formed in sharing of meaning within social interactions. Cultural meanings are actually the formative elements for the person. Values that form the foundations of society also influence actions of an individual. Constructivism and socio-cultural theory's emphases on individual perspectives, and formulations of meaning, combined with socio-cultural constructs, create the theoretical weave for my study.

### **3.3.2 Critical social theory**

Critical theorists believe power relations in society determine the agency of individuals and influence their learning in their context. Social structures and power relations influence their agentic responses. Siegel and Fernandez (2000) traced the development of critical perspectives from the critical social theory of the Frankfurt School, to Freire's critical consciousness, to Foucault's idea of complicity of all discourses in disciplinary power. Critical theorists believe the processes of transformation can be assisted by allowing learners to develop critical perspectives.

### **3.3.3 Relation of Constructivism and Socio-cultural Theory with Dialogic.**

Social constructivists believe that reality is constructed through human activity, it cannot be discovered. Individuals create meaning through interactions with each

other and with their context. Thus we are capable of understanding ourselves through rich human expressions (Taylor, 1991).

Dialogic embodies the co-joined version of these two theories. Students come with their construction and interpretations of a text. Interactions create the learning experience through questions. As the students start a dialogue around the questions, meaning-making becomes interpersonal. Students share their views, and question interpretations of others. Through this process learning is not transmitted, it is co-constructed. As Laura Billings (2002) writes, the reciprocal flow of ideas may lead to new understandings not held in advance (Vygotsky, 1986; Wortham, 2001).

In recent years there's growing interest in group learning and problem solving, notions that address the actual means by which the learning occurs in the contexts of existing social relations and practices (Cazden, 1988; Cole, 1978). This trend emphasizes principles that work against the teacher/student (T/S) model. There is emphasis on process over outcome: that learning how to learn is more important than learning particular facts.

Dialogic thus offers potential for social transformation that arises mainly from critical reflection. According to Bakhtin dialogue is the most natural form of human speech where meaning is determined by social situation and constructed between speakers (2001). Thus situatedness of dialogue, considered as a discursive practice made the context of my study, extremely important.

### **3.4 Dialogic Format: philosophies and practices**

With renewed interest in active learning, the strategies associated with Greek philosophers have regained importance. Besides Socrates (questioning dialogue), there are Aristotle (experiments and applications) and Plato (nurturing the autonomous learner). According to Aristotle, '*Dialog is the expression of thoughts in words*' (1450). Plato's dialogues are expositions of the dialectical process for the purpose of teaching the participants. Though dialogism first appeared in ancient Greece, it was overshadowed by rhetoric and dialectic, and it was in the twentieth century that it was developed by Bakhtin, in response to linguistic structuralism and formalism (Zappen, 2004).

### **3.4.1 Lamps of knowledge: old and new**

The concept of dialogue held a central place in education since the teachings of Socrates. The continuous flow of question and answer, challenge and response, is considered as communicative representation of a process of thinking and reconstruction of ideas. These views of dialogue stressed the role of the teacher as a facilitator, moving students on the path of discovery and insights. Other views have stressed the role of the teacher as a partner in inquiry. Zen Buddhism, rely upon the indirect effect of questions (*koans*) that are open ended or *cannot* be answered. Thus the contemporary vision of dialogue as pedagogy has foundations in history (Fowler, 2005). The discursive tradition regards all communicative acts as forms of social practice (Fairclough, 1989; Foucault, 1989; Gee, 1990; Luke, 1995). This tradition explores discourses as socio-historically constituted relations among people, texts, and situations. Because the major prescriptions of dialogue have come from philosophical sources, these accounts emphasize either the epistemological advantages of dialogue (Hamilton 1961) or the moral and political reasons (Freire, 1985). Rethinking dialogue as a discursive practice holds promise for developing accounts of richer and complex dialogue.

### **3.4.2 The T/S model**

Most discussions of dialogue are based on communicative relation, known as Teacher/Student (T/S) model. The T/S model is antagonistic to dialogical possibilities as it restricts dialogue to a very narrow range of interactions without alternative perspectives. Classroom discourse is for passing information or for behavior correction, advocating that only what the teacher says is important (Cazden, 1986). Thus teaching is thought to be about communicating content knowledge. Pedagogical communicative relation, known as IRE (initiation, response, evaluation) and IRF (initiation, response, feedback) is so ingrained in the experiences of teachers that teachers imagine this sequence as dialogic in nature (Alvermann, et al., 1990). Three studies from the late 1970s are significant for the development of thinking and research in classroom. In an analysis of teacher-student discourse in secondary classrooms, Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) identified IRF as the dominant form of classroom exchange. In a study of classroom communication in secondary schools, Barnes (1976) identifies the power of exploratory discussion for children's learning in

small groups. The first large-scale study of primary classrooms in England (Galton et al, 1980) showed that although children were seated in groups, there was little collaboration amongst students. These studies describe particular forms of classroom communication identified for their potential for learning but it was observed that communications were rarely observed even when the organizational arrangements and conditions were felicitous.

A wide range of studies documented the fact that the typical pattern of classroom discourse is one-sided (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1998). The IRE sequence gives little room for the exploration of ideas that may result in deeper understanding. During the 1960s and 1970s, a series of studies attempted to understand aspects of classroom interaction, such as engaging majority of students, responding positively to what students say, or asking higher-order questions. Applebee (1996) focused on Bakhtin's notion of dialogic interaction as essential to discussion, contrasting it with the monologic interaction patterns of the typical recitation. Focusing on questions as sites of interaction, studying more than a hundred 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade English classrooms in Wisconsin and Illinois, Nystrand (1997) used a variety of indexes of dialogic interaction to frame his investigation of language and literacy learning. Nystrand argued that results supported the importance of dialogic.

Research in recent years suggests little has changed (Galton et al, 1980; Earl et al, 2003). A deeper understanding of how and when dialogue is desirable and the conditions under which it flourishes is still required.

### **3.4.3 From T/S to dialogue**

While many English language teachers believe discussion is important for their students, few have devoted significant classroom time to it. Nystrand (1997) found that students in classes in which discussion did occur made significant gains in reading comprehension and literature achievement than students in classes where no discussion took place. When teachers devoted more time to discussion, students recalled their readings better, understood more, and responded to aesthetic elements of literature than students in monologically organized classes. Nystrand argued, his results supported the importance of dialogic, as opposed to monologic approaches to



instruction. Subsequent studies (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran) at the Center for English Learning and Achievement (CELA) also support these findings.

Sean Kelly's (2005) study of students' participation patterns in dialogic classrooms finds that educational gains were a result of the dialogic environment of instruction. Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith (1995) reached similar conclusions. In classrooms where dialogic discourse dominates, students learn that their ideas count. The discourse is therefore not predetermined and is negotiated jointly.

Emily Smith (1995) explores how English teachers enriched their understanding of discussion through participating in the English educators' network, a collaboration that brought together university teacher educators and secondary English teacher-mentors to improve the learning-to-teach opportunities. Though a growing body of research celebrates the importance of dialogic, the literature on how teachers facilitate dialogic remains scanty. Studies that examine such learning highlight obstacles and challenges. Christopher and Nystrand (2001) have documented the challenges teachers encounter when they adopt dialogic pedagogy.

These reasons inspired me to explore dialogic practices in educational setting and how these practices can contribute to overcome inequalities in educational context.

#### **3.4.4 Dialogic discourse**

Dialogic communication facilitates critical thought that engages the student. Students are encouraged through questions about issues that relate to power, knowledge construction, the curriculum and positioning in society. Although the complexity of the questions and discussions vary according to students' educational level, the teacher creates a nonthreatening environment that appreciates differences and multiple perspectives. This creates a dialogic space where knowledge is generated and shared by both the teacher and students (Shor, 1992; Cummins, 2000). Such pedagogy empowers students and ensures meaningful contributions to classroom discourse. Therefore true dialogue in teaching is one that goes beyond the stereotypical one to one exchange. That's why I have devoted the rest of the chapter to explain what dialogic discourse is or could be.

### **3.4.5 Dialectic or dialogic**

Wegerif (2006) argued that dialectic and dialogic are two relative dimensions, as they both focus on important features of the dialogue process.

According to Kant (Kant, 1781/1982) dialectic without dialogic is blind, dialogic without dialectic is empty of content. Their union results in shared understanding. So depending on the context, learning could be dialogic, dialectic or a blend of both. The dialectic by Socrates (470–399 BC), known as ‘the Socratic method,’ is one of the earliest recorded educational approaches. Through careful questioning by the teacher, students reach understanding without being told directly. For Socrates learning was embedded in real dialogue. Bakhtin argued that it is the clash of different voices that creates meaning. He opposed Hegel’s monological dialectic with his notion of dialogic where reaching a consensus was not the aim (Wegerif, 2008). Wallace (1999) conducted a critical reading course to ESL students in which she dealt with literacy practices before moving on to the scrutiny of specific texts. The course encouraged a stance in the spirit of resistance rather than opposition. Wallace advocates collaborated discussion to reach positions of agreement to disagree and to articulate views coherently.

### **3.4.6 Socratic ideals and Maieutike**

Plato’s three analogies of the Socratic educator: gadfly, midwife, and stingray are essential to understand the Socratic idea of education. The Socratic gadfly stings to awaken the educator who tries to improve the community by educating. The midwife helps deliver others’ ideas. The educator promotes learning by questioning (Kahn, 1996). The method is practiced as Sokratiska samtal (Pihlgren, 2006) and as Das Sokratische Gespräch (Nelson, 1965).

Socratic Inquiry (Socrates, 470 B.C - 399 B.C) was a method of questioning that lead individuals to logical conclusions through inductive approach. The method had two stages, the ‘ironic’ or destructive phase and the ‘maieutic’ or constructive phase. In the destructive phase, through skilful questioning, the pupil was brought from unconscious ignorance to conscious ignorance. In the constructive phase, by further questioning, the pupil was led from conscious ignorance to rational truth. Paul's

(1990) Socratic Questioning model, Adler's (1982) Paideia programme, and Lipman's (1987) model of Philosophy for Children are of models of Socratic Inquiry.

Paul (1990) investigated the special relationship between critical thinking and Socratic questioning. Paul maintained that all thinking is driven by questions and the quality of thinking is determined by the quality of questions. To propagate his ideas, Paul set up the Centre for Critical Thinking at Sonoma State University to develop materials on how to foster critical thinking and Socratic questioning in the classroom. In Singapore, the model is currently being tried out in some schools. Adler's (1982) Paideia Seminar infers nurturing of the child through learning, a method to engage students in discussion of ideas. This process has been adopted by 80 schools in at least 10 states (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002). Lipman (1987) developed the Philosophy for Children (P4C) programme to bring philosophy down to the level of students. All these models celebrate dialogue through which a student becomes critical listener, reader and participant in learning.

A different classroom culture evolves, when students have the opportunity to participate in Socratic seminars on a regular basis. They collaborate in the process and more voices are heard. The students develop thinking skills in an investigative atmosphere. This is shown in Pihlgren's study about rationales and effects of philosophizing with children (2008). The study included seven groups of children, five to sixteen years old. The groups were filmed during three years of philosophizing in the classroom and the films were analyzed. According to Pihlgren, interaction in the classroom was positively influenced. The teacher dominated less, students spoke more and the students gradually took over teacher's responsibilities of promoting dialogue. Methods connected to Socrates may seem out-of-date in a modern school, but that is not the case, according to Pihlgren. Robinson's research about the Paideia seminar is significant for middle and secondary school educators (2006).

Socrates, portrayed as the ideal teacher by Plato, as someone having no claim to know anything; indeed, he is conscious of all that he does not know and, consequently, always in search for knowledge. Socrates looked on the soul as the heart of consciousness and believed that each person needed to understand his/her own true self. In accepting his own ignorance, Socrates exemplifies humility that is essential to any rational inquiry. Also, in accepting his own ignorance, he accepts that

there is a real difference between knowledge and mere opinion. The effects of accepting ignorance are far reaching. From a student's perspective, this can allow him/her to join a discussion, because s/he is not afraid of ignorance or not knowing. Even if this teacher/student equality is real or imagined, it develops a perception in students' mind of being on equal ground with the teacher. This sharing of power and agency is the characteristic of dialogic learning.

### **3.5 Theoretical precedents: critical dialogic theorists**

Learning is best conceived as a process. Scholars agree with Dewey that open-mindedness is one of the fundamental aims of education, elusive but worth pursuing. Wells (2000) defines dialogic inquiry as an educational approach that acknowledges relation between the individual and society, and an attitude for acquiring knowledge through interactions. We are continuously in dialogue with others, and it is in that process that we create and recreate ourselves. In Western traditions reflective thought was promoted by Schon (1983), Freire (1973) and Mezirow (1997). Self-criticism is characterized by Confucius as inner digging and drilling that leads to an awareness of the self not as a mental construct, but as an experienced reality (Confucius, 500BCEc). Yet most of the times teachers remain as Freire observes (1970), narrating subjects. Different researchers have reported that intellectual progress results from critical evaluation of diverse perspectives. Many renowned educators' works contribute to or support this theory; they include McLaren, Shor, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Gramsci. Dialogic relationships of shared enquiry leading to understanding are central to the project called '*Thinking Together*' developed by Mercer and Dawes (1987) and also the Dialogic Teaching approach developed by Alexander (2004).

Educators explored conditions for dialogue that encourage curiosity of the learner. In his dialogic action theory, Freire (1970) distinguishes between dialogical actions, the ones that promote understanding and liberation; and non-dialogic actions, which deny dialogue and reproduce power. Bakhtin (1981) defines a relation among language, interaction, and social transformation. He believes that the individual does not exist outside of dialogue.

Critical approaches unveil the 'realities' of social and cultural power by showing whose interests are really served by dominant pedagogies. Thus critical educational

practices advocate social change (Pennycook, 1994). Although Dewey does not use the term hegemony, he describes this process as the medium of individual existence that leads him to see and feel one thing rather than another; developing a particular system of behavior. This hegemony exists in schools creating and re-enforcing the existing beliefs and practices.

### **3.5.1 Critical pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy as a concept challenges the oppressive ideologies, to prepare students to be democratic agents and endorses pedagogies of resistance and hope. Freire's dialogic approach revolved around an anti-authoritarian, interactive approach which examines issues of power relations (McLaren, 2000). Freire's praxis required educational practices that create not only a better learning environment, but also a better world (1998). Freirean radical pedagogy achieves three goals: identification of problems, understanding the causes of those problems, and counter oppressive forces. Freirean critical inquiry examines why voices have been suppressed. Through problem posing, students and teachers examine their perspectives in relation to issues of domination and liberation. Such perspectives develop students' understanding of how people are influenced by social realities (Nieto, 1992).

Peter Rule's project titled, *'Dialogic spaces: adult education projects and social engagement,'* explores the philosophical genealogy of dialogue (2004). In order to establish the concept of dialogic space, Rule surveys the works of Plato, Bakhtin, and Freire. The research draws on a historical case study of a South African adult education project. It concludes by examining the conditions which make dialogue possible in adult education. The Tuition Project was a small-scale project for young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds. It developed curricula that intended critical stance. Students in their response mention the ability to analyze problems, ask questions and think critically. The project challenged the apartheid stereotypes. Dialogue created opportunities in a closed society. It constituted dialogic space, where space was understood at a number of levels: physical, psychological, social and educational. The project helped participants to develop their own voice and deepened their awareness of one another and of their social context.

Critical approaches reshape literacy education in the interests of marginalized groups of learners, who on the basis of gender, cultural and socio economic background are excluded from access to the discourses and dominant cultures. One such research project is OSDE. Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry is a project designed to create learning spaces where participants engage critically with global issues and perspectives in safe spaces of dialogue and enquiry. The aim is to develop critical literacy and independent thinking, encourage diverse perspectives, examine the origins and implications of assumptions, negotiate change, transform relationships and make responsible and conscious choices. The methodology is developed by a group of educators and researchers of the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice at the University of Nottingham (Andreotti & Warwick, 2007). The conceptual framework draws on different approaches such as intercultural awareness, critical education and cultural studies and philosophy. Therefore, issues of voice, power and identity hold importance in this methodology where literacy is not about ‘unveiling’ the ‘truth’ for the learners, but about providing space for them to reflect. Effective facilitation is one of the challenges in the creation of ‘safe’ spaces for students to engage with controversial issues.

Many a times, I have taken dialogic pedagogy to my classes and conference presentation (At Zayed University, UAE, March, 2008; SPELT, 24<sup>TH</sup> 25<sup>TH</sup> 26<sup>TH</sup> and TESOL Arabia 2010). I have found that learners build the necessary trusting relationships and take on the challenge of critically engaging with others.

Effective facilitation is one of the greatest challenges in the creation of ‘safe’ spaces for students to engage with controversial issues. Kerr (2006) gives specific attention to how schools and teachers can create a climate that facilitates students in expressing their opinions freely. The combination of critical literacy and independent thinking develops learners’ capacity to learn, to analyze their contexts and to make informed decisions.

Besides these wonderfully unique projects, some research papers, like that of Renae Skarin (2005) focuses on documenting a critical approach to language and literacy development. In her paper, ‘Generation 1.5 in Hawaii: Gaining Critical Tools for Reading the World’, Skarin reviews the ways in which critical theory can inform curriculum and pedagogical practices. She provides a model of critical praxis which

she developed and implemented in community college ESL courses. Since few practical models, have been published, this paper offers a much needed description of how critical theories can be applied to L2 educational settings. Skarin draws from critical language awareness to explore definitions of culture and critical awareness.

Shor (1996) traces his own work in a classroom context and presents how his efforts of implementing critical pedagogy in the classroom actually work. Shor (1996) begins with a set of assumptions and ideals of what it means to create a liberatory classroom. Shor's study is a perfect documentation of how and why the two-world ontology in critical pedagogy can fail. Shor states that, if he wants students to participate, in Freirean terms, he must redirect his classroom goals and efforts towards student's desires. Whereas Freire (1972) used the context of literacy for his liberating pedagogy, Shor concentrated on his community college (Cuny, Staten Island) English classes.

Both Freire and Giroux (2001) advocate a critically reflexive role for the teachers. To create an environment of equality, teachers must engage in self-reflection about their position and the affects of their authority in the classroom as the use of dialogue in the classroom may not be liberating if an environment of equality doesn't exist. Dialogue cannot happen in a situation where teachers see themselves as owners of the truth. According to Freire (1972), Giroux (1981) and Apple (1982), critical pedagogy is primarily concerned with critiquing existing educational institutions, and subsequently transforming both education and society.

### **3.5.2 Critical pedagogy (CP) in EF/SL**

EF/SL teachers see their contribution as simply aiding learners to communicate. Generally, EF/SL teachers are not encouraged to address sociopolitical issues that educators like Freire (1970) have given utmost importance. Teachers usually practice transmission model or what Freire (1983) has called a banking education. During interactions that teachers have with students, students do not produce any language as they mostly listen. Thus when students respond, they provide recall statements. Rather than generating original thoughts, student response is close-ended. This pattern of teacher/student interaction not only limits a student's opportunity to use language freely, but also limits the student's ability to engage in complex learning.

This establishes a passive language learning environment. There is need for critical dialogue in language learning in the university curriculum. The English teacher, instead of evolving his own pedagogy, accepts 'alien' methods. S/he accepts the supremacy of not only the language but also the pedagogies and thus becomes an agent of cultural invasion in more than one sense.

Teachers represent a powerful force for social change (Giroux, 1997). The teacher must recognize that s/he can either perpetuate the powerful institutional structures or be critical and work to lessen oppression. As such, teachers cannot assume a neutral posture or act as technicians. Within this perspective, it is essential to realize that education has a transformatory function, but teachers' task is not to mold learners but to encourage their agency.

Critical pedagogy questions the legitimacy of accepted power relations; it provides the potential for the marginalized to explore ways of changing the status quo. CP acknowledges socio-political implications of language teaching and at the same time the possibility of change. It focuses on how and in whose interest knowledge is produced and passed on. It shows how questions of voice and power work to construct relations between teachers and students, institutions and society (Giroux, 1992), through pedagogical practices that change the nature of schooling, and the society as well (Pennycook, 1994). The power of transformative learning is fundamental for change in perspectives that transform the way an individual understands and interacts with the world. This learning process is extended through dialogue with others (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Shor, 1999).

As Hazen (1993, p. 22) puts it: 'in dialogue when we recognize and cherish our differences, we confirm another's independence and allow space for transformation for others and ourselves.' Transformation is a huge task and Critical dialogic approach provides a positive direction. However, EF/SL teachers are rarely encouraged to address sociopolitical issues.

Though accounts of teachers' critical practices can be found (Cervetti, 2004; Lander, 2005; Lewison, et al., 2002), only two studies explore critical literacy in EFL contexts: Falkenstein's *critical writing class in Taiwan* (2003) and Kuo's *critical conversation class* (2006). Falkenstein's study examined critical literacy practices in a university EFL composition course in Taiwan. Falkenstein revealed some obstacles in



using a critical literacy approach in Taiwan colleges such as insufficient classroom time, large class size, and cultural expectations of education.

Instead of a composition class, Kuo's study examined an English conversation class of 26 non-English majors. Kuo designed the conversation class from a critical perspective. His study shows that EFL students were able to reflect on texts by incorporating their lived experiences into their dialogues. Therefore, Kuo argues that English learning is not only limited to four skills but relates to students' lives and identities. Both studies support that EFL students are capable of taking a critical stance towards language learning.

One framework which elaborates a critical literacy approach to the education of culturally-diverse students is presented by Ada (1988). Ada outlines how interpersonal spaces can be created between teachers and students that encourage students to share their experience within a collaborative process of critical inquiry. The process is applicable to students at any grade level. Ada points out that this process helps develop children's self-esteem by showing that their experiences are valued by the teacher and classmates. It also shows that true learning occurs only when the information is analyzed in the light of one's own experiences and emotions. An atmosphere of acceptance and trust in the classroom is necessary for students (and teachers) to willingly share their feelings and experiences. This process of sharing and critical reflection opens up options for culturally-diverse students. These options are suppressed within a transmission approach where the interpretation of texts reflects the dominant group's notions. Ada emphasizes that school children of all ages can engage in this type of critical process. When students pursue critical reflection, they become engaged in a process of knowledge generation as they gain the power to think through issues that affect their lives. They simultaneously gain the power to resist external forces and deconstruct the sociopolitical pressures.

Rocha (2008) in the paper 'On applicability of Freire's method to tertiary education in the Caribbean,' proposes a discussion about the authoritarian nature of teaching at the tertiary level, both in terms of the classroom environment and the didactic methods. The word university relates to understanding the universe. With this in mind the paper advocates Freire's ideals as a means of exercising democracy within the classroom by

eliciting active participation of the student, thus promoting learning, more in tune with the realities of life.

My research is a small contribution towards making a case for critical dialogic engagement. In doing so, I draw from literatures from a variety of disciplines (Bakhtin, 1981; Freire, 1985 and Giroux, 1981). Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1962), Bakhtin's concept of dialogue (1981) and the ideal of the dialogic classroom offered me theoretical lenses through which I consider the learning process. My interest derives from the conviction that critical dialogic pedagogy is valuable as it takes into account, both theoretical and practical nature of education and pedagogy. I however feel that these aims have not been adequately translated into valid practices.

Critical approaches examine the power relationships and expose the non- neutrality of language and its effects on social relations (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Shor, 1999). Bakhtin also thinks words lack neutrality and take political stances. Oversimplified conception of knowledge leads to covert ideological positions. In contrast, critical dialogic approaches emphasize learners' right to speak. I believe that language learning should become exclusive local practice, so that English can genuinely belong to its speakers, irrespective of race and gender. Whereby, the language could become a force of possible emancipation.

### **3.5.3 The possibilities dialogic offers.**

Dialogic suggests the promotion of a series of questions in classrooms through teacher-pupil dialogues (Alexander, 2004). Dialogic takes education to be the discursive construction of shared knowledge (Mercer, 2000). Dialogic as an ontological principle, however, has more radical and original implications. Dialogue is not merely a means of knowledge construction, but an end in itself, the most important end of education (Sidorkin, 1999). Based on the idea that knowledge is constructed through discourse in classroom settings, Mercer and his colleagues (2000) investigated students' interaction with an emphasis on collaborative learning. Their research identified two communicative strategies, summary recaps and reformulations. These two strategies were especially useful for learning in small groups. The study develops deeper levels of consciousness leading to transformation of understandings. Mercer also drew attention to three forms of social modes of

thinking that underpinned development of the Thinking Together project (Dawes, Mercer and Wegerif, 2000). These include: disputational, cumulative and exploratory talk. Dialogic theory suggests that a different approach to education is possible, an approach in which multiple perspectives are encouraged and valued.

### **3.5.3.1 Construction of new perspectives: The agentic turn**

Critical and social theorists have challenged the notion of what it means to acquire knowledge and to put that knowledge into practice. Research informs us that the purpose of learning is to effect change, but not all learning results in change (Dewey, 1966; Mezirow, 2000). Miller and Seller (1990) distinguish learning as: transmissional, transactional and transformational. In order to foster transformative learning, students must have a chance to change their frames of reference and critically reflect on their assumptions. Transformative learning is characterized by active use of ideas and shifts in perspectives (Pugh, 2002). It involves understanding power structures of class, races, and gender. Far from this conception of the curriculum based on a mind-as-a-container vision (Bereiter, 2002), critical dialogue calls for an evolving, socially constructed curriculum. When students read texts critically, they move beyond critical readings of texts to work against oppressive situations (Freire, 1985). Although agency can be achieved through critical examination of language and culture (Ellsworth, 1989), yet barriers to agency are high, despite new pedagogical insights. Therefore, my research looks at ways through which students gain agency during their reading of English literature.

### **3.5.3.2 How dialogue leads to transformation?**

Dialogic promotes a democratic learning process that empowers students to become reflective learners, who could challenge their perspectives and frames of reference. Dialogic offers considerable potential for transformation that result from critical reflection.

In the working paper *Critical Consciousness and Critical Language Teaching* (2005), Takayuki Okazaki provides a participatory action research study of a course he taught in an Intensive English Language Program. Okazaki provides an overview of critical second language instruction, including a deconstruction approach for resisting

positioning by dominant discourses. He explores the use of problem-posing and dialogues to explore social justice issues taken from students' own experiences, develop language abilities through meaningful interaction about these issues, and understand culture in sociopolitical ways rarely practiced in second language courses.

The problematizing of the status quo enables the participants of dialogue to examine their realities, their origins, and how these could be made different. As the objective reality becomes subjective, it becomes changeable. The teachers may discover meaningful relations in their roles as transformative intellectuals (Giroux 1997). The transformative intellectual does not believe that s/he will transform the world by revealing the truth. S/he tries to understand and questions pre-established forms of truth. From this perspective, learners may reject realities or identities imposed through discursive practices (Alvermann, 2000). Hye-sun Cho's interpretive qualitative study of the Korean English Teachers Group (2001) explores the empowerment of English teachers in 'the Korean English Teachers' Group,' that calls for English teachers' collective voices to be heard in public discourse. Hye-sun defines critical teacher development and then specifically details the potential and challenges. Hye-sun concludes with recommendations for how language teachers can promote the social construction of professional consciousness and be agents of change.

### **3.5.3.3 Agents of Change: some possibilities**

Liberation cannot be accomplished through some external force. It results from understandings. Critical educators cannot change students' circumstances or environments. However, they can act as agents of change through critically examining how traditional education promotes or hinders students' success or failure. By encouraging students to problematize their responses to texts, we can allow them to take up multiple reading positions through activities that challenge the taken-for-granted representations and dominant ideologies.

Students are individuals with specific life experience, situated within their own cultural, class and gender contexts (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 1994). However schools operate according to established roles (Giroux, 1997), and students learn that to be a good student means to accept the prevailing rules in an unquestioning manner. Students need critical dialogic space to explore their own biases. Freire (1972) asserts

that without dialogue, there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no liberatory education.

Con Magro's qualitative study compared English and ESL teachers' perspectives of teaching and learning with the role of educator that is described by Mezirow's theory of transformational learning and Freire's critical theory of education. (2001). Teachers in this study had many reservations about the role of teacher as a change agent. They didn't share a theoretical understanding of Freire's critical education theory or Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation. However, significant parallels between some of the teachers' views of learning were consistent with the role of the transformative educator and the process of learning described by Freire (1970) and Mezirow (1981). Most of the teachers emphasized the importance of providing a safe, open, and trusting environment for learning, and using instructional strategies that supported a learner-centered approach.

I think it is safe to conclude from the review of these studies that the approach which positions the teacher as transmitter of knowledge is not a dialogical approach. An anti-dialogical person imposes her/his own objectives on others. Critical work in TESOL, thus attempts to teach English with a broadened view of social and political relations.

#### **3.5.4 Dialogic pedagogy and the Risks involved**

The process of questioning assumptions is unpredictable. It leads to a number of questions, such as: who will make the decisions and what forms of authority will be involved? Despite these challenges, critical dialogic education remains an exciting way of learning. Clearly, those fearful of challenges feel uncomfortable with critical dialogue. However, every teacher takes risks when critically engaging students. Those risks lead to uncertainties and it is within these uncertain moments that the possibilities of transformation exist. Gee (1992) writes that educators can either view themselves as language teachers with no connection to social issues, or they can socialize learners to possibilities for change. Despite the clear benefits of developing the ability of students to discuss issues of importance, many teachers do not pursue discussion programmes. Dialogic remains under practiced in the EF/SL classroom. A combination of factors are responsible for teachers reluctance to dialogue, these are: large class size, students' level of proficiency, and time constraints. As a result, many

teachers never attempt dialogue. Many teachers adopt structured or guided discussions. Examples of this approach are found in Alexander (2004), Wallace (2001), Hargreaves and Fletcher (1981).

### **3.6 Thoughts about the review process**

Findings from Research on Dialogic show that dialogic is not frequently practiced in classrooms. For instance, after collecting data on classroom talk for a year, Mercer (1995) stated that dialogic discussion was rarely found. Instead, most classroom discussion happened in an IRE sequence (Cazden, 1988; Lemke, 1990). Another major finding is that most classroom discussion tends to be teacher centered, fostering reproduction of what is already known by the teacher (Nystrand, 1997), and that group talk habits are gender-related (Cannan, 1990). Finally a limited amount of research suggests that when discussions are more controlled by the teacher, the teacher's roles are of controller, or instructor (Alvermann, 1996; Nystrand, 1997), and student roles are often described as passive observers (Nystrand, 1997; Sperling, 1995). However, none of these excellent pieces of research examine the important role of culture, gender upon dialogic discussion.

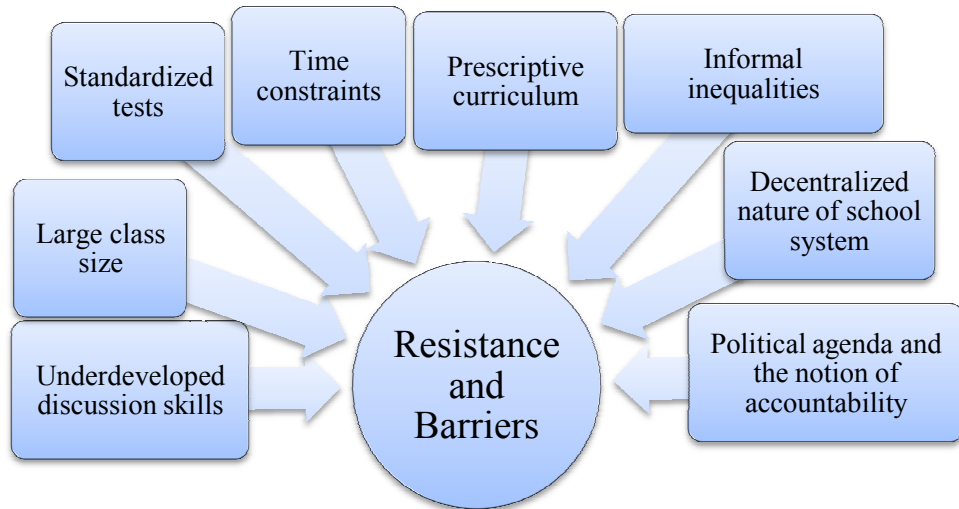
Dialogic pedagogies develop the ability of students and teachers to establish reciprocal relationships. Collaborative interactions between students are more difficult to effect when the contexts of interaction constrain the possibilities for dialogue. It is relevant then that I consider how both can be reconciled.

I have chosen to describe the stories that focus on the search rather than the answers, stories that seek transformation and awareness of culture. These few examples reveal that investigating the role of students' gender and cultural context in dialogic learning is an under-researched issue. Therefore I think dialogic approach to learning is an important area of research. This is why I wanted to examine dialogic interaction within a particular cultural context and from a gendered perspective. The journey of my thesis research began with the study I conducted earlier. This research takes forward and explores the questions raised in that study.

### **3.7. My odyssey began...**

My pilot study explored understandings for developing dialogic classroom practices and the possibilities these may offer to teachers. The study highlights the strengths and weaknesses of adopting critical dialogic pedagogy. The challenges were discussed from teachers' perspectives. It identified and explored the role of dialogic pedagogy in transforming the work of teachers. I tried to address two principle research questions. To examine implications of dialogic, I presented two learning strategies: the Socratic enquiry and dialogic spaces. Data included participants' reflections upon discussions during the workshops and interviews. My study discussed questions, and doubts educators associate with dialogic. It offers an account of workshops; how teachers negotiated dialogic in practice. The study concludes by making a case for dialogic but it also raises some questions. The focus on critical reflection helped challenge teachers' perspectives and reconstruct new and transformative ones. The questions I explored were: (a) did the participants experience transformative learning? (b) Were they able to transform their perspectives about critical pedagogy? Given the data analyses, the response is absolutely yes. For me participants' awareness is a form of transformation. Majority of the participants agreed they changed their frames of reference and gained new insights. This transformation is revealed in the language participants used to describe their experience. Although the response was positive, acknowledging whether the teachers took dialogic to actual classroom practice was beyond the scope of my study. My dissertation is an attempt to take this exploration further.

Dialogic spaces offer enormous possibilities for educators. However, facilitating these open spaces for young people would not be without difficulties. Achieving a genuinely open space for critical engagement with controversial issues can be a demanding and complex task for both the educator and the students to achieve. The barrier for most of us is that we are unable to attain the Socratic paradox. The figure below describes the barriers to implementing critical dialogic pedagogy as identified by the teachers/participants of my pilot study.



**Figure 3.1: Resistance & barriers to critical dialogic**

I also felt there was need for more time for discussion format. At times some participants felt confused. It is always difficult to introduce the process for the first time but gradually we all learned to differ and have fun! The experience was very meaningful for me. The challenge was to acknowledge that there are always different perspectives on any issue and that the choices we make affect other people. One reason why I raised issues of ethnicity, and gender is because I feel these issues are always present around us. Ignoring these would be like living in the illusion of their absence. As a result of the pilot study I felt it was important to understand how students' perceived transformation is shaped in an educational setting.

These studies I have reviewed complement each other or take different viewpoints. However, all the studies take forward the ideal that we must respect and nurture the individual in our students, that we as teachers must be instrumental in our students' empowerment. I feel that the research presented here are in a way, tribute to critical dialogic pedagogy.

*Therefore, the seeker after the truth, is not one who studies the writings of the ancients and, following his natural disposition, puts his trust in them, but rather the*



*one who suspects his faith in them and questions what he gathers from them (Ibn al-Haytham).*

So I investigated the challenges of adopting dialogic pedagogy in the socio-cultural context of the female campus of one of the universities in UAE.

## CHAPTER 4 – Methodology

*Research is a collaborative document, a mutually constructed story out of the lives of both researcher and participant (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).*

### 4. INTRODUCTION

Methodology reminds me of metaphors of a journey, dead ends and fulfillments. The decision about the course of my research did not come in a private moment of reflection, but in a lecture theatre during dissemination of my research for assignment. My study explored teachers' resistance and acceptance of the principles of critical dialogic pedagogy. I wanted to explore how dialogue is supported and/or obstructed by the participants in actual classroom practices. My dissertation study thus portrays a dynamic classroom where the teacher tries to empower his students by creating dialogic spaces. Though cultural constraints made the task challenging, students and the teacher shared a will to construct an environment where dialogue were encouraged. Since people constitute themselves through language, I employed discourse analysis to illustrate how university girls constructed their perspectives within advanced composition and English literature classes of Dr Farhan. My research attempted to address a critical examination of how gender, culture and power structures construct perspectives (Kubota, 1999).

Acknowledging that a representation is always incomplete and from a perspective the findings carry the marks of my cultural and gender biases. The study does not provide conclusive arguments but opens up new questions. The data included interviews, classroom observations, and compositions of students. The study employed an exploratory research design to understand perspectives of the people involved (Merriam, 1998). In this chapter, I first, discuss rationale for choosing the constructivist/interpretative paradigm (Glesne, 1999). Secondly, I introduce the choice of exploratory approach. Lastly, I discuss the data source and tools of analysis.

#### 4.1 The research paradigm

Since theoretical questions in education emerge from different interpretations of social reality, different paradigms evolved to determine the criteria to which one would

define problems for inquiry. According to Kuhn a paradigm is an integrated cluster of concepts, variables and problems attached with corresponding methodological approaches and tools.

The research paradigm is important because it affects the researcher's roles, approach and methods (Glesne, 1999). The researcher's ontological and epistemological stance shapes what the researcher observes and how the researcher interprets those observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I take the interpretive/constructivist paradigm as a guiding paradigm of my study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), as the purpose of study is to describe or interpret, not to predict or control (Sipe, 1996). I observed dialogic discussions to search for changing perspectives of students and the teacher. Constructivists suggest that knowledge is constructed within a context. As Sipe (1996) pointed out, under constructivism, a researcher's interpretation is one interpretation, but not the only interpretation. Therefore, my interpretation is one interpretation, as guided by research paradigm, theoretical framework, and subjectivity. Every observation and interpretation I made resides within socio-cultural theory, which guides me to carefully look at positioning of students and the teacher in a specific classroom context. It also guides me to look at discussions within a larger cultural and historical setting.

We are embedded in the world of language and socio-historical understanding (Haraway, 1988). The concept of human understanding as socio-historically en-languaged implies that all interpretations are temporary and therefore open to reinterpretation and that an interpretation is negotiable through conversation and dialogue (Kvale, 1996). Because we cannot separate ourselves from what we know, our subjectivity is an integral part of our understanding of our 'selves' and of the world around us. Understanding, therefore, cannot be separated from context. Consequently, the researcher's values effect the inquiry process (Creswell, 1998).

#### **4.1.1 The feminist tilt**

Social construction of gender is a major concern of my inquiry. Researchers see gender as an organizing principle that shapes the concrete conditions of our lives. Researchers like Horner (1969) and Gilligan (1982) questioned the none-existence of women's experiences in the social sciences. Researchers advocate the centrality of

gender in the shaping of our consciousness and institutions of power. Studying women from the perspective of their own experiences so that they/we can better understand the world is a research designed for women instead of simply about women. We need to go beyond merely replacing objectivism with subjectivism. Gergen (1995) stresses that knowledge is not constructed autonomously but socio-culturally through the interrelationships among people with the use of language as a medium. The constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) allows me to interpret my observations in multiple ways.

I observed discussions through the lens of socio-cultural theorists, which allows me to consider discussions as socially and culturally situated literacy events in a classroom (Bloome et al, 2005). The methodology of the study was carefully considered and selected to seek answers to the following research questions:

- i) What are the contextual circumstances that encourage female university students in the United Arab Emirates to engage in dialogue effectively?
- ii) To what extent does dialogic process foster participants' ability to construct new understandings that influence a shift in perspective?
- iii) What possibilities does 'dialogic' offer to teachers/learners?

## **4.2 Rationale for Choice of Approach**

Methodology in research involves the setting, sample, methodological limitations and analysis techniques. My research is an exploratory study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000) of an innovative approach to literacy education, involving a group of 20 female university students. This research portrays their experiences of dialogic learning. The purpose is to clarify how interpretations and understandings are formed in actual classroom situations (Radnor, 2002).

### **4.2.1 Research Design**

I framed my study within both the constructivist paradigm and socio-cultural theory. I chose an exploratory research design for my study, because I intend to carefully examine conversations between students and the teacher during dialogic discussions

in a natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I chose this methodology to observe and describe the nature of dialogic learning experience. In this study, the phenomenon was dialogic process and the focus was gender and culture specific.

My research narrates 'the story' from the participant's viewpoint. For this, I observed dialogic sessions in literature major and advanced composition classes, to explore the perspectives of the teacher and students.

### **4.3 The Research Site**

The research site was chosen because it was relevant and rich in information. Glesne (1999) quotes Patton (1990, p.169) that, 'information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research without needing or desiring to generalize to all such cases'. Since my research is gender and culture specific I chose the female campus of a university in the United Arab Emirates. Another concern was finding a teacher who valued reading literature and who practices dialogic discussion on a regular basis. I chose Dr Farhan for his passion to facilitate rich literature discussions as teaching strategy. Because the class assignment study was conducted at the same school, rapport and trust with the teacher had been established and this research study was also supported and welcomed. The students were 20 Arab girls (undergraduates) from two different courses, namely English literature and advanced composition. The students had a good level of English proficiency.

The female campus of the university is a purpose built, well resourced campus. Classrooms were well lit, spacious and comfortable with all modern facilities. In the classroom I found students sitting in rows facing the white board. The students usually sat in rows; the emphasis was not on physical settings. Sessions flowed through dialogic strings, passing from one participant to another. I observed the teacher standing in-front of the class or moving between the rows, talking to students or engaging them in written work. Although the physical environment 'seemed' very particular, the teacher successfully created an environment of cordiality that suited the dialogic mode.

#### **4.4 The researcher, students and the teacher**

My data resources were the teacher, the students and myself. A brief sketch of all three of us follows.

##### **4.4.1 The Teacher: a critical pedagogue**

My research portrays Dr Farhan, a teacher desirous of establishing an interactive classroom. Farhan created dialogic space by: i) listening and respect and ii) interaction. I wanted to work with Farhan because of his strong belief in empowerment and agency, which I noticed during my assignment study. He encouraged students to be readers, writers, and researchers, and helped them make sense of themselves and the world around them. He believed students should learn to question oppressive practices and attempt to take action against oppressions of their local contexts (Freire, 2000; Shor, 1992). Students respected Farhan because he cared about them. They appreciated his respect for them as learners. In this classroom students read lengthy canonical texts like, *Oedipus Rex*, *Macbeth*, and *Antigone* and wrote analytical essays requiring original interpretations not offered by the teacher. Dr Farhan, an Arab, is a PhD in English literature working in the university since 2001. I found him to be enthusiastic and passionate about teaching and his subject.

##### **4.4.2 The Students**

Learners are not isolated individuals; they are participants of particular communities (Dyson, 1995). Most of the girls were Emirati while there were Egyptian, Sudanese, Palestinian and few from other Gulf States. Through conversation with students, I came to know important facts about Arab females. Since contact with outsiders is restricted, they were unable to use their English often. Learning mostly relies heavily on the lecturing approach (Guefrachi & Troudi, 2000) to provide the correct answer, hampering effective communication. These factors effected their participation although majority was eager talkers (Details in table below).

**Table-4.1: Focal Students**

<b>Pseudonym Nationality</b>	<b>Type &amp; hours of data</b>	<b>Study level</b>	<b>English proficiency level</b>
Umnia Sudanese	Interviews 3 hours	Undergraduate	Excellent proficiency
Mariam Egyptian	Interview 2 hours	Undergraduate	Good proficiency
Sara Emirate	Interviews 2 hours	Undergraduate	Average but talkative
Waffa Emirati	Interviews 3 hours	Undergraduate	Good proficiency, but quiet
Soha Palestinian	Interviews 3 hours	Undergraduate	Good proficiency, talkative

I chose five girls to form the focus group. Focus group was formed for detailed interviews and analyses. I also spoke with students frequently in informal conversations. The criteria for selecting students were diversity (Race and degree of engagement in discussion) and willingness to participate in the study. I chose these students because I noticed they positioned themselves in different ways during class discussions and they were regular in attendance.

#### **4.4.3 The Researcher**

My goal was to provide as Blumer (1969) suggests, an exploratory framework to develop and fill out as comprehensive and accurate a picture of the area of study as possible. I sat at the back of the classroom, an observer at first, eventually, I developed relationships with students, some stronger than others. I informally talked with students about their everyday lives and felt that students were comfortable with my presence. They were outgoing and made me laugh. I got to know the girls and left a piece of my 'self' with them. During the discussions, I did not participate and observed quietly. I always kept my notebook with me and wrote down what I observed and thought. However, I participated when a dialogic thread was passed on

to me. As it is the researcher who, at each stage, makes sense of things (Radnor, 2002), therefore, I defined three main roles for myself: a member in dialogue, a researcher, and a Pakistani female visitor. I was the only Pakistani in Farhan’s classroom. The students were aware of my ethnicity because of my facial features and as I often shared pictures and information of my country. Introducing my cultural perspective (when it was appropriate) was one way of establishing reciprocity with the participants (Lather, 1992).

#### 4.5 Data Collection

Merriam (1998) describes qualitative studies as ‘seeking to discover and understand perspectives and worldviews of the people involved’ (p.11). I present the process through thick description of participants’ lived experiences, of their thoughts about the situation. The evidence presented in this study is supported by theoretical statements whenever possible (Cohen, et al, 2000). The situation was complex, and the data was dependent on the context. It was studied as it naturally occurred with no control of variables, allowing categories, themes, and patterns to emerge (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This approach provided rich, context-bound information that explored the phenomena. The data tools were interviews of the teacher and of the students of focus group, class observations, and students’ composition. I collected data from multiple sources because multiple data provide evidence to support the researcher’s conclusion (Yin, 1989). Multiple data sources established convergence and allowed triangulation of categories for coding and research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The table below shows data tools and sources.

**Table 4.2: Data Tools**

Research tools	Sample	Selection criterion	Context	Participant
Conversational interviews (students: focus group, teacher)	Purposive Patton, M.Q (1990, 169-186).	Male Arab professor (desirous of establishing a dialogic classroom)	Female campus of a university in UAE Class: undergrads Subject: Advance composition & Eng.lit. major	One male teacher ( A PhD in Eng.lit)
Compositions of students		Arab female students studying English		20 female students (5 focus group)
Class observations (open-ended)				(Researcher in



		language and literature		her subjective capacity)
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#### 4.5.1 Observations

Observation as a method of data collection is a capacity to know and understand others through introspection, reflection and observation of and interaction with people (Patton 1990). Observation requires that the observers acknowledge the strengths and limitations of their perspectives. This requires both self-knowledge and realization. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out, observational research involves formulating a well-understood relationship between the researcher and research participants. According to Denscombe (1998: 139), ‘Observation offers researchers a distinct way of collecting data. It does not rely on what people say they do, or what they say they think. It is more direct as it witnesses events first hand’. It allowed me to see the confluence of all the voices that came together to form the dialogic space. When considering the context, my theoretical orientation also guided me to focus on interaction, rather than the content. Thus when taking field-notes, my chosen form of recording, I noted down matters relating to form and structure rather than content. For example, I noted the way the clarification was sought or given, the question and pattern of dialogue that resulted from that. I also took the field-notes to identify patterns and sequences, such as: the Initiation, Response and Follow-up (IRF) sequence (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), turn-taking issues (Maybin, 1996), the function of silences (Poland & Pederson 1998) and questioning (Burbules, 1993). However, no method is without its challenges. The immersed participant has problems with objectivity while the distant observers may fail to understand what they are observing. I was fortunate that I had familiarity with the setting therefore I was a welcome presence in the room, sometimes involved in spontaneous conversations with the tutor or students.

I observed classroom activity to build up a rich description. The observations were what Wilkinson (2000) calls molar units of observation that focus on tiny details including gestures. Immediately following the observation the notes were written up as a summary and clarification sought from the teacher (sometimes by email) if necessary. I observed 32 dialogic sessions in which six short stories and two Greek plays were discussed. Each visit lasted for 45 minutes. I specially took note of events such as: Farhan actively engaging learners, modifying instruction or involving

learners in the inquiry process. I was able to confirm my interpretations of what the teacher had told me in the interviews or seek comments afterwards. I have used these notes to construct the process for my readers. During observations, I wrote as much as I could. However, once I became familiar with the routine, I reduced the amount of note taking. For example, on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010, in my field notes, I wrote, 'Dialogic/students Writing Qs', to remember that students wrote questions that they had while they listened to the discussion (Field notes / FN).

#### **4.5.2 Field notes and analytic memos.**

Field notes are used by researchers to record what they observe. Analytic memos are helpful to review and record emerging patterns (Maxwell, 1996). Whenever I was in classroom, I took notes about the discussion, my feelings, questions and any related thing that came to my mind. My field notes were a messy place where I jotted down thoughts (Appendix: my reflection log). So I also wrote analytic memos to summarize my observations based on the field notes. Later, I wrote extended memos based on my notes. Both field notes and analytic memos helped me review my observations and findings.

#### **4.5.3 Conversational interviews**

Interviews were an important source of my data. Kvale (2008: 9) defines interviews as 'attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world'. Interviews provide interpretations through the voices of the interviewees who contribute insights into a particular situation (Yin, 1989). Conversations are recursive rather than linear, as participants revisit previous ideas. Conversation may be the ultimate context within which knowledge is understood (Rorty, cited in Kvale, 1996, p.37). Conversation according to Oakley (1981) helps the researcher to open up with participants about the purposes of research. Thus I held 'conversational interviews' to suit my purpose. These interviews allowed me to understand experiences of the teacher and students. Establishing trust and rapport with the participants is important if they are to talk freely in such a situation (Kvale 1996: 125). I addressed the potential difficulties of a power imbalance by 'attentive listening' (Kvale 1996: 135), occasionally echoing back comments to check meaning and being respectful and non-threatening. I felt

fortunate to be ‘listening to the multiple meanings involved in the interviewee’s statements’ (Kvale 1996: 135). Most of the questions were developed spontaneously in the course of the interaction. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, although some interviews were of longer duration. The interviews were semi-structured in nature based upon open-ended questions. I asked key questions for facts and (Yin, 1989) to elicit information about participants’ interpretations of the situation under study. After all the interviews were transcribed and all collected materials read, I proceeded with the analysis of data which is the most complex part of the inquiry process (Holliday, 2007).

According to Mason, knowledge gained through interview is a co-production [...] dependent upon the combined efforts of interviewer and interviewee in conjuring up the relevant contexts from which they think, talk, act and interpret (2002: 227). They are a process of knowledge construction rather than a process of knowledge ‘excavation’ (Mason 2002: 226). I considered interviews as an opportunity for dialogue. It was the open-ended responses that contained the ‘gems’ of information that could not be caught in the questionnaire. (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:255). The initial interview with Dr Farhan was semi-structured and conducted at the beginning of the study. Through this interview, I found about his teaching background, teaching objectives, plans and students’ backgrounds. However, subsequent interviews were informal conversations and were not audio-taped. I wrote everything as Farhan didn’t wish to be taped. Interviews with the teacher were held in his office whenever the teacher was available. Informal interviews allowed me to interact with the teacher frequently and know his perspective about dialogic discussions. The questions were intentionally nonspecific to leave enough latitude for the teacher and ensure a holistic view. I followed same pattern with the students, conducted initial interviews with students, to know them better and subsequent dialogic interviews for deeper insight of their perspectives. All interviews were done in the relaxed atmosphere of cafeteria, whenever the girls had time off (Appendix-Initial interview question for students /teacher). I mainly opened up the interview topics to students and let them say whatever they wanted as long as it was related to the discussion. As Joseph Maxwell (1996) wrote, ‘Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask to gain that understanding’ (p.74). Interviews with focus group students helped me answer research questions by helping me understand their perspectives.

#### **4.5.4 Students' written response**

Farhan asked students to write their thoughts for all discussions. These were students' composition assignments. Students' writings were analyzed for possibilities dialogic holds as learning strategy. I explored writing assignments because previous research has shown students appropriate the topic of discussions and schema for argumentation (Anderson et al., 2001) developed during discussions and apply them in their writing tasks. Researchers agree that content of the discussion is picked up in written response if writing is followed by the discussion. For students who struggle to express their ideas on paper, these are especially important findings. Therefore students' written response, selected from three dialogic sessions were included and analyzed.

#### **4.5.5 Value of Multiple Data Sources**

The use of multiple data sources allowed me to view the focus of inquiry from different angles. According to Kagan (1990), 'multiple data allow triangulation and capture multifaceted aspects of teaching and learning' (p. 459). The field-notes were extensive, around eight hand written pages, for two sessions. The next process (Stage 2) marked the beginning of the analytic stage which involved organizing the data extracts to identify themes that emerged (Appendix; Table 4.3, 4.4 Emerging themes). I will now explain the data analysis process. Ongoing data analysis allowed me to identify emerging themes and patterns from participants' responses. It enabled me to revise and implement my plans.

#### **4.6 Data Analysis**

Describing and analyzing the social world is not a simple matter. As social interaction takes place through language, made up of discourses forever in flux (Bakhtin, 1986), data analysis was an ongoing process as well. However, the main data analysis was done after collecting data. I now explain how I screened 32 discussions for detailed analyses. In the second part, I explain how I coded the selected discussions.

### 4.6.1 Transcripts

Transcripts were done during the data collection period. I tried to transcribe at the earliest. After completing the transcripts, I identified dialogic discussions. I coded transcripts. First, as I consider individual utterances as actions in discussion, I coded actions under non-dialogic and dialogic moment. I carefully examined each speech and tried to code them as much as I could. My transcripts were done on two levels. In rough transcripts I did all sessions, noting the content of sequences and from where the sequence originated; the facilitator, the participant or both. This made it possible for me to choose the sessions. I selected dialogic discussions to reduce data into a manageable size and to analyze it in depth. Table below shows criteria for selection of sessions.

**Table – 4.5: Dialogic/non dialogic traits in sessions**

#	Activity	Sequence	Theme	Dominating speech		Dialogic	Non-dialogic
				Facilitator	Participant		
1	The bamboo blind	Question from the participant results in further questions	Cultural constraints		✓	Dialogic	
2	Hold the mayonnaise	Questions from facilitator result in student led dialogue	Food and identity		✓	Dialogic	
3	The minister's black veil	I-Rs-Rs/2-Rs/3-Rs/2-Rs/1-Rt	Society, exclusion		✓	Builds into complex dialogic	
4	Oedipus the Rex	I-Rs-Rt-Rt-Rs-Rt	Power, Oedipus complex	✓			Teacher initiated & dominated

							interaction
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	-------------

I manually coded the transcripts with highlighters to indicate themes as emerging from each interaction. Chapters Five and Six are discursive representation of my research experience (Holliday, 2007) (Appendix: transcript conventions).

As common with qualitative research I worked in steps. Literature review revealed the forces playing for or against the dialogic process. I used these criteria for selection of the sessions. I looked for presence or absence of dialogic interaction and selected sessions for detail analysis of my research questions.

#### **4.6.2 Selecting Dialogic Turn Counting**

After transcribing, I counted the turns of the teacher and students in all transcribed discussions, based on the coding manual of Soter et al. (2006). I defined a turn as an utterance that is spoken intentionally by a speaker. I counted one turn per speaker until the speaker stopped talking or the talk stopped by interruption. At this point, the speaker's turn and the interrupter's turn were counted separately. I counted short turns in cases; when a speaker called someone's name or a speaker used one word like 'yeah' or 'ok', or a speaker attempted to talk using word like 'well'. I regarded these as strategies that permitted the person to gain a talking turn.

Since I intended to look at dialogic discussions, I needed to select discussions where students were actively engaged in dialogic moments and collaboratively constructed meaning of the text. In a monologically organized discussion, a teacher dominates the interaction. In this case, the teacher talked more than students, initiated a conversation and evaluated students' comments. In dialogic instruction, students talked more than the teacher because the teacher encouraged students to share their thinking and did not evaluate their comments. I marked these with the abbreviations and numbers with D representing dialogic moments and non-dialogic moments as Non-D.

The amount of discussion time for each moment varied because time was not considered to identify a moment. Therefore, one moment could be five minutes long while another could be of lesser duration. I needed to select discussions that contained many dialogic moments where students collaboratively constructed

meaning of the text. Since in all 32 discussions, students talked more than the teacher, I decided to select discussions when students contributed more than 70% of the discussion. This process reduced the data from 32 discussions to 14 sessions and finally 7 were selected for analyses.

Table below shows the sessions selected as per the dialogic turn counts:

**Table-4.6: Turn counts**

#	Literary text	Discussion time in minutes	Total Turns	Teacher's turns	Student's turns	% T/S
1-	The bamboo blind	45+45	70	20	50	29/71
2-	Rip van winkle	45+45	70	25	46	35/65
3-	Oedipus the Rex	45+45	80	44	36	55/45
4-	Hold the mayonnaise	45+45	70	23	57	33/77
5-	The minister's black veil	45+45+45	120	36	84	30/70
6-	The birth mark	45+45+45	95	24	76	25/75
7-	Antigone	45+45	75	45	50	45/55

#### **4.6.3 Data Reduction: coding**

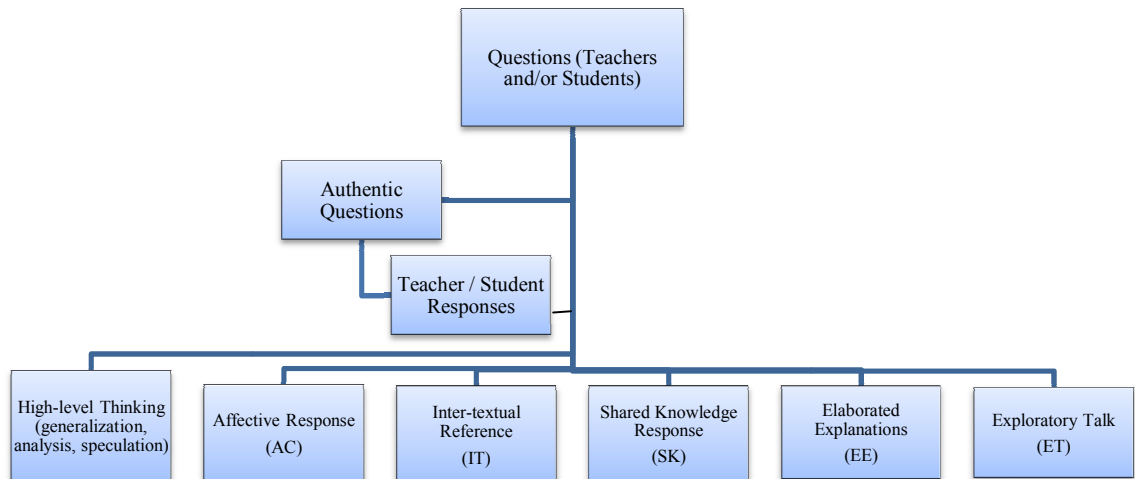
The first step in data reduction is categorization. Researchers categorize transcripts and label them with names and code. Miles and Huberman (1994) write that codes are 'labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study' (p56). Coding usually is a mixture of data reduction and data complication (Atkinson, 1998), generally used to break up and segment the data into simpler, general categories in order to explore new questions and levels of interpretation.

All data from, field notes, interviews, discussions, observation, were analyzed. I employed an inductive coding technique (Strauss, 1987) for data analysis. I initially read and reread each data set and then systematically identified specific characteristics based on emerging patterns and themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Next, I reread all sets of data together to cross-check the similar and different codes across the data sets. When all transcripts were coded and important categories and themes identified, categories were scrutinized to explain the themes in more detail.

This process can be summed up in phases.

- 1 - Initial categories.
  - i) Open coding: (Strauss and Corbin 1998).
  - ii) Refocusing
- 2- Saturation of categories
  - i) Creating subcategories in categories.
- 3 - Developing categories into general analytical frameworks.
  - i) The process of integrating and refining categories.

Using this principle and adapting Soter et al (2006) coding scheme, I analyzed the discourse, examining every turn of the discussions. I adapted Mercer's (1995) notion of Exploratory Talk (ET) but Mercer (1995) in his study had not included the teacher in episodes of ET. However, since two of my research questions were related to the teacher, I decided to include the teacher. When reading transcripts, I looked for ET moments because I consider them as dialogic moments. Exploratory talks are dialogic moments when students are engaged and talk to one another to co-construct knowledge with no or minimum teacher's guidance. When I found ET moments, I highlighted them with a color for easy distinction. I adapted six features originally from Mercer (Wegerif & Mercer, 1997). Figure below depicts the framework for analyses.



**Figure 4.1: Framework for Analyzing Discourse of Discussions ( Soter et al., 2006)**



Besides codes for dialogic Talk's features, I also created codes for non-dialogic Talk (Appendix, Table 4.7 for detailed dimensions of discourse features). Nystrand (1997) defines Authentic Questions as questions that do not have pre-determined answers. Uptakes are follow-up questions that investigate the previous response. I employed terms such as authentic questions, uptake, reasoning and action (Nystrand, 1997; Mercer, 2004). For example, when Mariam shared her response, farhan asked, 'Can you elaborate on that? The word 'that' in this question indicates Mariam's previous response and requires a further explanation.

A lot of research using transcribed interaction analyzes the transcripts by coding them in different ways. I did not pre-classify the codes as it would've hindered the chance of seeing 'new things' (Mercer, 1987). I also applied Elliot W. Eisner's (1998) concept of connoisseurship and educational criticism. Elliot W. Eisner describes connoisseurship as: the art of appreciation. Eisner's concept provides educational evaluation that is qualitative in nature, with the critic in education following the example of critics in literature and other visual arts. It involves the ability to see, not merely to look. To do this, one must name and appreciate the different dimensions of situations and experiences, and the way they relate one to another, place experiences and understandings in a wider context, and connect them with values and commitments. My literature education background helped me to achieve this. However, being an educator I needed to be more than connoisseur. I had to be a critic too. Criticism, as Dewey pointed out is the re-education of perception. As Eisner (1998: 6) puts it, the criticism I employ functions as the midwife to perception. It helps it come into being; so that educators may discover the truth in experiences.

I hope, interplay of the descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative aspects will provide multiple perspectives of dialogue for educators and help them appreciate the complexities of the dialogic process.

#### **4.6.4 Discourse analysis**

Discourse analysis takes many forms as researchers adopt different disciplinary approaches according to their needs. I adopted Bakhtinian discourse analysis, to focus on the interactions and examine expressions in the utterance.

The intention is not to study discourse for its own sake, but to use discourse analysis to examine how speakers experience dialogic learning. Bakhtin offers an explanation of why some discourses are more influential than others according to their type and structure ('monological', 'heteroglossic', 'double-voiced', 1984: 185).

Discourse analysis provided a means to study relationship between students' perspectives and literacy practices. The students discursively displayed their enthusiasm and resistance to engage in dialogue. Dialogue was negotiated in complex ways, influenced by specific cultural trends. Individuals have unique histories and perspectives, so their ways of making sense of their learning differs; discourses therefore carried ideological and political significance.

I wanted to explore how participants negotiate dialogue about different issues. To this end, I identified discursive patterns, looking at how language is used to construct versions of the world, self and others (Potter and Wetherell, 1989). I intend to describe the events and findings so that the reader can experience them, interpret the events so that they are decoded as to why and how the events occur, evaluate these events for educational values and finally formulate themes by identifying recurrent messages. Thus conclusions are made through inductive analysis and findings are sorted out thematically.

#### **4.6.5 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is a flexible, rich and meaningful method, allowing comparisons to be made across different accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I adopted a cyclical process of thematic analysis and the data were read many times before the final themes were identified. The data were then coded for these final themes. Analyses were influenced by discourse analytic concerns due to the importance of the narrative threads of participants' talk and written texts.

The themes that emerged answered the research questions and illustrated the process and context (Calderhead, 1989). This assisted me in identifying change and intellectual growth in each participant. In addition, results from each participant's interviews, classroom observations and field notes were combined, compared and analyzed across all cases for themes and patterns. This was accomplished through key

words and phrases. Themes were categorized using the research questions as a framework. They were color-coded and further analyzed for common patterns, similarities and differences.

#### **4.7 Credibility and trustworthiness**

The social discourses reformulate our understandings and our interpretations. Valid knowledge claims emerge when interpretations and possibilities are negotiated among members of a community (Kvale, 1996). Consequently, interpretive understandings of truth differ from the positivist. I achieved Dialogic credibility for my research through dissemination at 5 academic conferences, which is the accepted academic research route. The intent was to gain more understanding from the feed back of my audience. In a qualitative study, a researcher needs to be aware of his or her own subjectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Even though reliability is not applicable in qualitative research, disciplined subjectivity is proposed. Disciplined subjectivity is the researcher's continuous self-questioning and re-evaluation of the research process. Subjectivity is a major concern in qualitative research and because of this, I was conscious of its influence throughout the data collection and analysis. When I walked into the classroom, I was aware of my gender and cultural association. I focused on what was observed, written and answered and questioned my words and behavior for bias. Because this writing is from a female perspective, I acknowledge a narrow lens, even though I member-checked and debriefed the data for the accuracy of meaning and wording by the interviewees (Davis, 1990).

I observed Farhan's classroom, interacted with my research participants and interpreted my observations because of who I am. I read extensively to enhance my understanding of the context and to see how others had conducted research in this area. Review of the literature broadened my understanding about dialogic learning. I had started by conducting the first phase of research, my pilot study. My research questions evolved from that study. I was in Farhan's classes every day. I knew I couldn't change the fact that I was an outsider, but I wanted to be trusted (Glesne, 1999). So it was very important for me to be as close to the participants as possible to get an insider's perspective. Otherwise, my findings would've remained superficial. When I was conducting the interviews with the participants, I felt connected to them they were happy to share information about their experiences over the academic year.

#### **4.7.1 Triangulation of the Data**

In research the issues of credibility and trustworthiness are important. In order to ensure credibility the researcher must use procedures that minimize bias. Therefore, I presented views from the interviews without alteration, to reflect as far as possible what the participants said. I managed to verify most, if not all, of the occurrences shared by the participants in the interviews. I collected data from multiple sources to triangulate my findings. The primary sources of the data were dialogic discussion observations and interviews; however, as I analyzed them I went back to other sources, such as field notes, analytic memos and compositions to confirm my findings across the data sources. Examining data across multiple sources established triangulation of the data and gave me confidence in findings. After the data collection period was over, I kept in touch with Farhan and let him know about my progress. I also continued member checking with him through emails and shared my writings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Maxwell, 1996). Specifically, I sent interview transcripts so that he could read what I had written. Joseph Maxwell (1996) writes that there are three areas that present threats to credibility in qualitative research. They are description, interpretation and theory. Using Maxwell's format as a guide, I believe this research was protected from these threats.

#### **4.7.2 Limitations**

The findings from this study have significant implications but there are a few limitations to consider. Qualitative research doesn't fulfill purpose of generalization; its evidence is based on the exploration of specific context and particular individuals (Brantlinger et al., 2005). This study investigated participants' perceptions towards dialogic learning and the factors that influence the process. Because of the small sample size, results are therefore valid for the particular population under study and cannot be generalized to a larger or demographically different population group. The findings of the current study are therefore bound by the socio-cultural, ethnic, and academic characteristics of the participants, the texts that were chosen for each discussion, and the school settings cannot be generalized to other populations. This study provides only a peek at the complexities of the teachers' role and of the

challenges faced by students while exploring dialogic spaces. Nonetheless, I believe that helpful observations can still be made about higher education practice and policy.

#### **4.7.3 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics play an important role in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of others. Their manner should be good and their code of ethics strict. Keeping this in mind, I informed the participants about the reasons for my presence and the nature of my study. I explained the goals for the study. I informed them about issues of confidentiality and parameters of participation. Participants were also told that their work would be held in confidence and that their names would not be used in dissemination of the research materials. As I interviewed the participants, I was aware that information was revealed to me in confidence. Fictitious names have been assigned to the participants for confidentiality (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Nevertheless, because some of the data and descriptions may uniquely identify the participants, it might be impossible to preserve absolute anonymity.

I obtained Certificate of ethical research approval issued from the Chair of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning Ethics Committee. This contained a brief description of my research project. This was required by the University of Exeter. I had the Exeter University consent form which was signed by the participants of the study (both forms are attached as appendix). I was an observer who was respectful, honest and grateful for the privilege of learning from the students and teacher. I protected their privacy at all costs as I explored an educational strategy that may benefit the larger community of learners.

#### **4.8 Concluding thoughts for chapter 4**

I believe the 'lively dialogue' enabled me to test the validity of my own perspectives too. Understanding of power relations amongst cultures, their effects and acquiring these tools helped me understand my own position and identity. In next chapter, I present a collage of voices in dialogue. These data displays are Charm'd magic casements (John Keats' ode to nightingale) opening an elusive world for my readers.

## CHAPTER 5: ANALYSES, AND DISCUSSION

*'Truth is not to be found...it is born between people, collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic action' (Bakhtin cited in Nystrand, 1997).*

### 5. INTRODUCTION

Bakhtin suggests that when people engage in active discussion, texts come into contact and spark off against each other, 'a light flash' occurs (Bakhtin, 1986: 162) and the participants experience 'a dialogic feeling for the world'. This chapter presents this 'light flash' or the lighting of the fire and explores the conditions associated with the creation of this state.

I wanted to investigate the open-ended interaction during advanced composition and literature major class of university graduates and investigate the circumstances, and audiences, for which the ideal of dialogue becomes unattainable?

Educational process also communicates knowledge of culture (Bernstein, 1990, Bourdieu, 1991). Dialogic theorists advocate importance of language in the construction and (re)construction of social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Monologic epistemologies ignore dialogic nature of meaning and deny perspectives, whereas, dialogic epistemologies encourage multi-voiced dialogue; create a polyphonic world (Bakhtin, 1984). A central concept of analyses in my study is that language can explore stances in social situations (Lemke, 1990; Mercer, 1995). My study explores how the participants discover beliefs regarding literacy, gender and culture during dialogic discourse and provides an exploratory account rather than a conclusive one. A thematic analysis was done by generating categories from the interviews of the participants, the field notes, classroom observations and the students' compositions (Ely, et al., 1991). In this chapter I present key quotations as data displays that relate to analysis of research questions and discussion. But before doing this, I describe briefly three dialogic sessions to provide a context for the analysis of interaction under the three main research questions (Criteria for selection described in chapter 4).

I employed discourse analysis similar to Mercer's (1998) analysis of classroom talk (1998). Mercer examined the ways in which students and teachers build shared knowledge. Humans reveal their experiences of the world in narratives. The narrative is 'the primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful' (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). These collective narratives are shaped by the cultural setting (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005). It is within this perspective that my narrative takes you to the class of Dr Farhan. This is, of course, only a snapshot, because the constructs that I work remain in flux.

## **5.1 Hearing Their Voices... my sojourn in the dialogic space**

Gaining Access and Approaching Participants was easy as I had conducted one assignment study with the same teacher. I have given details of the participants and context in Chapter four.

There were times I arrived in the classrooms with just enough time to get settled before discussions began. At other times, I arrived in the classrooms to observe the events leading up to the discussions and follow-up work. The teacher here is a part of the group, a tall person, sometimes hunching down so that he does not tower over the students. Within minutes into the activity, he moves to propose a way forward, he does so in a very tentative way, as if seeking out answers as he goes along, in true Socrates way (field notes: march 2010). The class of twenty, bright, motivated young girls was unique in many ways. They however were experiencing unusual pressure due to forth coming examinations, while I was scheduled to collect data. Some of these attributes have bearing on my data and findings. This dictated the subject matter of one of the sessions and created fluctuating attitudes and written responses. The students appeared burdened. Given this pressure, their level of participation was remarkably good.

### **5.1.1 Descriptions of the dialogic sessions**

Selecting the sessions for presentation was difficult for me as I found many of them thought provoking. Farhan's choice of literary text was a strong contributor to explore the effects of gender and cultural constraints in dialogue.

I will describe three dialogic sessions. The girls found two sessions difficult because these dealt with drama from literature of antiquity. The students were eager participants in all sessions however, in these sessions the efforts of teacher were quiet evident. Table below shows attributes present in three dialogic sessions.

**Table 5.1: Attributes found in dialogic sessions**

Sessions Attributes	Session-1, Bamboo Blind	Session-2, Oedipus the Rex	Session-3, The minister's veil
Students involved with the text	Always engaged	Effort in dialogue/inconsistently engaged	Always engaged
Questions flow to and fro	Dialogic in nature	Between few girls, teacher initiated.	Dialogic in nature
Student to student Dialogue	Mostly dialogic/engaging all	Mostly between teacher and student	Mostly dialogic/engaging all
Teacher is Facilitator	Facilitator	Facilitator and an initiator of dialogue	Facilitator
Alien references	Always engaged	Engaged with effort	Always engaged
Cultural difference	Indian	Greek	Western/Christian
Related to life	Totally	The issue was significant but girls found it difficult to discuss it openly	On philosophical level

I will look at dialogue that becomes a vehicle for change in perspectives. The understanding of the process was co-constructed by the teacher and the students.

### **5. 1.2 The bamboo blind**

*'Engaging them beyond facts is hard but if I can facilitate it, I think they will be better off. Helping them understand other cultures is something they can use in life. We can make the world better if we are open to questioning ourselves and the ideas around*



us'. Farhan remarked as we walked to the class. The first dialogic session I chose discusses a short story, 'The bamboo blind.'

The girls' responses to story were based on their understandings of the power structures that exist in society. The girls could relate to the story on many accounts. They agreed, stories that showed people facing discrimination due to their race or none conformity to norms, were accurate depictions of power structures in society. Interviews and dialogue revealed that the girls' interpretations of texts were connected to their cultural understandings of what it means to be a female. Sara's comments reflect the views of majority as she exclaimed in a lighter tone:

*My parents were fairly progressive and there was a lot of talk at dinner about issues...progressive ideas... but, I won't like others to catch my husband changing the nappies of my children (dialogue on house husbands, march 2010).*

Most of them shared similar experiences and understandings. Farhan believed it was important to understand how students viewed issues like race, culture, and gender. I believe the selection of text helped in creating the dialogic space Farhan had hoped for.

This Session continued for two days (45 minutes duration each). Classes began with 'settle down' time given by the teacher. Dialogue was continuous and the teacher was a facilitator rather than an instructor. The students thought it to be a rewarding experience. Farhan thought that some of the students had asked good questions of each other. The teacher asked everyone to think about the story, including those who hadn't read the story. The class began with dialogue,

1. Farhan: yes you can ponder over the title ---what does the title make you think?
2. Umna: well...(....) BLINDS!!
3. Farhan : [smiling] hold that thought Umna -I will get back to you

(My note; Even if the point raised by the student didn't seem relevant at that time it was never disregarded)

Because of the space created by the teacher the students managed to get into dialogue. At the end of the second day on this topic, the teacher said he was happy because

students participated and that students referred to ‘specific evidence’. *‘There was really good listening and they made ‘good connections between the story and prior knowledge’ (Informal conversation, 19/3/2010).* Changing minds during dialogue was an interesting phenomenon. Amna revealed her change of mind by listening intently to Sara then turning her head away, pondering, she moved her head smiling... her kajol eyes bright and excited. The dramatic display of understanding was very cultural. To me the lovely gesture was dialogic in its own way.

### **5.1.3. Oedipus the Rex**

It was Sunday morning after the weekend. The teacher discussed assignment topics as only ten students were present due to an international conference being held by the department. Farhan decided to continue the session in the next period and shifted to group work to build up initial understanding of the topic. The session ended with the teacher discussing the assignment about the Greek play that they were about to finish. Farhan asked the students about the topics they would like to work on. For once I witnessed excitement among the girls as they enthusiastically thought about assignment topics. Although the text was interesting and ambiguous enough to promote an interesting discussion, the play did not generate heated discussion. During the talk at the end of the session Farhan sighed and said, *‘I think they are weary of exams. But I accomplished one thing, I got them to think.’* He thought the discussion might have provided a frame they could go back to when they actually read the play.

### **5.1.4 The ministers’ black veil**

The third session (I choose to describe) discusses Hawthorn’s story; ‘The minister’s black veil’. Students were enthusiastic and well prepared. Motivator seemed to be a test grade they were receiving for the composition and the high personal interest in the topic. Farhan reverted to his favored stance and ‘directed flow of thoughts’. He posed questions, clarified student responses, and moved students on to new questions. At the end Farhan commented on the high level of student participation. He said that listening to students was heartwarming. He was impressed by the high quality of interaction. His first comment after the session, *‘I was watching... LISTENING, it was so wonderful’ (Class, 19/3/2010).*

## **5.2. Discussion and analysis of Data in response to Research Question 1**

Human actions are dialogic in nature as none of the things we say or do occur in a vacuum. Individuals always exist in relation to others. Therefore Bakhtin (1986) states that voices by interacting create meaning and understanding. Meaning and understanding cannot be transferred from one person to another; they are created when voices engage in dialogue with each other. An utterance is the voice of the speaker and the addressee, as well as other voices experienced in life. Thus any change in perspectives occurs only when all enter in dialogue with one another. Interaction is thus an unfolding narrative, in which we are constituted and negotiate new positions. These positions depend on people, their context and relations of power. Sociolinguists argue that cultural expectations are forming forces of people's actions and perspectives. Walkerdine (1997) states that race; class and gender differences influence students' understanding of classroom talk and view of the world (McCarthy & Moje 2002). Some voices are silenced, some privileged in reading and writing contexts, some stronger at different times and circumstances. Due to this importance, my first research question explores the contextual circumstances and practices that encourage female students to engage in dialogue effectively.

### **5.2.1 Farhan, students and power dynamics**

Power constructs the appearance of reality by excluding the powerless from authoritative discourse (MacKinnon, 1995). Power within the classroom is multi-faceted. Power resides in unequal relations, sometimes between teacher and students. It also describes the overt demands made by administrators and ideological influence of the larger society. According to Giroux (1993) students are rarely allowed to think critically about how knowledge is contextualized as knowledge is presented objectively, existing beyond human control. Thus students become passive receivers of knowledge, controlled by the norms of society (Pennycook, 1994). Dialogue in the classroom is also about reshaping power relations, through the language used by both teachers and students (Florio-Ruane & Morrell, 2004). Whoever has voice has the opportunity to influence the listeners. However, some speakers gain more authority than others. These voices are challenges and create what Readings (1996: 161) calls

an 'asymmetrical relation'. All these forces form the contextual circumstances and influence dialogic interaction.

According to Vološinov (1986: 41) 'A word of a particular individual is a product of interaction of social forces' where human dimension is more forceful than the physical environment. Farhan, kept power dynamics in mind and created an environment of engagement that helped in dismantling these obstacles. He positioned himself and the students in such a way that all formed the dialogic space of the classroom.

I noticed Farhan occasionally had to indulge in authoritative discourse and directly ask students to take over, '*It's quite tricky. I think the students don't like it if you don't give them information*', Farhan said in an interview [18/3/2010]. He had to urge them to get involved. '*I have to tell them, why don't you go ahead...whoever has something to say, you don't need to wait, go ahead (..) express*' (interview, 15/3/2010).

Generally, Farhan constructed his role as participant facilitator who shared responses and raised questions to support reflection. As students responded, he sometimes remained silent or wrote students' ideas on the white board or signaled appreciation (*hmm*) or asked for other possibilities (*Any other ideas?*). At times he repeated students' response thoughtfully (*possibly a sense of insecurity?*), added on his response collaboratively (*He faces exclusion?*), or pressed for elaboration and reasons (*So why do you think he did that?*). But he took an average of 18% of the turns of talk. Student turns were longer and his responses often brief but encouraging. He did not evaluate correctness of responses but reacted, as a fellow reader and interested participant considering different views. Farhan emphasized;

*'It is important to give students enough space to think... question. We as teachers are sometimes driven by the desire to listen to ourselves and enforce our ideas. We have to exercise caution. The teaching experience is not about teachers, it is about the students. Teachers may ask a question, and never wait for students to answer either because they are running out of time, or because they are uncomfortable with silence (pause) Silence is fine, perhaps the students are reflecting. Giving the students the opportunity to grow on their own is really crucial'* (interview, 16/3/2010).

Farhan used the inclusive pronoun 'we', as he positions himself as one with the students. Farhan innovatively used silence to award agentic position to the students. Students learned conversational strategies however, they kept overlooking quieter students. Farhan therefore continued to play the central role in guarding the marginalized. Transcripts reveal evidence of emotional and linguistic growth of students' empowerment leading to maturity. Zara exclaimed, *'our teacher contributes to learning (...) we feel motivated because he is communicative. There must be some stimuli, and we have it!*

Students saw Farhan as an open-minded supporter, Umna thought, *'He always challenges us to think.... in Dr Farhan's class we talk in open ways..... We always discuss, figure out what's going on and why ... and what we think will happen, you know, without reading ahead..... It helped me as a person. I learn from others' experiences...'* (Interview, 18/3/10).

Questions by the students were encouraged and supported in dialogue. I wanted to know the opinion of the girls, I asked them, *'So, Mizna, Zara, Mariam, 'how do you feel when the professor gives you the space'*. Zara replied, *'yes Dr Farhan always encourages us but sometimes we feel shy because of the topic.'* Mariam enthusiastically confirmed,

*'My understanding was shaped by the encouragement of my professor...saying, 'You are nearly there,' or, 'I think you've made great progress. As I was so involved in academics, I never realized...I was changing!!'* (Focus group Interview, March, 2010)

### **5.2.2 Overcoming Resistance and Barriers**

Devon Woods defines assumptions as the acceptance of a fact which we take as true (1996). Assumptions affect choices made in the classroom and prevent implementation of new ideas. Structuring the classroom depends on teachers' assumptions (Woods, 1996). These assumptions form resistance. At the end of sessions I asked participants: *'What do you feel you have learned in the sessions? And do you think there is a need for change?'* (Interview: 4/4/2010). The girls reported, they had learned about gender differences, how people enforce these differences and the stereotypical cultural expectations placed on women through language. In response to second question they suggested that people should participate in awareness-raising activities similar to the ones they were engaged in. When I asked Farhan, he identified nature of school system, specific references, relation to power structures, systems of belief, ethical, psychological programming of the 'self' and

political agenda as barriers or forms of resistance (interviews, 24/3/2010). He particularly pointed out that gender bias caused lower self-esteem levels which ultimately effected competence and effectiveness in schools and beyond. One explanation for the participants' silence about gender issues is that these dimensions are so deeply ingrained in social processes that they remain invisible. Umnia suggested that the change has to be initiated by women themselves. She wrote.

I can understand why women feel inferior to men. Because men control society, women feel the need to use gentle, more polite language. But I think that women contribute to their inferior status by agreeing to serve men. If they want to bring change, they have to try not to treat men as superior. May be changing their language would be a small change, but it would be a sign that women want to change (Composition on: the bamboo blind).

When I asked: *'Would you say that 'there's resistance' in every culture?'* Umnia said: *'I think maybe, it is the people who have power... want to keep power. 'I think dialogue can help overcome these barriers'* (Interaction, March, 2010).

When knowledge erects systems of exclusion, it oppresses those already misrepresented in dominant groups. And, if groups base their knowledge on exclusionary thought, they act in exclusionary ways and create stereotypes based on false judgments about others. Farhan encouraged questioning of beliefs. Students generated life stories, while reading the text. These helped in the identification of stereotypical attitudes and taken-for-granted assumptions with particular reference to gendered identity in Arab culture. Students were also asked to draw comparisons between the lived and fictional experiences. They develop different viewpoints through compelling questioning, in the light of evidence of literary text that challenged the stereotypes.

To challenge the stereotypes, Farhan floated the idea of house husband! Most of girls were not pleased with the idea of house husband. There were both difference of opinion and silence. The 'talk' from Rip van winkle, progressed from plastic surgery to women concerned about their looks because of social pressures or self insecurities. Farhan felt frustrated because some students were not opening up. I wondered if it his

gender coming in the way? At the end of the class I asked the students, did they find the topic controversial? 40% of the girls said yes, and they would discuss it openly if the teacher was a female, confirming that although the cultural constraints were there Farhan was making inroads!

Girls were very vocal during the talk about attracting attention, Farhan supported girls' exploration of this topic by devoting four sessions to the topic. The girls responded to the invitation with enthusiasm. Farhan asked the girls to write about what race has to do with the concept of beauty. Farhan appeared encouraged by seeing pupils motivated and engaged.

I analyzed teacher's comments to determine whether he subverted, or endorsed the gendered views in text (class observations, March 2010). I examined the data to see if teacher's comments were traditionally or progressively gendered. Data reveals that when the teacher came to a gender critical point he subverted the traditional gender representations. Javiluoma, Moisala and Vilkkko (2003) agree that 'in addition to examining gender roles, we should explore the mechanisms which construct such roles' (p. 2).

Initially some students struggled to identify the beliefs displayed in the narratives, but after a period of uncomfortable silence, most of them got involved. Students developed new perspectives and ignored their stereotypical lens. The initial perception of women as subservient, fragile and lacking in confidence was gradually transformed. A common theme running through these critical observations was the gradual understanding that identities of both men and women permanently evolve in their interactions. As learners decentred and read the stories from a different angle, they moved away from the practice of *othering* towards a multi-dimensional understanding. The aim was to use the narratives as a mirror for learners to see the *Self* through the eyes of the *other* with a view to raising awareness of ethnocentric attitudes and reflect upon them. Dialogue encouraged learners to interrogate their assumptions and view the world through an intercultural lens.

Discourses create perspectives from which people speak, listen, read, write and think in certain historically recognizable ways (Gee, 2008). One pertinent study linking social enactments of literacy with gender and power by Waff (1994) was the Girl Talk

project. Waff noted how talk about text contributed to a critical consciousness and helped adolescents interpret inequalities in their lives.

Farhan emphasized that social norms dictate woman's role in Arab societies. *'I think the emphasis on memorization contributes indirectly to the prevalent gender discourses. We uncritically follow the long-held positions and gendered roles, influenced by memorization and authoritarianism... reinforcing the notion that knowledge is fixed, nonnegotiable and sacred,' (20/3/10).*

Farhan facilitated discussion about gendered positions by including opportunities for students to query texts that put men and women to specific gendered positions (Davies, 2003). His efforts brought a change in perspectives confirmed in the conversation transcript below:

What are you learning? I asked

Huda; about cultural specific gender roles

Researcher: Okay, so what about it. Tell me a little bit more

Huda: I found out I've been unaware of my biased thinking!

Researcher: Really, so what does that mean?

Huda; .... My fixed notions about gender roles, majority of us have fixed ideas ----you know as women, through discussions... I kind of ---experienced a mirror! ...saw my 'self' (interaction, 18/3/10).

### **5.2.3 Alien cultural references**

For many girls reasons for their non-participation were the fears that their ideas were not well formulated because (they thought) they didn't know enough about the subject matter. Kinza thought that she would be considered stupid by other students (Zara, Mariam, kinza, 22/3/2010). Therefore Class sessions that addressed controversial or alien topics sometimes resulted in unintended outcomes: (i) silence from students who felt intimidated (ii) perpetuation of stereotypes or assumptions. One explanation for the participants' silence about gender and power issues is that these dimensions are embedded so deeply in social processes that they become invisible. It was a difficult task; a walk on the egg shells sometimes. Farhan had to consider emotions in the classroom and continue encouraging the girls. Farhan thought what Mona wrote about Antigone was stilted;



The words of Sophocles are both wise and noble. The beauty of Antigone is both poetic and sincere. It is a tragic story, and through drama it reaches the height of great tragedies (Mona's compositions).

Farhan felt that thought was lost in words. He wrote to urge her on: '*there's something missing here!*' Mona explained that she couldn't fully grasp the story because she felt like an outsider.

There are no easy answers for dealing with these situations when they occur. Farhan countered some of the blocks through strategies that enabled students to express their own ideas at the same time listen and learn from others. However, stereotypes though challenged and shared seemed cemented. Transcript below presents talk that shows how the girls felt about their culture and themselves.

23. Farhan: how would you feel if you were in a situation like this?  
24. Sara: oh never ever ....  
25. Farhan: (waits.....) Umm  
26. Soha: it's not normal  
27. Farhan: not normal?  
28. Mina: well I wouldn't like to share anything[\*\*]  
29. Farhan: so it's about sharing?  
30. Amna: noo, it's the image too; it's not nice you know (...)  
31. Farhan: well I don't know!! Aha (...) the 'stereotypes'?  
32. Mona: stereotype?  
33. Sara: YEAH...like Cinderalla!  
34. Mana: yeah I don't want to be a MAID of someone else's children  
35. Farhan: Nayyer?  
36. Me: well there's another way to look at it ---the children are your husband's children too aren't they? well, ....  
37. Sara: yes I see your point but children won't love you as their mother  
38. Me: may be the child is more insecure then us , after all s/he is younger!!!  
39. Mona : .... The husband is always comparing with his previous wife....if divorce -- then no regrets, where as the dead wife lives on!  
40. Farhan: I never thought like that umm that's interesting !  
41. Mona: yes we respect the dead and create a picture perfect for them  
So you are always competing against that picture perfect?  
42. Sara: yes it's not nice to talk about the dead

Some of the girls considered the author's point of view as valid some agreed with each other but even in that agreement the position they took was their own. When I asked whether dialogue helped in understanding of the topic? The girls replied,

Mariam: Now I look at thing from different angles.

Sara: YEAH...It helps a lot [...] sometimes

Me: Sometimes?

Sara: Sometimes it doesn't... like somebody has an opinion about something that I totally disagree with [...] I won't really change my mind about it. But it's always good to hear different opinions, just in case you might be wrong (Interview, 18/3/10).

Their views indicate that although it is not an easy thing to understand an individual's frame of reference but it's possible to create mutually sustaining dialogic space.

#### **5.2.4. Intercultural sensitivity**

Cultural values put constraints on individual behavior (Richardson, 2004). Cultural affiliations influence learners' interaction patterns. Islam supports education for both male and female. It has not held women back when it comes to education. But women still feel restrained because of social restrictions. A major concern for me was to explore the ways in which the text from a foreign culture was received through the prism of culture. This prism pre-programmed the receiver to interpret the encoded message.

Although, Oedipus Rex (Greek tragedy) was interesting and ambiguous enough to promote an interesting discussion, it did not generate heated discussion. The reasons, as the girls reported in their interviews, were, difficulty of language combined with their reluctance to discuss the topic with their male teacher. Of the five focus group student, four said they could not read the text properly (Post session interaction, March, 2010). I noticed the general unpreparedness of the students (Field notes). Farhan's role was very different in this particular session. Most of talk turns in this session were taken by him.

As majority of the students couldn't read the text, they did not have the questions in mind. Six of the main concepts were introduced by the teacher and four by the students. Of the concepts introduced by the students, three were responses to closed questions asked by Farhan where there was a single acceptable answer. The student

contributions to the discourse were initiated by Farhan (Class, observations, 23/3/2010).

During the interview (24/3/2010), students shared the reasons with me. Mariam felt embarrassed that she didn't know much about Greek mythology. Sara said she searched information about Greek history and dramatic traditions as she realized she knew very little about the topic. Students were expecting the professor to provide an opinion or evaluation, whereas he was resisting being pushed into banking pedagogy. For once I sensed Farhan's honest efforts for a dialogic space, failing somewhat.

Billings and Fitzgerald's (2002) study on dialogue observed one teacher over the course of three Seminars and found that she took over 50% of the talk turns. In the three sessions that I report in detail, there was only one that Farhan had no choice but to make it teacher reliant. Transcript below shows that the dialogue was teacher initiated. It is difficult to discuss a text if it has 'foreign' associations. During the session, the teacher became much more than a facilitator. He coached, taught and asked students to refer to the text. All students however were involved with the story at hand;

The teacher starts the dialogue by writing on the white board, 'Prophecy.'

1-Farhan: so do you think she knew about this (talking about the mother..queen)

[Farhan waits for a response and floats another question]

2. Farhan: what is her fear?

3. Amna: concerned about her child?

4. Farhan: what about kingdom? Don't you think the canvas is larger perhaps?

5. Sara : yeah... but(..) may be more so about her life

6. Farhan: any more thoughts , can you relate this with the text

[The play is difficult. The difficulty of the text results in slow progress, girls find it difficult to relate to the text. Farahan senses that at once.]

7. Farhan: let's visit the text shall we, [reads some lines] umm it will lead us....

8. Shama: can you read a bit slowly so that we can see the words.

9. Mona: the WORDS?

10. Farhan: YEAH... the words are important Mona, they say a lot about what characters are thinking. WAIT; are there any more pointers we can locate? Sara?

For once the teacher has to throw in the invitation to speak; the play had many alien cultural references. The girls dig into text as the teacher cleverly chose not to 'tell'. Not only there were frequent interjections by the teacher, but his role of facilitator also changed. The interjections in other sessions were quite different. Interjections determined students' preparation. During the dialogue about 'the black veil', Farhan turned to Sara whose response was under attack and said, *'Do you want to respond again?'* or later when the dialogue had turned to society's practice of exclusion, he exclaimed, *'yallah waffa, several people have taken exception to what you have said. Would you like to respond?'* In both of these examples, Farhan was successfully directing traffic whereas in the second session Farhan made extra efforts. However, this session answered many questions, that dialogue is reliant on students' reading of the foreign text. Students spoke about the relationship between their cultural backgrounds and their participation in dialogical sessions. According to Zara, *'Sometimes it is too personal and you do not want to talk about personal things.'* The self-other relationships that emerged through dialogic struggle support Hall's (1996) views that a powerful correlation exists between an individual's sense of subjectivity and ethnic location ( cultural soft spots). Waffa during one of the interactions admitted that some of the girls felt shy to discuss some topics so openly with their male teacher *'so we choose to stay quiet and listen'*. *'But how can others know your thoughts'* I asked. The girls smiled and remarked *'it's 'in' us and we don't try to overcome this'* (interaction after the session with Waffa-Zara- Mona 3/4/10). Their cultural ideals didn't allow them to be assertive individuals. For example, Zara made an incorrect public reading of a phrase in the minister's veil, she confessed that she needed help in getting through the complicated Christian analogies.

For many students speaking in class was not easy. Mizna said she was *'not used to opening up and saying things'*; she did not often speak in the whole class. She preferred discussions in small group (16/3/2010). During a discussion about what does it mean to be a male or a female, Mizna seemed to resist discussion because she thought the topic was controversial however she was willing to write about it. She said,

*'I found the topic rather controversial as it questioned traditions firmly established in our society, however I could write about it , the only time I felt uncomfortable was*

*when the teacher asked whether or not seeing a man with a pram was sexy, I would have felt easy to discuss it with a female teacher' (interview, 18/3/2010).*

Challenges led to shifting role in dialogic setting. This was not surprising, given students' collective histories. As a result, the transition was neither straightforward nor easy in the sessions dealing with difficult texts. Farhan acknowledged these difficulties, saying he noticed that girls were 'not opening up' (interview-20/3/2010), Farhan thought this struggle played out differently with different students. In most extreme cases, girls remained silent, not sure how to begin. Sometimes, students talk lacked a conversation pattern. Students' comments contained frequent pauses and periods of silence (class observations, 22/3/2010). Tendency to depend on Farhan for leadership was evident here. In discussing Rip van winkle, the discussion became stilted when Farhan stepped away, Farhan relented his authority (field notes, 22/3) reminding students they were in charge. His explanations developed students' understanding of the new format. However transition was achieved gradually. This transition was evident in compositions by the students.

### **5.2.5. Silence and dominance**

Bakhtin (1985) considers knowledge as historically and ideologically constructed. To apply this concept to reading, we could say that a reader is a knower of what s/he has come to understand within the social relationships. That is, what s/he understands exists in the historical personal relationship with other readers. From a socio-cultural perspective, this means those who experienced discussions have more practice with this kind of reasoning (Gee, 1996). Participants benefit from the experiences and responses of others (Rogoff, 1995). The bottom line is that the learner is never alone; he or she follows certain patterns of activity that have been performed already (Wertsch, 1985).

I felt that many of the participants were challenged when their long held but rarely questioned views were critiqued. Some, while understanding the dynamics, had trouble identifying how ethnicity influenced their lives. A typical example of this conceptual block was summed up by Mona, one of the quieter ones:

*I've never thought this way. It's good. But it's difficult. While I often thought how my experiences of growing up in a conservative family led me to be 'seen' in a particular way, especially by 'other' people, I have never thought in depth about these things. I don't think I have any experience of class or race. While I can talk about being a woman, the others... race and class... I don't know* (22/3/ 2010).

There were many long silences, a source of tension for all. It was a source of tension because it often arose when students were expecting the teacher to give his interpretation on an issue.

During the sessions several students were identified as dominant speakers due to number of utterances made during discussions. These students appeared to remain dominant in every context; teacher-led discussions, whole class or small group discussions. This tendency for the conversations to be dominated by a few was sometimes very obvious.

Waffa thought; *'same people are the ones who get their opinions all the time, so you get only one perspective'* (interview, 19/3/2010).

However, with a different text other girls also emerged as speakers. This indicated that the size of the group and/or the context of the discussions influenced participants. Students' participation in dialogue varied. The silence of certain students during discussions was obvious. In particular, I was puzzled by the silence of a group of 5 or 6 girls. Although the girls were generally positive about their experiences in the class, they were mostly quiet during classroom discussions. Later in a brief chat Ayesha said, *'This kind of thing... I mean talk ... isn't something I would choose. If I have a choice between writing an essay, or... like having a discussion, I would do the essay'* (Interaction, March 2010).

I realized that some of the students might not change their stances easily. 'Knowledge is constructed and reconstructed in the discourse between people doing things together' (Franklin, 1996, quoted in Wells, 1999, p. 58) so it was during responses that students built and refined understandings (Wells, 1999). However, dialogic is

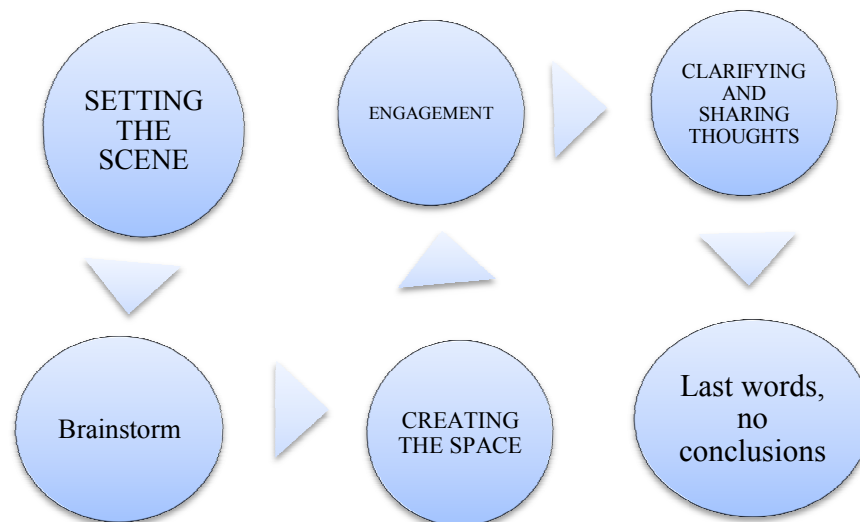
never free of argument as individuals try to enforce their opinions (Hatano & Inagaki, 1998).

The purpose of dialogic process, as Bridges (1979) sees it, is: neither to decide which view is right nor to build a single perspective, but to *understand* them in diversity (p. 38). External factors, such as power relations, stereotypes or presumptions that participants bring to a dialogic situation can limit understanding. Intimidation may cause some to be silent or withdraw from the dialogical situation. Thus teachers (and students) must acknowledge the potential of conflict that exist in society and in educational institutions. A context that encourages monologue cannot have communicative relations especially if members experienced insecurity or silencing in the past (Burbules & Rice, 1991). Farhan frequently allowed silences both after his own questions and after student responses, something that is rare in classroom interaction. These extended silences were helpful in getting the students to respond. The inclusion of silent participants is an enriching dimension of participation. Farhan explained, *'Thinking minds can reflect upon any texts used in the classroom regardless of how conventional these texts are... It is up to the teacher to bring them up, and ALLOW students to reflect upon them'* (Interview, 18/3).

The teacher must keep in mind these cultural and social differences, as well as power relations. A mere invitation for all to participate in a discussion is not enough.

### **5.2.6 The solution: establishing Safe Space**

To engage in dialogue demands a safe space between students and the teacher as well as between students themselves. A safe space does not mean that tension wouldn't arise, that disagreement will not be heated. It means to be able to disclose true feelings and stories of personal history relevant to the topics and reading material within the class. When students become comfortable with absence of a consensus, they can truly indulge in critical learning. Characteristics of Farhan's 'dialogic space' is shown in the figure below;



**Figure 5.1: Farhan’s ‘dialogic space’**

I believe a number of strategies were employed by Farhan, necessary for building this space, such as sharing writings in class. Students could hear views on given topics and respond to what others had to say (Details of farhan’s teaching strategies: Table 5.2 a, appendix).

At times the need to protect students as individuals came in way of Farhan’s commitment of examining issues of language and power. There were quite a few episodes that illustrated the complexities involved in constructing critical dialogic safe spaces. Through multiple readings, students interrogated the gender and cultural representations in short stories from multicultural literature. When given the opportunity, students demonstrated great energy and commitment, which is not possible to convey through transcripts. Mariam illustrates this point to some extent:

*...Yeah, I want to see the differences and accept them...I don’t have to say that the person is wrong or should be shunned simply because the person is different. I think this attitude can make a difference in the world (interview, 18/3/10).*

Reflections are triggered in the safe environment of the classroom, where similar and dissimilar cultural practices and views can be identified and juxtaposed. Soha realizes that the male mentality and women’s lack of confidence, submissive and obedient



nature are surprisingly similar despite the geographical distance (Class, 18/3). One of the most important themes in their reflections is the opportunity to share inner dialogues. Mariam remarked, *'this must be the most open discussion I've had in a classroom in my whole life ... you got to express your feelings openly ... what's right, what's wrong is confusing ... I like open discussions because you can give other people your point of view, but they also give you their point of view and you can think about that and consider that ...'*

However, whether from pressing administrative mandates of testing, or by fears that discussions of complex social issues might lead to uncertain outcomes, some teachers 'postpone' dialogue or have it as a 'once in a blue moon' debate. Some do not have a clear framework for negotiating dialogue. Unsure of how to proceed, they seek the comfort of the known rather than explore the possible. Students respected Farhan because he cared for them. In interviews, students indicated that they were aware of his commitment of building relationships, and they saw such commitment as evidence of his respect for them as learners,

*'You can tell Farhan is a good teacher because you can't look around the room and say that any one person is stupid!!'* [Soha, Interview 16/3/10].

The most beautiful moment of this space came when during discussion on 'the minister's black veil'. While Farhan was talking about how we deliberately drown the inner voice in 'loudness', suddenly one of the girls remarked, *'Umm (.....) no I was just thinking....'* And Farhan exclaimed;

*'Sssssh everyone (.....) let her think'* (Class 15/3/10).

For me those 5 or 6 seconds summed up the beauty of this dialogic space characterized by relations of involvement.

### **5.2.7 Recognition and Agency: Farhan relegating his powers!**

According to Brookfield (2002), the educator is not a bland facilitator, modeling happy tolerance of multiple perspectives. It is the educator's responsibility to make learners recognize how perceptions are colonized by dominant norms and ideologies. This is done by sharing power with the learners and giving voice to their experience.

Walsh (1991) describes how empowerment depends on the social and political context. Voices can be silenced in environments where power relations exist beyond the control of the individual. Farhan positioned his students so that they became part of the ‘dialogic space.’ There was no overt expression of authority in the classroom. Students felt relaxed in an atmosphere of mutual respect. By creating the ‘dialogic space’ Farhan facilitated conversation. Facilitation involved intervention to keep the conversation on track and to protect the rights of the marginalized. The dialogic instructor must share his or her voice appropriately with students. Knowing what to say and what not to say requires a sincere appreciation of others. As Umna remarked, *‘What I appreciated about this class was the opportunity to reflect.’*(Interview, 18/3/10).

Farhan thought that students regain voice when they are given opportunities to express their opinions in the classroom. The following interaction shows how Farhan gives up his position of authority. The teacher created an atmosphere of emotional safety where girls were encouraged to speak. The discussion extended to provoke curiosity and social consciousness. An atmosphere of openness is evident during dialogue about the story ‘the bamboo blind’ (the teacher Feigning ignorance in true Socrates’ fashion).

1. Farhan: what were we talking about last time? Can you recall?
2. Soha: yeah....education ... as a means of escape.
3. Farhan: escape?
4. Soha: well as a means of connecting with others , empowerment and a chance to escape
5. Mariam: we can feel what the word ‘prison ‘ in the story means for Raziya[...] she is young –you know she has different outlook , inspirations –believes
6. Sara: [\*\*\*] and the bamboo blind?
7. Amna : I know what’s a blind but I have never seen a bamboo blind
8. Mona: well I think it must be a blind of some sort.
9. Umna: I feel BLIND have deeper meanings here
10. Farhan: BRAVO! Carry on

The students engaged with each other and formulated an understanding of events in the story. Moreover, the teacher is present but not dominating the talk. This kind of

student-to-student interaction pattern is known as an open participation structure (Chinn et al., 2001). The students also take on multiple roles. They moved between the roles of facilitators, evaluators, and interrogators as they constructed an understanding built on each other's comments and challenged each other's views in order to make sense of the text. Finally, the above example shows that the role of the teacher is distinctly inconspicuous. Lehman and Peters (2001) argue, when a teacher's control over a discussion is strong, students tend to remember facts from the reading instead of questioning one another to interpret the text together. Farhan explained, '*My students experienced enlightenment as they came to realize that knowledge wasn't what I stuffed into them, but something which is already inside of them, waiting to come out*' (interview, 20/3/10).

Farhan suggested one interpretation of '*The birth mark*', Mariam, a second; perspectives were triggered by the dialogue. Students felt relaxed in an atmosphere of mutual respect. It is an essential human need to be recognized as a whole being. An individual becomes empowered when this need is satisfied and acknowledged (Taylor, 1997). Empowerment is in exercising agency. Agency was fostered as class interacted with each others, including the professor who supported dialogic discourse that helped construct all as empowered 'selves.'

Huda acknowledges discovery and possibilities, '*I can sense a great change in the way I feel and think about things. It's like the very texture of my mind has changed... a lot, [...] I feel competent and confident* (interaction 20/3).

### **5.2.8 Farhan's instructional strategy: interaction and analysis**

Farhan employed various techniques to support students' participation in the dialogic process. To demonstrate interventions adopted by the teacher, one strategy (follow-up questions), which was used for a variety of purposes is described here. The students were involved in group discussion and enacted a stilted discussion marked by awkward pauses and little in-depth treatment of topic. Farhan stepped in to highlight what the students were doing (retelling) and to suggest a question for discussion. The following excerpt picks up at this point.

1. Farhan: And, how would you have felt if you were Raziya walking in, knowing that you are not a part of the family like everybody else [Pause]
2. Zara: Sad. Teacher [ long pause]
3. Farhan: OK [moves his hands in a circular motion, trying to get other students to jump in].
4. Farhan: Are you guys going to let her get away with just saying sad?
5. Amina: Sad and...
6. Huda: [..]
7. Zara: Embarrassed.
8. Mariam: should I be feeling anything ... I mean I can ignore them all !  
[ class session 3/04/10]

Students hesitantly began to answer teacher's question but used one-word answers. Knowing that one-word answers would not facilitate a rich discussion, Farhan elicited follow-up questions from the students, '*Are you guys going to let her get away with just saying 'sad'?*' This elicitation indirectly indicated to students that one-word answers such as 'sad' were not sufficient. Later girls picked up the cue.

24. Farhan: are there any oppressing forces working here?
25. Sara: yeah I get you –the word 'EAT UP' [...] I mean the relations consume you sometimes
26. Farhan: very good ---so what is this leading us to –umm I wonder!
27. Umnia: relationships ....

The students and teacher had built up shared knowledge and learned when to use it (Mercer, 1995).

### **5.2.9 Orchestrating dialogue**

Language is the means by which students gain knowledge and power. It's the process through which they gain agency, and learn to question the social systems. As the students engaged in the discussions, they became change agents, redefining their lives. The dialogue below shows girls gradually getting involved. The posture of the teacher gave them a comfortable space.

7. Farhan: OK, you guys are on track right here. Zara shared something and Mizna replied. You guys asked both Zara and Mizna to explain a little bit more. And Amina just felt that she wanted to share something, She didn't wait to be asked, Amina, thanks for jumping in.

So What other things did you think, that strike you in the story, that you really wanted to talk about//

[At first two girls answered then more got involved, Farhan continued to write on the white board as he exclaimed, 'tell me more.']

8. Farhan: the choice should be available to girls too (.)\*okay\*

9. Farhan: Would anyone else like to add to that? How did you find the story? +++

10. Mariam: .... the story?

[The story wasn't read by all]

11. Soha: plastic surgery is like (....) Playing God...It's like killing the person, --- accept me as I am!!

12. Huda: Yes. +++()

13. Farhan: how would you describe her as?

14. Mariam: I would describe her as... challenging

15. Farhan: So her family expected her to be....

16. Soha: +++ Maybe they criticize her

17. Farhan: the choice should be available to girls too (.....)

18. Soha: Are girls frail?

20. Mariam: It is cultural programming

21. Zara: we actually want acceptance (.)

22. Mariam: but WHOSE acceptance?

23. Farhan: yes guys, critical issues is who decides what is wrong, (stepping in)

24. Mariam: Society sets standards//why do women have to change

25. Farhan: \*okay\* is it because men are holding back the knowledge [Tough question]

Farhan's facilitation kept the conversation on track. Students' having greater space than the professor is evidence of a shift in power relations. Farhan said,

*'Students should be given the time to think and reflect upon what they are reading. I notice that teacher ask their own questions. Why can't students ask? Their questions are valuable. It is important to give students space to think, question.... We teachers are sometimes driven by the desire to enforce our ideas' (Interview-March, 2010).*

The Students' progress shows their gradual transition to empowerment. Students were learning and using conversational strategies to pull others into the conversation. Mariam goes on to say, 'it's something you just do not realize until you get to this point and then you're suddenly like AHA [laughs] that's what dialogue was about...'

For Mariam 'a light flash' occurred (Bakhtin 1986: 162) and she moved to a position where she is part of a community of scholars and can see it as 'interesting' to her.

Compositions reveal evidence of emotional and linguistic growth of students. Their views on indicate a favourable environment. I was interested in knowing the driving force behind the passion for dialogue so I asked Farhan, during one of the interviews and he replied,

*'Education is about impressions, Nayyer; I learned this from personal experience... Not all teachers are die-hard critical practioneers...they learn from experience.' 'So how do you de-programme the learners who are so used to the feeding model of learning', [I wanted to know, and Farhan replied], 'Well I try Nayyer –yes I agree... it's hard work Sometimes the children feel lost, when they shift in between teachers who give them space for thinking and the ones that do not, but we must keep trying (16/3/2010).*

The teacher's role in orchestrating the classroom discourse is important but we must also consider the students' perspectives, as individuals in specific cultural settings. According to Mercer (1995, p. 50): 'appreciating the learner's angle on classroom conversations means recognizing that learners have their own interpretations of events'. Thus, the communicative approach cannot be mapped out by the teacher alone. We must consider all contextualization cues.

Observing these sincere efforts and ideals of the teacher led me to investigate whether the students experienced a change in their perspectives. My second research question explores influence of dialogic process in fostering participants' ability to construct

new understandings that influence a shift in perspective. Key to understanding the intent of this question was interpretations of the constructs which have been defined in earlier chapter.

### **5.3 Research Question 2: Influence of dialogic Process on Thinking and perspectives**

In critical education, people develop power to perceive their existence critically. They come to see the world not static, but as a reality in process, in transformation (Freire, 2000). Well-constructed discussions can promote students' understanding of concepts explored in class (Dillon, 1994). In Farhan's class discussions provided freedom to explore ideas, especially about controversial issues. Through dialogue, participants challenged each other's perspectives. The girls valued the opportunity to be able to engage in dialogue. This experience resulted in a shift in their perspective based on sharing of ideas, as Sara remarked:

*'Discussion gives me the opportunity to learn about different views. I like the way Dr Farhan allows us to share our views. It really helped me to see others' point of view, it helped me grow' (23/3/2010).*

Mariam said, *'My expression has broadened.... The professor allowed us to speak from the heart and from that, we learned a lot about ourselves.... I've learned more about myself and my abilities than any other time in my life' (Interview 15/3/2010).*

In interviews and written evaluations students in both classes thought they learned from responding and questioning. From students' views Farhan's connectedness was central to success of dialogue as student crossed over from received to constructed knowledge. Students' joy at engaging in the class seemed to stem from this feeling of growing as a person and as a student. I was impressed with the sophistication and civility with which girls engaged in dialogue. Students respected each other's perspective with respectable talk style as they agreed, and disagreed with their peers. Soha confirmed the positive effect of dialogue. During an interview she said, *'It was awesome to be able to share my perspectives and hear others' viewpoints, discussions have clarified lots of issues for me' (15/3/2010).*

Amna pointed out:

*'Reflecting on the story...I thought how it connects to what I am expected to do and about the choices I make. It forced me to think about what I was learning. I really liked how teacher acknowledged everyone's questions and engaged us. It helped us see others' struggle and thinking'* (interview, 16/3/2010).

Compositions also reveal participants' changed perspectives due to dialogic learning. Students' writings focused on (a) content learned; (b) questions/comments about content and (d) how content related to life. I found evidence of reflective thinking, and changed perspective in their writings.

They students learnt to trust the validity of their own ideas and experiences and to recognize that literary works deal with real, relevant issues that they themselves can and do write about. Their writing was detailed, emotional and analytical confirming the subtle transformation they had gone through. Umna explained, *'dialogue makes you think in differently... prompt you to think how you can out smart your opponent or, you know, counter arguments and stuff like that, and stimulates to work that much harder'* (interview, 21/3.10). The student uses energy-laden words such as 'out smart' 'arguments' and 'stimulated,' capturing the sense of language as a 'living interaction' (Vološinov 1986: 41).

Perception and perspectives are unique to each individual. Individuals interpret and speak about same objects from different perspectives. In this case there were 20 individuals and understanding their perspectives was important. Therefore, participants had to make a persistent attempt to understand each other's perspectives. This sometimes caused the 'reluctant' to be silent or withdraw from the dialogical situation. Any shift in perceptions was hard to gauge, but with the number of different data sources, I was able to gain some understanding sought in my research.

### **5.3.1 Dialogic Process Influence upon thinking**

Dialogue exists between equal humans. If one speaks and the other is not allowed, domination occurs. For Freire (2000), the relationship between students and teacher is interrelated in equal ways. Data demonstrates a consensus among the participants that dialogic results in growing understanding of the text as the interpretations and



perspectives of others are also given consideration. The participants identified factors influencing comprehension. These include: reading an ambiguous text closely with open-ended questions; a discussion that is dominated by students, open-mindedness and making connections between prior knowledge and new knowledge.

Soha said; *'whereas English teachers are often interested in doing justice to books and writers, Dr Farhan is interested in us too. In his class our views are valued'* (16/3/10). However, one of the major difficulties in dialogue documented in this research was that students felt shy in discussing controversial issues specially the ones unrelated to their cultural knowledge.

The fourteen compositions that I selected for analysis, demonstrated enhanced awareness of issues. There were no generalizations, but specific words from participants. Secondly, when a person was firm, the students who were refuted were named and evidence was given by the writer. Analysis and elaboration continued as dialogue continued. Students continued the oral dialogue and moved it into written form (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). Dialogic theory suggests that a different approach to education is possible, through which multiple perspectives can be encouraged and valued (Wegerif, 2008).

### **5.3.2 Using and giving space**

In his study, Nystrand (1997) found that teachers who organized instruction dialogically also established positive classroom culture. In my study, the classroom was a safe place for the students to express their ideas. Farhan welcomed and valued students' ideas. He also treated each student as an important member of the classroom community. Farhan used the classroom space while teaching, as he asked questions he often moved in close proximity with the students and interacted with both individuals and groups during the lesson.

Unlike the autocratic instructions, the teacher's voice in the dialogic space was enabling for all voices. Students were learning and using conversational strategies to pull others into the conversation. However, they were still overlooking or failing to include quieter or difficult students. Farhan therefore continued to play the central role

in guarding the marginalized. Transcript below illustrates how Farhan steps in; noting Umnia was assuming her way was the only way, to make sure all opinions were heard.

1. Umnia: What about you, Alina? Did you say that because...sometimes you don't want to love your new mom because you don't want to forget about your real mom.
2. Zara: If you were the dad, how would you feel if you needed a wife?
3. Umnia: What? Wait, we need to go in order [gestures in circular motion]
4. Farhan: Is that something you need to do or is that something you want to do? (...)  
Umnia, we don't need to go in a circle, this is a dialogue!
5. Umnia: I thought going in a circle would be more organized.
6. Farhan: Well, we could certainly discuss that[...]

Transcripts reveal evidence of emotional and linguistic growth of students and empowerment leading to maturity. They wrote stories that showed new perspectives were slowly being constructed. During brief conversations before class began, Farhan remarked:

*'I have come to believe that students must be involved in making decisions about their own learning. If I make all their decisions, I deny them the opportunity of setting their own purposes. ... I do not believe that children learn by our telling them what they should remember; rather they must construct understandings by integrating new information with prior knowledge. My role as a teacher is to help them understand this process. I see my role more as a facilitator'. (23/3/10).*

Critical theorists urge teachers to create opportunities for the students to gain an understanding of power in all its manifestations (McLaren, 1999). The oral and written responses of the students showed new perspectives were slowly being constructed. They understood that life offers opportunities and snags. This exercise in empathy and concern for others resulted in raised social consciousness. Dialogue began a process through which students started thinking about shaping their own realities. Farhan consciously selected stories that supported acceptance of diversity. An added element was the role of acquiring a second language because along with linguistic development there is the social dimension. The classroom was a microcosm

where I examined an unfolding process that allowed students to discover their potentials. Dialogic served as a vehicle to redefine learning as a social, cultural, and intellectual activity.

### 5.3.3. Engaged discussions that challenged previous perspectives

Research suggests that well-constructed classroom discussions can nurture critical thinking and reasoning (Gall & Gall, 1990). Following interaction depicts how dialogue moves on two levels.

30. Farhan: FEAR! What was she afraid of? Yes mariam you smiled! I guess you can guess what the girl was feeling like?
31. Mariam: yeah () well kind of (...) she was afraid she will lose her identity
32. Farhan: identity and food!!! That's food for thought (laughs) do you think about food like that?
33. Sara: YEAH, sure the way we cook and eat (...)
34. Zainab: and if some ingredient is missing.....from our food ...our lives
35. Farhan: AHA!!
36. Mariam: food won't be the same!
37. Soha: we won't like it
38. Sara: and we will be very sad
39. Farhan: what about you Nayyer (including me in dialogue) are you specific about food too?
40. Me: yes of course , the ingredients , manner of cooking even the serving dishes count, the way we cook and serve reveals our feelings towards the family...the guests.
41. Farhan: do you think it's only about food or is there something else bothering her!
42. Sara : food is only an expression , to show what she may miss deep down she is afraid of second marriage(...) no in-fact the children she will be moving in with
43. Farhan: (smiles ...)

Farhan doesn't comment further, as if deliberately allowing the thoughts to 'brew' and sink in. The dialogue continued and progressed based on the life experiences of all. The talk that involved food, love, marriage ended up on perspectives. There was a shift in the 'long held' ideals. This shift came not through 'telling' but by subtle 'showing of the mirror' so to say. A small peep into the selves went a long way in

developing new perspectives. Some of the girls considered the author's point of view as valid some agreed with each other but even in that agreement the position they took was their own.

Students said that dialogic sessions stimulated and challenged their thinking about issues and motivated them to know about others' perspective. The teacher and students relished the philosophical over the mundane as a wide range of perspectives were asserted and rebutted. The enthusiastic flow of questions was evidence of students being involved.

Exploratory talk created a contextual foundation that promoted connection to the text in ways that went beyond basic, literal thought. From a socio-cultural view of learning through dialogue, the students made thoughtful comments because the context and continuity of their conversations allowed them to do so. The following interaction shows gradual construction of new perspectives.

1. Mariam: I notice the hidden power relations here () the characters are 'gendered' by the writer. I believe our attitudes are all guided by culture.
2. Farhan: Umm....So where are you in the text Amna?
3. Amna: I want to become a revolutionary.... and remove inequalities and injustice.
4. Soha: I *did not know* that the story had so much. I thought... in reading, as long as meanings became clear, we would understand everything.
5. Umnia: I can see what you mean, the stories have much more to offer than word meanings....they are about relationships, about how others feel
6. Farhan: 'others' (...) like us !! Umna can you talk more about this  
( class session on 'the bamboo blind'. 25/3/2010)

During one of the interviews, I asked students what they gained by dialogue. I enquired, '*While studying literature you have evidence for an assertion in the text you are reading. When you come to the class with evidence from the texts, do you ever change your position?*' They all agreed their point of view changed when they learned about the perspectives of others. They acquired analytical skills. I asked the girls if the session made a difference in any manner and Waffa replied;

*'yeah... I think now I can see, people are struggling most of the time ...that's only because they don't accept differences and that's basically what I gained from dialogue. It's like better understanding of differences and acceptance of differences. (23/3/2010).*

In spite of enjoying firm positions, students acknowledged the importance of being able to change a position. Waffa was a good example. At the beginning of the story, 'the bamboo blind,' she passionately argued in favour of the protagonists. During the session, several students argued against the characters being totally innocent. In the end waffa saw their point and wrote about her changed opinion. These changes indicate the influence that dialogue had upon her reading of the text. By bringing up things that otherwise go unnoticed, teachers can open a space in which students could consider who they are as they critique what culture tells them they should be.

The girls of the focus group acknowledged the importance of being open minded. The level of open mindedness and willingness however varied. When interviewed, Sara said, *'I am interested to hear everyone's ideas... [We] need to listen to others more and not just ourselves, so we get broader view of things'*. While Umnia said, *'I had some pretty strong ideas...when I am dead set I rarely change my mind. If I don't have a firm idea about something, then I am easily influenced, depending on where the information comes from'*. Overall, the consensus was that dialogic influenced their thinking about life and people around them (Focus group dialogue, 23/3/2010).

Interestingly, students knew each other's positioning as well and acknowledged their peers' positions too. Soha, a die-hard liberal, enjoyed hearing Maiam's conservative arguments. She said, *'I always love hearing Mariam speak during discussions just because she always has conservative views, but it is still balanced. It always changes my opinion closer to the center'* (23/3/2010).

Students valued the dialogic process and agreed that dialogue influenced their thinking about text. They utilized questions to shape the reading experience, they understood its purposes and they were unanimous in understanding the positive impact it had on their learning. Most of the students felt that the dialogic should be preferred over lectures (interview, 20/3).

I chose to analyze writing assignments as well because previous research has shown students appropriate the topic of discussions and a schema for argumentation (Anderson et al., 2001) developed during discussions and apply them in their writing tasks. Soha's post session writing demonstrated analysis and use of evidence. Her in-class notes reflected that she actively interacted with the information and in writing assignment she demonstrated that she had changed her opinion on an issue. Zara who found the sessions 'interesting' and appreciated the sharing of opinions said that sometimes she felt 'saturated' and did not want to write about the story anymore. Sara and Mona preferred writing essays at the beginning of the sessions because they thought 'after wards the class becomes unified in opinion.' Changes in perspectives viewed through Students' writing were substantiated by what the individuals said during the sessions and what they said during their interviews.

**Table: 5.2 Students' views of Dialogue**

Enthusiasts	Quieter ones
<p><b>Soha :</b>  <i>we talk about any issue for quite awhile... you say what you think and other people can agree and disagree.</i></p>	<p><b>Aysha:</b>  <i>I thought about the story and listened to what others said though I didn't talk much.... But I know more</i></p>
<p><b>Mariam:</b>  <i>I liked bamboo blind the best because everyone had an answer... and they were our own....</i></p>	<p><b>Aala:</b>  <i>The discussions helped me question myself more....</i></p>
<p><b>Umnia :</b>  <i>Asking questions...giving evidence and proving your ideas is fun...  We try to think about what to say and we find a part in the text that supports our idea....and explain to people what the idea is.</i></p>	<p><b>Meliha:</b>  <i>There are more answers in the text than I had thought. I felt shy to talk but I enjoyed listening to others.</i></p>

I noticed, the shy ones averted gazes, making it difficult for me to determine if they were listening or engaged. However, I think most of the girls participated because they entered the conversation with short comments and questions. Students' comments show intellectual growth and excitement towards dialogic learning.

### **5.3.4 Farhan's perspective on 'perspectives'**

Farhan's perception of how 'dialogue' influences students' thinking about text was clear and well articulated. In his interview he said: *'Students listen and see different perspectives in dialogue.'* He went on to say, *'It comes down to whether you want the students to think and remember or feed them', of course, because of this you can't cover everything in syllabus, so you must keep balance between coverage and intellectual growth.'* He said that the three essential components were: *'good questions, reflection and high levels of participation'* (Informal chat before class, 16/3/2010). Two comments that Farhan often made were the need of teaching students to question and providing students a safe space where they would feel comfortable to challenge views of others as well as their own. He remarked:

*'I want the students to get closer to reality. The world is a complex place. Having students develop multiple perspectives makes it easy for them to understand complexity. We unfortunately, push them to uniformity'* (Informal chat before class, March 2010).

### **5.3.5 Understanding difference**

The interviews and discussions reveal a deepening understanding of issues among the participants. There was some evidence that participants moved to a deep understanding about themselves and others. Participants expressed that dialogic influenced their understanding. This new understanding was revealed in their work and in the language they used to describe their experience.

Farhan noted that students should read and discuss texts to expand their understandings of other cultures. It helps students (a) see that not everyone shared their belief systems and (b) raise important questions about the stances they took on different issues. Therefore, teachers needed to include multicultural texts that represented racial, ethnic, and social classes and that presented a number of perspectives.

As students learn how to engage, they realize how their views influence their interpretations of texts and interactions with people. This can be difficult. Students sometimes resisted reading texts in ways that require them to examine their own

beliefs and actions or that were not in line with their cultural and social expectations. They felt uncomfortable moving beyond their views of the world and in reading and discussing texts that challenge their ideas. Additionally they sometimes felt it wasn't their place to question dominant beliefs or to critically examine others' beliefs. Often, most girls had strong ideas about morality and values, viewing themselves as guardians of such values, and so were less inclined to discuss controversial issues. Farhan however thought, '*Critiquing hegemonies through reflection could lead to transformation.*' Table below displays Participants' views

**Table: 5.3 Attitudes towards cultural specific references & bias**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Data / Views Recorded</b>
<b>Farhan</b> Resolve	<i>Education is about empowering, about questioning the status quo, not necessarily to exclude people, and perpetuate a system of exclusions, but to create a system that is inclusive, of gender, ethnicity, cultural and social differences. It's about education ... a democratic system of progress and transformation</i>
<b>Umna</b> Comfortable with gender differences	<i>Although the topic was controversial I felt comfortable discussing it, I enjoyed the discussion and found it thought provoking, I don't think it would be different with a female teacher, we heard about issues we had taken for granted and I don't think a woman would have been able to offer such a perspective.</i>
<b>Huda</b> Resistance	<i>I found the topic controversial as it questioned traditions, however, I didn't find it a problem to write about it, I also felt uncomfortable when the teacher asked whether or not seeing a man with a pram was sexy, I would have felt easy to discuss issues with a female teacher</i>
<b>Zara</b> Awareness	<i>Majority of us have fixed ideas of our roles ---you know as women ... through dialogue ... I kind of experienced a mirror! I saw my 'self'!! . sharing also helped me transcend gender specific ways of talking</i>

An overriding impression was that dialogic represented a unique learning experience that provided an opportunity to 'actually' meet with peers and dialogue in order to appreciate their differences.



### 5.3.6 Modern Socrates!

In accepting his ignorance, Socrates accepts that there is a real difference between knowledge and mere opinion. Dialectic results in intellectual progress through critical evaluation of diverse perspectives. Socrates believed that enabling students to think for themselves was more important than filling their heads with right answers. Wegerif and Mercer (1997) emphasized that students need to have the openness for alternative perspectives.

Farhan of course followed Socrates' path; I observed this towards the end of dialogue about Oedipus Rex. The play was not only difficult but had alien references and issues the girls felt a bit shy to discuss with their male teacher. Having students question another text was one way to involve students in dialogue about the text they were finding difficult. In the excerpt below, while briefly discussing Hamlet's views about Gertrude. Farhan begins by asking Rehana what Hamlet means when he calls his mother, 'common'.

1. Farhan: Claudius turns to Gertrude, and Gertrude tells Hamlet not to grieve. That if you live long enough, your father dies. It's a common experience. Then Hamlet calls her 'common.' What is the connotation? What is 'COMMON'?
2. Rehana: (refers to the book) It says here that it still hurts.
3. Farhan: Common when it hurts, ok () have you ever called anyone common?  
What else could it mean? (long Pause)

Students thus become members of a narrative audience.

Also important was the kind of language that all the participants were using in this exchange (including the teacher): *'I don't know', 'I can't really tell', 'I'm not sure'*. These words express uncertainty and signal openness of members of this class to multiple perspectives and possibilities. Especially interesting is the use of 'I think' by the teacher, through which he indicates the possibility of other ideas.

Rehana exclaimed, *'The discussion about text was an eye opener. I always used to believe whatever is given in the textbook as truth; today I learnt that we should not accept everything blindly'*. (3/04/10). Discussion provided an opportunity to critique

other views and challenge long-held assumptions. This was evident on occasions when the girls changed their stance.

Transcripts bear evidence that the day witnessed good dialogue with substantial amounts of analysis and elaboration. If students are allowed to maintain open minds, their thoughts develop and mature in the process. The outcome of true dialogic as depicted in the transcript below

Farhan: SO do you think blindness helped [...]  
The one who can see, sees nothing (Oedipus);  
the one who can't see, sees more clearly.  
Umnia: How can you say that sir ...he is still confused isn't he?  
Farhan :Who is Oedipus?  
Umnia: I get it .... The Oedipus who had physical sight has been living a life of self deception  
Mariam: yeah....Are there truths about ourselves that we cannot see now, but we might some time.... Should we consider ourselves responsible for the mistakes we make, or blame some evil demon which makes us do them?  
Farhan: umm...interesting thoughts girls !!!

### 5.3.7 Making connection

There was a strong agreement among participants that dialogue can deconstruct previously held perspectives and construct new ones. Umna thought, the quality of argument can persuade the 'fence sitters'. Conversation between Mariam and Sara provides an instance of such persuasion.

7. Mariam: I like how complicated your notions are. It's not simply related to economic status or to age, How can you live without some relation?  
8. Sara: Also, need isn't always mutual. So it's hard to think about this as need. But if you say these kids need a mother, that makes one feel good....yeah...that's a human thing....so I guess you have a point (class session, 24/3/10)

Through dialogic chain of utterances, Sara shares a thought, that is half hers and half someone else's. Soha narrated story about her own upbringing. Her story diffused the notion that affection is only associated with homes of particular cultures.

*'The culture of the home I think plays a role. My family was physically affectionate, so my friends would come over and say, "I can't believe your dad just said he loved you, you know, like, Mine would never say that out loud.'* Soha by telling about her family set up a dialogue among characters and herself (class session, 15/3/10).

Using a Bakhtinian discourse lens, we can understand how the students were sharing and constructing internally persuasive narratives in dialogue with others, how they positioned themselves in relation to stories, themselves and others. The answer to the research question would be incomplete if the problem or interferences within the setting were not analyzed. Both the students and the teacher commented on how the busy schedule and the two international conferences disturbed the routine of the classes somewhat. However, I feel the data were rich because they came from real setting that teachers and students live and work in. The data adequately met the needs of this research and actually added some new dimensions.

From the input of all of the participants, it was evident, that students read complex texts on controversial issues and: i) acknowledged the perspectives and interpretations of others, ii) gained in-depth understanding, iii) and constructed complex view of the issues. Farhan's critical analysis of socio-political issues, served as a starting point for students' own opinion-formation and critical development that began (or continued) the processes of critical consciousness. The students caught his critical rhythm and took cues confirming that critical readings can open up possibilities for transformation of social structures.

Mercer (2008) argues that conceptual change cannot be understood without considering the role of dialogue. People share ideas, considering and changing them through spoken interaction. The discourse opens different points of view, but there is no comparing and contrasting. Whereas the teacher can adopt an approach to establish how the ideas relate to one another.

Farhan: *Sara thinks that this might be the case, but Sana seems to be suggesting something different. Noor what do you think?*

The second approach involves a higher level of interanimation of ideas. Farhan clearly opts for the second approach as shown by the transcripts quoted above. The students agreed on some points and disagreed on others, but worked together to understand

difference. The agreeing and disagreeing constitutes an ongoing dialogic discourse that opens different perspectives. Excerpts provide a sense of how teachers' constructivist stance promotes students' understanding in discussion (Langer, 1995). As students become accustomed to dialogue, they respond to the ongoing conversation (Bakhtin, 1986). The nature of their participation in the classroom is based on their understanding of the particular culture of that classroom (Knoeller, 1998). If that culture allows possibilities (Bruner, 1986), the discourse will invite multiple perspectives to help students open their minds.

Negotiation of multiple perspectives, ideas, and ways of expressing has become a central topic in literacy research (Nystrand, 1997). It stems in part from number of studies that have found how classrooms block students' perspectives or voices (Hull, Rose, Fraser, & Castellano, 1991). Kinloch (2008), focusing in particular on African American high school students, showed evidence of stifling of students' voices in high school writing classrooms and urged teachers to encourage student choice and voice (p. 86). Knoeller (2004) examined students' rethinking in an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse AP English class. In this ethnographic study, Knoeller showed how students' ideas and perspectives developed and evolved as a result of class discussion.

Participants in my study felt a fundamental shift in their attitudes. Zainab felt she *'didn't exist to anyone'* in other classes, but the collaborative *'talk in open-minded ways'* gave her a social existence that affirmed her sense of herself as a reader and thinker. Mariam thought her learning was *'so much about herself'* As she learned *'to open up mind'* she became *'aware of things through different perspectives'* and she saw *'a different world full of detail'* in which she *'felt confident to speak out.'*

#### **5.4 Research question 3: dialogic as a learning strategy**

My 3<sup>rd</sup> research question discusses 'dialogic' as a learning strategy. I examined how teacher and students perceived their dialogic experiences and the influencing forces. The participants considered dialogic to be a positive experience. I wanted to know if this positive experience would transfer to writing assignments (FN-, 22/4/10). Do readers benefit from the discussions? If yes, in what ways? I sought answers of my

question in the compositions that Farhan usually gave as assignments at the completion of the text.

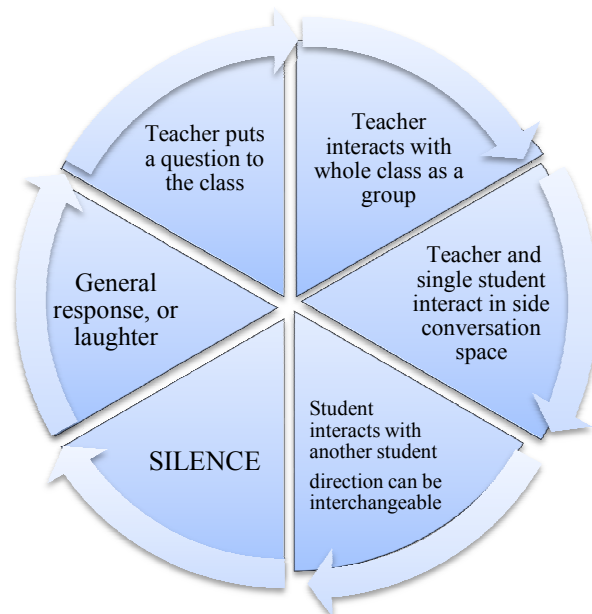
During a group interaction (25/3/10), I asked to ascertain how students felt about reading through dialogic as opposed to other readings. The students indicated that it motivates them and is a positive influence. Their responses included phrases like, *'I get the opinions of others' reading,* *'I take better notes,* *'I am more careful,* and *'I am looking for points I can use in the argument'*. All felt it allowed evidence gathering, promoted thoroughness and focused reflection and thinking. One student differed, saying she *'was more into listening'*. I asked what they thought the purpose of the dialogic was. The answers were, *'to gain deeper understanding,* *'exchange and develop ideas,* *'think independently and analyze critically'*. One student added amusingly, *'and the teacher knows if we really read the text!'* (interaction, 20 /3).

Moving from a teacher-centered class is never easy. Sometimes the students are resistant to changes. So I enquired from the girls, *'to what extent had the experience been different (if at all)?'* The girls found the strategy interesting and different. They all had been exposed to discussion before, but in other forms and manner. Sara said, *'What impressed me is that when I try to engage in reading and writing, that's my major focus, I never used to.... THINK... really.'* Amina believes that students during lectures do not understand, but only repeat. This led me to the second question, whether the exercise was different in any way from other discussions they have had. Each girl offered examples of discussions they had participated in but found their previous experiences unsatisfactory. *'In Farhan's class it's different we can make decisions'*, Umna exclaimed, *'we can ask questions, show our confusions, and reflect and take time.'* Mariam agreed, *'Yeah, those are the three things I find different, freedom to ask, express and take time'* (Focus group interview, 24/3/2010).

#### **5.4.1 Open and Closed Patterns of interaction**

To prompt further elaborations, Farhan usually gave feedback instead of evaluation of student's response (that's interesting; tell me a little more. . .). This pattern of interaction generated interaction chains of an I-R-P-R-P-R- form. The prompt [P] by Farhan was followed by response from the student [R]. Sometimes Farhan closed the chain by a final evaluation (I-R-P-R-P-R-E), but mostly sequence remained open (I-R-

P-R-P-R-). Students also initiated a sequence by posing questions. Most of the time different students responded to each other generating a complex I-Rs1-Rs2-Rs3 chain. These complex chains of interaction show increasing engagement among students. Farhan scaffolded students' thinking through statements such as: 'OK, can we read the text again and see what we can find; can you connect that with what Mariam said?' And 'for whom is Hawthorne writing?' (Class, 23/3/2010) Farhan used open chains of interaction (with no evaluative feedback) to support an interactive and dialogic approach to explore students' views. By adopting this approach, the teacher sets a climate for fruitful engagement which becomes apparent as the class becomes involved in making substantive (and passionate!) contributions to the discussion. Figure below shows the dialogic strategies adopted by farhan.



**Figure-5.2: Dialogic strategies**

Here I present an episode of exploratory talk, when students went beyond sharing their ideas. They worked together to produce an understanding of the story. Students pool their thinking in order to make meaning together. Exploratory talk characterizes the collective work of students as they use language, reason together and formulate meaning (Mercer, 1995). The collective reasoning is an intellectual activity that takes place in discussions as students build new understandings together (Mercer, 2000). From Mercer's (1998) point of view, exploratory talk is co-reasoning, 'where students (sometimes with the teacher) share relevant knowledge, evaluate evidence, and consider ideas in an equitable way' (Wilkinson et al. 2006, p. 28). Three essential elements include, reasoning for opinions, alternative views, and challenging each

other's ideas in critical but constructive ways (Mercer, 2000). Table below displays an example of exploratory talk from the session, 'the bamboo blind.'

**Table 5.4– Exploratory Talk Turns**

Turn	Student	Element of exploratory talk
9	<b>Mariam:</b> I think Razyia is over reacting. If she couldn't talk to her in-laws, she could've talked to her husband	Proposal stated/gives reason
10	<b>Soha:</b> Yeah, but remember she tried ...when she talks with her husband it's here on page 3...I think she takes him to be unwilling to listen.	Gives reason
11	<b>Amna:</b> (surprised) Oh, yes she did	
12	<b>Mariam:</b> Yeah, right there in the last paragraph.	Agrees to reason
13	<b>Sara:</b> remember her husband brushed her off	Alternative view
14	<b>Amna:</b> yes razyia does feel lonely because of him	Alternative view
15	<b>Mariam:</b> Yeah, but she should've tried more	Challenge to Sara's claim in turn 13; reason
16	Students: (overlap). I don't think it would've worked	
17	<b>Amna:</b> Maybe he really doesn't care.	Alternative view

In addition to providing reasons, students challenge each others' claims and opinions. Mariam challenged Sara's position (turn 15). As a result, the others considered the story rationally (turns 16 and 17). Students in discussions do not always take up a challenge, but in exploratory talk, students considered Mariam's challenges, responded with reasoning and relevant information. Participants used language as a tool to make reasoning visible and created new understanding (Mercer, 1995). In almost all cases, the discussions with higher densities of exploratory talk were the discussions that students said they enjoyed the most.

Although there is an element of what Mercer calls 'disputational' talk, which is conversation as a kind of competition (Mercer, 2000), changing minds during

dialogue was an interesting phenomenon. Transcripts demonstrated good dialogue with substantial amounts of analysis and elaboration related to the issues raised. If students maintained open minds, their thoughts developed. Being willing and open to evidenced persuasion by classmates is the result of analysis and elaboration.

This change was appreciated by the girls as well, as during a chat, Soha praised her class experience saying, *'well in the past...we'd sort of just go one side or the other, like... yes I agree with her... or no I don't... () we didn't THINK. Some would stick, and say ...no.. no. But yesterday it was really different. Like we all explored ... we were sort of talking about in more depth and saying ... HEY... wait, what about this?'* (Interview17/3/10)

Of the sessions I observed, very few reminded me of an IRE discourse pattern. Students rarely chased the 'right' answer. They asked their own questions and seemed to do most of the thinking. As Farhan began to wrap-up the discussion, he said, 'any final thoughts?' and Umnia replied, 'no closures! Right?' Farhan laughed a little as we walked out of the class, 'kids are enjoying learning, aren't they!'

#### **5.4.2 Dialogic and High-level Thinking about Text**

According to Palinscar and David (1991) dialogue is the 'window on the verbal thought in which children are engaged as they attempt to understand text' (p.127).

The nine discourse features I adapted from Soter et al.'s (2005) coding scheme were: authentic questions (AQ), generalization/analysis (GA), speculation (SP), affective connections (AC), intertextual connections (IT), shared knowledge (SK), references to text (RT), elaborated explanations (EE), and exploratory talk (ET). The features serve various functions in discourse. Most of the responses include at least one discourse feature that indicates high-level thinking, the comments reflect a kind of thinking that goes beyond the given about the text. Students asked authentic questions about the texts. These kinds of turns also included instances when students gave one-word responses to affirm or disconfirm a previous utterance (like, 'Yeah,' 'No,' -um'), when students faded out without completing idea (*Well, I think....*), when students asked procedural questions (*What page is that on?*), and when students agreed to another student (*you are right..*). Comments of some students reflected engagement in thinking that went beyond the literal details. Figure below shows examples of discourse from students that typify features of talk related to high-level thinking.



Student	Title	Turn	Indicators of high-level thinking
Soha	Minister's veil	Yeah, I too would like to hide my face and see the reaction of others.	Affective connection
Amna	The bamboo blind	They were rude, they used abusive language	Reference to text
Mariam	The bamboo blind	Umm... it's like someone that you didn't know you would still cry for them and feel for them.	Generalization/ Analysis
Mana	Hold the mayonnaise	I have a connection to girl. She is right in feeling afraid, it is in our culture well may be in all cultures not to speak ill of the dead. So she will walk in the shadow of the dead wife...always	Generalization/Analysis; Intertextual connection
Soha	Hold the mayonnaise	Food is only an expression, a concrete show of what she may miss deep down she is afraid of second marriage---no! in fact the children she will be moving in with	Generalization/ Analysis Elaborated explanation
Mariam	Hold the mayonnaise	yeah ( ) well kind of ( ) well may be she was afraid she will lose her identity	Speculation

**Figure-5.3: Indicators of high-level thinking**

Webb (1995) thinks students listen to elaborated explanations and benefit from these experiences because they have opportunities to understand the topic of discussion in better ways.

I chose the following discussions because they have discourse reflecting exploratory and problem-solving talk about the texts. These seem some of the best examples as they show how students would reason about the text and collaborate. The figure below shows excerpt from discussion showing higher level thinking:

Turns	Indicators of HLT coded in the turn
Mariam: Okay. Death by chocolate? That's weird! Who can die of chocolate	Authentic Question Generalization/ Speculation
Soha: I think the teacher is referring to the story hold the mayonnaise	Generalization/Analysis; Reference-to-Text;
Mariam: Okay (...), Yes the story about second marriage and food!	Elaborated Explanation Generalization/Analysis
Amna: food and above. Well she was afraid she will lose her identity, wasn't she?	Authentic Question
Soha: Uhm... food is only an expression , a concrete show of what she may miss deep down she is afraid of second marriage---	Generalization/Analysis Reasoning /cultural reference
Umnia: we revere the dead and create a picture perfect for them	Reasoning Reasoning /cultural reference
So you are always competing against that picture perfect'. When the wife is dead she is not criticized.	

**Figure-5.4: Excerpt from Discussion Showing High-level Thinking**

My study supported existing research and found that students challenged one another and that this helped them develop their thinking in dialogic discussion (Mercer, 1995, 2004; Nystrand 1997; Nystrand et al., 2003). However, my data showed that a teacher's instructional strategies need to support students so that they can practice new ways of thinking and discussing.

### 5.4.3 Reasoning transferred from Discussions in Writing Tasks

Farhan used writing exercises as pre-discussion and post-discussion activities. On three occasions during my observations he asked students to write a response before the discussion and then asked the students to write a response to the same text after the discussion.

To prepare students to grapple with this moral ambiguity, Farhan asked them to write, before 'The Birthmark' is assigned, about their own goals and the sacrifices they are willing to make to achieve them. The instructions for this write-before-you-read exercise and the results of Zara ten-minute musings are presented below

The pursuit of an ideal is the major aim of many people's lives. People strive to achieve their ambitions in many ways. For some, it may be to become rich, or become a doctor. My goal is to achieve excellence. It does not matter in what field or profession it is-the important thing is to be the best at what I am doing. As far as making sacrifices is concerned, I am willing to give up most of my material belongings to succeed in reaching my objective. I feel that sacrifices are inevitable when it comes to making major decisions in ones lives, to pursue our goal no matter what. (Writing Assignment: Write-before-you-read)

Such an assignment allowed students to examine their own ideas before they confront those presented through a story. This prepared them for a close reading and an enlightening class discussion of the literary work.

Students took different approaches to these assignments. Sara and Umna exhibited strong use of analysis and elaboration in their writing. They utilized persuasive citations from the texts. Waffa not only analyzed the text in writing, but made use of prior knowledge and finished writing with open-ended questions. Amna's style was direct, open and well organized. There certainly were multiple examples of students utilizing analysis and elaboration in their written work. The figure below shows different elements of argumentative structure that comprise elaborated thinking (Wilkinson, 2006) in each of the two responses. These are Soha's writing samples.

Pre-discussion writing	Post-discussion writing
I think we can all be sure about what a blind is [claim] because blinds are used in modern times too [reason]. And we are girls so we understand how Raziya feels [claim]. It seems that the story is about human emotions [reason].	It was an interesting story as it is about human psyche [claim]. It deals with the excitement of a girl who dreams of marriage as a way out of her situation [example]. I think the girl is excited about the new environment [reason]. She assumes there will be no blinds or obstacles in her new life [reason]. Of course the ending of the story is an anticlimax [claim]. I am very impressed by author's choice of the title too. It created interest in the story and gave a metaphorical association. [elaborated reasoning]

**Figure 5.5 Excerpt from compositions showing developed reasoning**

Soha's written responses and participation in discussion show that she appropriated the content of the discussion in her post-discussion response. Her reasoning in the post-discussion writing is more elaborate than the pre-discussion writing sample. In her first response, she made two claims and supported each claim with one reason. In the post-discussion response, Soha stated her position, provided an example of her position, and supported the position with reasons. The post-discussion writing reflects using discourse to reason about text; that is, state a view or make a claim and support the claim with a reason and evidence from the text (FN-22/3/10).

I do not claim that the students' discourse of reason in the written responses is a direct result of the discourse of group discussions but it is difficult to ignore improved reasoning in the post-discussion responses.

A socio-cognitive view of learning suggests that reasoning during discussions develops students' acquisition of a schema for reasoning which reflects in their writing tasks. Saunders et al. (1997) reported that discussions acts as both a

springboard and an anchor (p.45) for the students, meaning they could use this knowledge in ways that helped them in both the discussion context and other learning areas. So there is relationship between oral and written language, therefore, writing grows from talk (Britton, 1970). The data confirms that oral language (discussion) affects the experience of the learner in another context (writing).

Dialogue develops an understanding of text, and then, becomes a critical link between that understanding and written texts. Students benefited from dialogue in the same way. Their writing was another place where dialogic discourse continued (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000).

By engaging in dialogue students' ability of analysis was greatly enhanced. Soha thought if the teacher hadn't initiated a dialogue she wouldn't be able to share her knowledge openly with others (25/3/2010).

#### **5.4.4 Role of Questions**

Students usually do not spontaneously share responses if teachers do not encourage them to do so (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). Questions act as a frame for student. Open-ended questions allow risk taking, and initiate thinking process. Farhan posed questions to engage students in critique of issues relevant to their lives (Almasi, 2002; Roberts & Billings, 1999).

Leaving out any part of the process, can move a dialogic discussion to an IRE sequence, where the teacher questions for evaluation purposes and the students respond with right or wrong answers. Real dialogic discourse seldom occurs while IRE sequences are common (Alverman & Dillon, 1990; Applebee, 1996; Nystrand, 1997; Wells, 2000).

During an interview talking about the importance of dialogue, Farhan fondly remembered one British teacher of his college days, whose very first question to the class was, '*do you have some questions?*' Farhan smiled and remarked '*next time we had questions –lots of questions*'. '*So you were programmed like that,*' I remarked! '*Well I mean ... you learned the value of questions*'. '*Yes you can say that Nayyer --- yes every teacher leaves a mark, by creating space or suffocating students, I was*

*shown the value of QUESTIONS by that lady. Teachers teach the way they are trained. I leaned to seek deeper (...) under the skin of complexities' (15/3/10).*

Dr Farhan emphasized the importance of crafting open ended questions. He said, *'questions are related to what I want the students to learn'*. He went on to say, *'I keep the agenda in mind—the road map and observe where the young minds imaginatively flow.'* When I asked, *'what kind of questions generate dialogue'*, he said *'that evaluate generalizations and assumptions'*.

Farhan framed many of his questions in such a way that they were personalized. Roberts and Billings (1999) encourage personalizing the questions to motivate and make connections to real world. Some examples of personalized questions from sessions were: *'Does it do us any good to read about a story from another culture – people different from us –like for instance India'*; *'What part of the story surprised you the most?'* and *'do you see, feel bamboo blinds around you? (Class 16/3/10)*

After interviewing Farhan and examining his questions it seems fair to characterize his questions as purposeful, open ended, and personalized (connected to the lives of the students). Farhan also interjected informal questions during the session, complimenting his comments with his personal experiences. Farhan asked clarifying, or follow up questions, aimed directly at speakers, usually in an effort to encourage clarity. In one case the student said, *'I don't think we should....'* Farhan retorted, *'What is our call?'* He was not allowing the student to say something like this without explaining herself (Class, 18/3/10).

There are two kinds of questions, those that assess and that assist. The questions that assist, steer students into deeper understanding (Almasi, 2002). The questions posed by Farhan required interpretations, assertions and evidence. Questions were pivotal to higher-level thinking and comprehension that set the table for students to process through text analytically during the dialogic sessions.

During a focus group interaction I asked the girls, *'what do you think about the sessions'*, Zara very enthusiastically replied, *'The critical perspectives we've been gaining are just mind- blowing. Dialogue has broadened my horizon...reading made me rethink, sharing aided me to transcend gender specific ways of talking'*, Mariam

agreeing with Zara added, *'The main factor (...) the ENCOURAGEMENT from the teacher.. I think it depends very much on the teacher'* (15-18-22/3/10).

Students' comments suggest that they noticed and valued the qualities of dialogic learning. No student said *'we don't listen,' 'we argue with each other,'* or other kinds of comments that would suggest the students perceived their involvement in the discussions negatively.

Farhan further said, *'I am sure students can make more out of literature than I could tell them....The freeing nature of dialogue is to realize that you don't have to be the giver of knowledge, the bringer of all the meaning'* [ interview, 23/3/2010].

Farhan approached teaching through conversations in the narrative mode, and, to use Bruner's (1986) metaphor, transformed students' 'minds' through his sustaining vision of 'possible worlds' ( p. ii).

#### **5.4.5 Dialogic's Transformative Perspective**

Dialogic was a medium through which students experienced a change. They shifted voices from the confessional utterances of a struggling learner to the assertive voice of confident knower. The students changed and the change was in relation to each other; valuing their 'selves' and their classmates. There was no revolutionary change, nor was it intended by the teacher. However, the girls challenged the effects of subordination, a sign that girls wanted to explore possibilities. Farhan further explained:

*'I'm there to guide students to help them look at themselves and their own discoveries. I can help learners articulate their experiences. For meaningful learning to take place, an atmosphere of trust and respect must be there.... I see myself as equal to my students. They may be learning about life and literature and I am learning about them and about life through them!! changing myself in the process '* (Interview, 22/3/10).

Farhan was sure that learners develop voice when they are given opportunities to discuss their opinions in the classroom. Farhan's response to students' discourse was characterized by back-and- forth movement, rather than a linear mode of participation.

Some of the girls recalled negative experiences such as lack of enthusiasm from the unwilling and extra work. Reversing this negative attitude was also a transformation. Participants expressed that engagement increased their motivation and passion for the subject. Amna's interesting comment highlights this change:

*I now have new interests, and I am no longer fearful of language learning. I know that language is not just grammar and spelling. I understand that it is much more' (interview, 28/3/10).*

Evidence of transformative learning is that learners begin to value dialogue they were experiencing (Pugh, 2002) and become so deeply moved by it that they make changes in their own behavior and/or practice. Several participants evaluated their own experiences and reversed previous practices as Ummia explained: 'learning is about thinking I guess. This is so powerful for me. Dr farhan doesn't emphasize upon memorizing facts' (Interview, 23/3/10).

Transformative theorists contend that transformative learning occurs as individuals begin to examine themselves and personal frames of reference when exposed to meaningful learning experiences. It was heartwarming to see participants focus on themselves as individuals.

#### **5.4.6 Social Critic and Conscientization**

Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it (Freire & Shor, 1987, p.98). Merging formal teaching with social critique is not simple. It's also a fact that critical consciousness cannot flourish in a traditional, teacher-centered classroom.

Critical reflection; the careful questioning of practices, issues, and assumptions, is an important aspect of transformative learning. When learners begin to raise questions about society and its policies, it is an evidence of transformation. Dialogue provides opportunities to raise participants' consciousness about social issues.

Farhan noted that it was important to understand beliefs and biases to foster a critical mindset. Without such understandings students might select readings that promoted their own ideas and stereotypes. Farhan said,



*'We all have stereotypes and things that we value... But the thing is what we think and what we like could dictate the kind of books we make our students read. I know I might be more comfortable reading a book that I agree with and not having to deal with some crazy, difficult topic but I have to get over that. If all I do is find ways to get kids to read and talk about what I like then I'm forcing them into a box—my box. And I'm not helping them learn how to question the world around them'. When I asked him what he wanted for his students, he said he wanted all of them to 'think, make connections, and enjoy reading.' 'Yes you have a point here farhan', I replied, 'but don't you feel interaction 'wastes' your time ... I mean I have heard this from some teachers...we are always short of time! To do what nayyer? Farhan asked, Well curriculum and TESTING ! (was my reply).YEAH I get your point, but I believe -- skills are interrelated. THINKING is central, and related to reading and writing listening and speaking. If thinking is central... the focus should be on this skill, and the rest will be developed. Any curriculum can turn to a liberating curriculum if we highlight thinking as its major outcome' (Interview, 22/3/10).*

Farhan's efforts were acknowledged by the girls who were glad to have had this opportunity for intellectual and emotional exploration. In choosing texts that critiqued racism, sexism and prejudice, farhan invited students to participate in conversations about stories from intercultural perspectives traditionally left out of the literature conversation. He provided cultural information in conversation and through stories invited students to look through others' eyes (Greene, 1993). Discussion was central to this democratic vision (Bridges, 1979).

Evidence from discussion and writing in the class suggests that these students became quite conscious of the new strategies in the context of reading and thinking. In interviews they consistently spoke of themselves as readers making connections, asking questions, understanding the characters' thoughts and feelings. I found that many of the participants were challenged when their long held, but rarely questioned, views were open to critique. Some, while understanding the dynamics, had significant trouble identifying how ethnicity influenced their lives.

By exposing un-interrogated views and assumptions, girls began to challenge not only their own experiences of identity, but also the assumptions about marginalize and privilege people in wider social contexts [class observations, 21/3].

### **5.5 Would dialogue be in any sense possible?**

Mercer (1995) stated that dialogic discussion was rarely found. Instead, most classroom discussion happens as an IRE sequence. Research also suggests that when discussions are more controlled by the teacher, the teacher's roles are often described as evaluator, controller, or instructor (Alvermann, 1996; Aulls, 1998; Nystrand, 1997), and student often described as passive observer ( Nystrand, 1997; Sperling, 1995). Even in comparatively non-hierarchical cultures this is not always common in classrooms. However, I found that participants of my study were willing to engage in dialogue with their teacher. For example, on the first day, zainab narrated an anecdote about her married life that related to the story. Zainab's anecdote was matched by another participant, who related her own experience of 'image of femininity' in society as experienced by her.

Dialogue became more elaborate as students discussed different views. They remarked that society puts pressure on women to be feminine and that sounding young and cute constitutes a major part of the image of femininity [Sara, Umna, 22/3/10]. In the discussion that continued, teacher/ researcher, and students further explored what femininity meant in the Arab context. One of the notable aspects of the dialogue was the proportion of involvement. Such participation was limited in the beginning of the session; however, towards the end at least two-thirds of the participants had contributed to the discussion, most of them offering more than just one comment or question.

The culture of dialogue can be cultivated in a language class by challenging learners to use reading and writing as a means of confronting social inequalities and human rights issues and look for silenced voices in all forms. Although this classroom was not a space in which all students agreed, it became a place where students were able to discuss issues and learn how to promote change within their lives. The teacher created a new space by helping students reflect on personal experiences, connecting them to the world of language, literature, and society. Most of the students in the study moved beyond stances of resistance by exploring their own beliefs and attitudes regarding gender issues through writing about multicultural literature.

The obvious questions to ask are: (a) did the study participants experience transformative learning? (b) Was there evidence of a shift in their perspective and meaning-making? I believe that transformation is possible and can occur discretely because transformation comes in different sizes that may constitute transition to critical awareness (Shor, 1992). When participants' language takes on a new meaning about an experience, a deeper level of understanding evolved. Based on the data, it is relatively safe to say that all participants did experience change. The findings revealed that participants had changed their frames of reference and gained new insights and perspectives. They began to recognize how and why their beliefs and prior experiences had constrained the way they felt.

Although practicing dialogic is challenging in terms of the tremendous amount of work involved, such as planning engaging activities, monitoring discussions, especially those related to controversial issues, creating and sustaining a space for discussion and facing students' and administrative resistance. Overall, to see the shift in perspective makes all the efforts worthwhile.

## **5.6 Closing thoughts**

I have no 'conclusions' to offer but will simply ask my readers to pause and reflect upon the power of language and cultural practices presented in the dialogic space created by Dr Farhan and 20 university girls.

'Understanding the self is a pre-condition to understanding others' (Pinar, 1988: 150). I gained insights from the participants who willingly shared their perspectives with me. As I pause, I think about the implications of my experience. Leaving Farhan and his class, I was surprised at the change I saw and experienced. I felt like the wind. I smiled proudly to myself as I draped the red hijab that covered my head...but underneath that red hijab, I knew who I was!

## CHAPTER-6: IMPLICATIONS OF MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

*Their story, yours, mine... it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them (Coles, 1996, p. 30).*

### 6. INTRODUCTION

Dialogic interaction is a deep approach to learning, as students do not simply acquire knowledge but seek to understand the ideas of others. When students participate in dialogue, they create a bridge (Vološinov 1986) between themselves and others and experience engaged rather than 'alienated' learning. My research investigated this 'engaged' learning process in dialogic spaces created by a teacher for undergraduate female students of a university in the UAE. In a 'dialogic space' Farhan facilitated conversation. Facilitation also involved intervention to keep the conversation on track and to protect the rights of the marginalized. I interpreted this effort to shape a space where students respected differences.

Thus agency was fostered as students interacted with each others, including the professor who supported dialogic discourse for empowered learning 'selves'. For the Higher Education, as the scope of the study, a number of key factors for successful dialogic learning are highlighted. This research provides insight into the challenges of implementing dialogic learning in UAE Higher Education.

This chapter presents summary of the key findings, significance of this research in educational landscape and finally a word or two about the final words. The chapter concludes my research document. However, it is not the end of my epistemological journey.

#### 6.1 My Study and New Understandings

Dialogic learning is more than a set of practices; it is what Bakhtin calls a new mode of interrelationship (1984) that allows students to develop active understanding. When students take part in dialogic activities, they assimilate the ideas of others. Bakhtin (1981) equates this assimilation with understanding. My analyses of data also indicate

that taking part in dialogic sessions enabled students to develop an active understanding of the issues under discussion (Bakhtin 1981).

My research is distinct as it focuses on dialogue as a mode of learning. It presents an empirical study of situated practice, rather than an overview of theory or of general practices. I need to acknowledge that every research perspective and methodology has its limitations. The analyses of the data are offered as partial and unfinished interpretations based on a specific theoretical framework. Three constructs were analyzed: the construction of new perspectives (transformation), social references and issues of power (contextual circumstances for engagement), and the possibilities dialogic offers (as a learning process).

A Foucauldian concept of the university as a disciplinary block, with relations of power, points to a concern of what kind of people we want our students to become and how our practices are contributing to this formation. It is through dialogue that we can understand how power operates through our language to shape our identities. ELT practitioners maintain an unequal society, by teaching for hidden power interests within society, rather than for the learners' real needs (Ellsworth, 1989:101). My study presents innovative classroom based on Freire's concept of consciousness building. It considers a pedagogical approach that draws on feminist and critical pedagogy, and is tailored to the cultural, religious and historical context of the Middle East. Following are the key findings with brief explanations

## **6.2 Summary of the Key Findings**

### **6.2.1 Participant Perceptions about Influence of the dialogic on Thinking about Text**

The participants thought that the dialogic process influenced their thinking about text and they believed that an environment of open-mindedness was essential for successful dialogue. What I observed in Farhan's classroom was the change in relational attitudes towards the creation of the space where humans meet. I also observed that learners continued their discussions with no expectations of closure. The discussions continued until a plurality of experiences and values were understood from multiple perspectives.

## **6.2.2 Evidence that Students Applied Higher-Level Thinking**

Teachers are usually concerned about transmitting the content and ignore understanding and evaluation. There was significant evidence that students applied higher-level thinking to text as they engaged in dialogue. Specific findings that show the application of high-level thinking are: enthusiasm, motivation and analytical approach.

The teacher embedded reading and thinking strategies; such as, questioning, analysis, and elaboration. Open-ended and personally relevant questions reveal the kind of thinking that took place. The teacher posed questions guiding students on how to dig through layers of complex text.

The findings suggest teachers need to encourage discourse that encourages genuine problem-solving about the meanings of text. The most powerful and persuasive higher-level thinking answers to questions given during the observed sessions were analytical and elaborative.

### **6.2.2.1 Evidence of higher level thinking through students' writing**

The writing samples collected before and after the sessions suggest students appropriated the form of the discourse during discussion, or the structure of reasoning about a text (Elaborated explanations), in addition to appropriating the content of the discussion in their writing. Students' writings indicated that students modified their comprehension of text as they processed information through dialogue. The teacher said that he assigned essays to motivate careful reading; majority of the students agreed their writing improved. During the interview Farhan said that writing takes more time and effort than talking, but if students would acknowledge writing as part of dialogic discourse, they would take more interest in it. Academics also emphasized the central role played by dialogue in students' writings.

## **6.2.3 Dialogic: a learning strategy**

Dialogic is not merely about dialogue; it is the manner in which interactions takes place. Dialogic implies a richer dialogue that promotes deliberation. As Hazen (1993,

p. 22), puts it: 'In dialogue when we recognize and cherish our differences, confirm another's independence, inner freedom, we allow space for transformation for the other and ourselves.' Dialogic enabled all to understand similarities and their differences.

Nystrand argued (1997) that students, in dialogic discussion become thinkers because they interpret the text by interacting with others. My study confirmed and extended Nystrand's findings. Sometimes students are reluctant participants in dialogue as teachers programme them to answer. Teachers usually ask students to find information from the text. They do not ask students to challenge or negotiate one another's ideas. Girls' in Farhan's dialogic space participated enthusiastically in dialogue because they were given the opportunity. When the girls had chance to extend their thinking in dialogue their work reflected the change as well. Even those who were mostly silent also benefited because they were prompted by peers to go beyond the literal interpretation. However, when only few students retained the positions of challenger it became problematic. Goatley (1995) thought that if the same students were seen as knowledgeable in discussion, they could assume that only they are more knowledgeable than others. Therefore, they may perceive their peers as dependent, rather co-learners. Thus, even when shy ones benefited from the talkative participants in dialogue, this negatively influenced learning. Students were using conversational strategies to involve everyone into the conversation. However, they sometimes failed to include quieter ones. Farhan therefore continued to protect the rights of the marginalized. To summarize, it could be said that when a text was discussed in dialogue, multiple perspectives were spoken, heard, and evaluated and choices were made.

The findings of this study indicate that wherever students experienced dialogic, a deeper learning experience resulted in the sense that the student were drawn into 'an active understanding' (Bakhtin 1981: 282) of the issues. The study therefore calls for practitioners to maximize the opportunities for dialogue as it motivates students, builds confidence and develops problem-solving (Kern 2000).

Vygotsky (1978) asserted that students can reach their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) with capable assistance. In the study, Waffa and Mana were able to reach their ZPD because of their peers. For example, they guided their peers to look at certain

parts of the text, directed them on what to do, and evaluated their comments. The students became collaborators and worked together in dialogic discussion (Mercer, 2004; Nystrand, 1997). As discussed earlier, Farhan usually managed the discussion. When girls collaborated dialogically, the teacher did not interrupt the students' conversation to keep the discussion going smoothly. Therefore, students took charge of discussion and gained more independence in their learning.

My findings confirm that dialogue failed on only two occasions; when individuals tried to impose their views on others, or when individuals identifying with a group identity, uncritically agreed with each other to avoid any disruptions. In successful group talk the girls were able to question their perspectives, alter their positions and ask for help when they did not know the answer (Wegerif and Dawes, 2004).

Learning through dialogue emphasizes 'fellowship and solidarity' (Freire, 1974 pp. 73-74). When engaging in dialogue the girls not only changed the mannerism they also changed the way in which they related to each other. They became more open to others. The change was evident in their relations as well in their attitudes towards assignments and exams. I believe it is essential that participants develop their own understandings of engaging critically within their cultural contexts.

In responding to texts, students went beyond simple interpretations and got involved in various social practices (Beach, 1997) that included (i) constructing/deconstructing perspectives, (ii) coping with conflicts/differences and (iii) constructing/sharing knowledge. Dialogic represented a unique learning experience. From the students' comments it was possible to identify that dialogue provided an opportunity for girls to take part in a meaningful exchange and experience a closer and more positive ways of relating. Dialogic moments were significant for the students because they supported thinking not possible in non-dialogic moments. Freire points out that: 'Both the teacher and the students should understand that their posture should be dialogical and open in the acts of both speaking and listening. (1996:96). Language thus became the means by which students gained knowledge and agency, and the process through which they express their experiences and questioned the social and cultural systems around them.



The professor gave up his position of authority. In this class, the students shared authority. These examples represent best case scenarios of critical dialogic pedagogy. As the students deeply engaged in the discussions, they became active change agents by redefining their lives and establishing their own futures as leaders. Transcripts reveal evidence of emotional and linguistic growth and maturity.

#### **6.2.4 Minimum Interventions by Farhan**

Wiseman (1992) found that teachers usually frame students' response to right answer. However, questions in Farhan's class were not to test knowledge but to guide students' understanding, to make sense of their experience. Students were not passive learners. Instead, they actively constructed knowledge through talk (Mercer, 2004; Nystrand, 1997). The students did not consider the teacher as the only source of knowledge. They independently sought information they needed from the text before requesting additional explanation from the teacher. Farhan was more of a facilitator. He often asked the students to point out where in the text they found information they referenced, or which part of the text made them think what they thought. Students understood that the text was a source of knowledge they needed to revisit often.

Nystrand's study (2003) found that teachers' authentic questions, uptake, and high levels of evaluation promoted dialogic discussion. He also found that when teachers opened the floor, students became engaged in discussion. My study confirms Nystrand's findings. Farhan invited the students to talk, and guided the students to use the text. His priority was to transfer responsibilities of learning to the students so that they could gain independence. Once students took over the conversation, Farhan tried not to interrupt their talk. He wasn't the 'holder of knowledge' but led students through co-constructed readings of the texts to deduce meaning which guided students in the writing their own pieces.

Lehman, and Peters (2001) think it is important to let the students interact with each other without a teacher's interruptions. When teacher's control over a discussion is strong, students remember facts. However, dialogue does not happen naturally and sometimes intervention becomes necessary to protect the rights of the marginalized.

The quality of student reasoning altered over time as all members of the class engaged in dialogue. Zara's improved performance was linked to opportunities for engaging in discourses when she didn't feel at risk. She could build new understandings which she, her teacher, and her classmates valued. Students understood how their interpretations have authority if supported with textual evidence. The only problem was the pupils' perception of the change in their teacher's role. It was apparent that, on some occasions, they found his reluctance to correct 'wrong' points of view and give out information somewhat disturbing. During the student-student interaction, every student was the speaker and audience. Every speaker realized that they should be independent and take responsibility in it. Throughout the research it was clear that too much monitoring of the students would hinder the growth of their interactional competence.

Dialogic is important because it provides meaningful learning experiences to students by giving them ownership and helping them engage in their learning. Studies about students' responses to literature in an open participation structure, such as Literature Circles, and Grand Conversations, reported that students actively participated in discussion, and achieved ownership in their learning (Daniels, 2002; McMahan, 1992). These studies also showed that when a teacher encouraged students to share their personal experiences in relation to the text, students made connections between the text and their lives. They also made intertextual connections between different books and interpreted the text in a meaningful way for them (Sipe, 1996). Farhan chose to break traditional bond established by the institution of school and met the students as a fellow learner. Such a shift changed the power structures and transformed the ways in which students and teachers interacted. The shift I describe from students/teacher to fellow learner changes the traditional classroom structure toward a structure that was flexible enough to allow for the individual constructions of knowledge and dialogues between student-learner and teacher-learner. The use of the inclusive 'we' strategy by the professor sent an invitation for participation and created a positive bond.

### **6.2.5 Tensions in implementing critical dialogic with adolescent girls**

Sometimes teachers stick to the banking pedagogy even though classroom dynamics favours transformative, dialogic pedagogies. Social dynamics and contexts of classroom are primary shapers of learning processes. The power of social processes

distorts discourse, and silence perspectives. In Farhan's class I found some aggressive voices who would not accept experiences other than their own; thus making the politics of classroom oppressive. Mercer (1995) emphasized the sharing of authority with students to enable them to be active learners however the girls showed inclination towards sharing views rather than challenging or negotiating perspectives. Challenging each other is an important component of dialogic discussion. If students agree with each other uncritically, the talk will be Cumulative Talk (Mercer, 1995). Therefore, sometime teacher's occasional intervention was helpful not only for the eager participants but also for the reluctant ones. Everyone did not deconstruct perspectives naturally in dialogic discussion. That's why changes in perspectives were subtle.

The ways in which women are depicted within texts, and the ways in which women are allowed to interact within institutions influence on how women view themselves, their lives, and their possibilities for success within the society. I noticed how girls accepted the mainstream concept of feminine. Therefore students needed support to feel comfortable with new ways of thinking and dialogue. Some students perceived challenges as disputational (Mercer, 1995) thus avoided it, to exhibit a more womanly character.

Gilbert (1989) emphasized that discussions in classrooms need to include opportunities for students to query texts that relegate men and women to specific gendered positions. She also suggests that since texts position women in subservient roles, teachers should expose this sexist positioning. Farhan encouraged dialogue about gender bias in texts and in society, enabling learners to view alternative roles for men and women. Farhan's selection of the text brought thought provoking discussions thereby deconstructed many long held perspectives regarding gender, culture and societal stereotypes. Negating unequal power relations and strengthening participation of less vocal readers decreased students' anxieties. In the previous chapter I have discussed in detail how students' participation was related to what the teacher did during dialogic discussion.

### **6.2.6 Absence of dialogic moments**

Bakhtin states that, if an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue (1986). Dialogic, does not refer only to the idea of two voices speaking together but to the speech implying any number of voices.

As I explained earlier, I distinguished dialogic moments from non-dialogic moments and examined interaction within those moments. Findings for Research Question 2 reveal it was hard to single out one factor that promoted or hindered dialogue. I inferred that most of the teacher's efforts contributed to make discussion dialogic, and eventually, transferred authority from the teacher to the students. Skipping evaluative comments on responses increased students' interactions (Nystrand et al, 2003). However, this was problematic for students programmed for banking model of instruction. I noticed practice of holding back. Students' shyness, embarrassment, and constraint were a result of cultural behavior. I recognized that silence was obvious when the students were working on an unfamiliar topic. I think that the difference in the way of communicating between English culture and Arab culture was the root of this problem. It was difficult for second language learners to challenge or negotiate a foreign text as it required more complex thought processes. On top of understanding the text, they had to speculate about others' opinions from multiple perspectives.

Most of the students in the study moved beyond stances of resistance by exploring their own beliefs and attitudes regarding gender issues through writing about multicultural literature. Resistance manifested itself in the classroom; in particular kinds of behavior in the classroom such as body language conveying silent dismissal or disruptive questions. Students challenged by critical discussions of power relations reacted with discomfort. Their views were influenced by dominant ideologies that were grounded in social, cultural and sexist beliefs.

Furthermore, it is important that power circulates between a teacher and students, but it is also important that power circulates among students. If power does not flow among students, discussion will not be meaningful for them in constructing knowledge, and generating higher levels of thinking no matter how dialogically the teacher organizes discussion.

Thus, it is critical that teachers recognize the difficulties students face when they shift to more student- directed format. I found the teacher's non-evaluative responses and encouragement, like pacing and hand gestures, helped students participate in discussion. As students became familiar with how to facilitate discussion, Farhan gradually relinquished the authority to students. But I believe that resistance also represented success. Resistance was central to turning students into critical readers, engaged in the construction of meaning from texts and life experiences. Understanding expressions of resistance provided an insight into girls' attitude towards reading and life. Through resistance, students gave voice to their insecurities, anxieties and struggles.

To make students aware that the social issues were not abstract speculation, Farhan linked topics to contemporary issues and their personal experiences. Students read stories that discussed gender oppression mediated by culture and religion. Through empowerment Farhan wanted students to understand the world around them.

Farhan developed among the students a habit of listening and respect towards other's views. This encouraged the students to ask, '*what do you think?*' Students continued the discussion by relating their ideas with previously shared responses. However, when the girls felt uncomfortable with the topic, they did not become initiators. On such occasions, even though contributors kept the discussion going, the discussion did not become dialogic because their response could not involve multiple voices.

Thus on occasions the class couldn't reach full understanding of heteroglossia in dialogic discussion. For example, in this study, multiple voices co-existed when students shared their own responses; however, sometimes, their talk was not connected or related. It seemed the students considered the quiet ones to be non-cooperative. Thus saying much became important sometimes. In an interview Soha thought that the discussion was good because everyone had good connections to the stories, and a lot of people made good points. For Soha, a discussion was good when she talked a lot (Interviews, 15/3/2010). Even when students recognize that societal structures can be harmful, they believed that the dominant structures cannot be changed. Therefore, not knowing how to take a critical stance with texts resulted in students perpetuating the status quo. Gradually, students learned to identify messages found in texts and raised questions about dominating structures.

### **6.3 Implications for teaching and practice**

Despite some thoughtful explorations by scholars there is still a need for more research on critical dialogic pedagogy. The importance of understanding students' gender and cultural context is a vital but under-researched issue. My dissertation study explores some of these issues.

The value of dialogic discussion is not disputed (Apple & Weis 1983; Bridges 1979; Freire 1997; Giroux 1997; Kincheloe 2004), but research indicates that teachers do not practice it often. The reasons that teachers gave (my pilot study) were: it changes the power structure in the class and it is time consuming. My research would be beneficial in addressing these issues and may successfully meet the teachers concerns.

Dialogic interaction is a deep approach to learning, because students are not just acquiring knowledge in order to pass examinations. A dialogic space is a space for reflection where participants feel comfortable to express themselves. However, facilitating such an open space for young people is not without difficulties. During this research, I have realized that achieving a genuinely open space for young people for critical engagement can be a demanding and complex task for both the educator and the students to achieve. However, providing students with a series of dialogic sessions is highly recommended. Through repeated opportunities participants slowly find their voice, build a trusting relationships and progress beyond merely enjoying having their perspectives listened to. Teachers need to recognize their own biases and attitudes and to encourage pupils to explore theirs. To those already overburdened, time commitments are substantial; the question is whether one or two classes can make any difference. Yes, I could feel resistance from some students in Farhan's class. Some students were unable to even notice or respond to a more dialogic mode of classroom practice. I noticed girls at various times accepted the mainstream concept of feminine. As Giroux suggests, without critical recognition of such covert power, the interactions among students and teachers are controlled to an extent that students and teachers remain unaware.

According to Farhan, there were definitely occasional setbacks and what worked for one class in a given semester did not work again for the next class. Critical classroom praxis may be understood theoretically but may not be easy to implement. Moving

beyond one's mental habits involves risk for which conducive climate is essential. Creating dialogic space is a gradual process and openness can only happen when there is safety. The barrier to knowledge for most of us is that we are unable to attain to the Socratic paradox that, it is our ignorance which is the true inspiration to knowledge. Students' participation varies according to their class, gender and academic abilities, among other factors. It is always difficult to introduce the process for the first time that's why girls in Farhan's class gradually learned to differ and have fun! There was no revolutionary change, nor was it intended. . However, they did challenge subordination and showed that girls can explore possibilities that lie beyond narrow confines.

Traditionally, ELT has focused on giving students the tools to communicate in a foreign language. The emphasis is on standardization (grammar, vocabulary, exams). From a critical perspective, the primary role of language education should be to provide learners with the tools to understand how language works (how it shapes and is shaped by us). The America College Testing Program, (ACT, 2006) in an executive summary states that, 'the students are not able to comprehend complex texts' (p. 2). It defined complex text as 'a text that contains multiple layers of meaning... that requires the unlocking of meaning by calling upon sophisticated reading comprehension skills and strategies' (p. 7). As students spend time preparing for standardized content based tests, they have less time to focus on higher-level reading and thinking skills. The findings of the study confirm significance and the application of my research, that dialogic can be a motivating environment for complex reading skills practice. The findings also reveal that students demonstrated analysis and elaboration when exposed to critical dialogic learning.

Teachers can enact change inside their classrooms by encouraging students to identify messages found in texts and raise questions about dominating power structures of society. Using the classroom as a space to consider and test out changes in beliefs, gender roles, and power structures can provide students opportunity to shape their own and each other's lives, read the texts and address questions such as, what is this text trying to communicate? Are there important ideas left out of this text? Teachers can use students' responses to launch discussions that ignite deeper questions and to help students see that texts contain more than a neutral set of facts and ideas. Discussions in classrooms should include opportunities for students to query texts that

relegate men and women to specific gendered positions. Teachers can encourage dialogue about gender bias in texts to enable students to view alternative roles for men and women.

My study highlights difficulties that some students may face and how this teacher addressed those difficulties effectively. The research also provides evidence of the effectiveness of the teacher in the role of facilitator. This study provides an in-depth look at how Farhan enacted the role of facilitator as he scaffold students' understandings of a new discussion format. It demonstrates the ways in which the teacher's responsive guidance resulted in students' understanding of a new interactional format. Another feature of the teacher's interventions was gradual nature of the teacher's handover of responsibility as students shifted to student-led discussion format. This gradual release of responsibility was represented by a back-and-forth motion rather than a continuous one. While others have noted the importance of providing support for students within student-led discussions, few have addressed this process at the point of teacher-student interactions during the actual discussions. I believe the practice will encourage all who want open and meaningful discussion in a classroom.

Critically Engaged Dialogue allows teachers and students to connect to each other by acknowledging their differences, discussing individual life experiences, and working together. Hooks (1994) stressed that pedagogy as a practice of freedom recognizes the authority of experience and the importance of voice (or what I am calling critical dialogic) as central components in teaching and learning. Through critically engaged dialogue, participants reflect, think, and speak, they take positions on controversial issues, and they transform others' thinking simply through spoken words. As Hooks (1994) explains, 'Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where learners grow and are empowered by the process' (p. 21). Therefore, critically engaged dialogue negotiates and balances the power and provides space for all individuals. Given the opportunity of dialogue, the girls became aware of who they were. They realized that gender matters in individuals' daily experiences. Thus dialogic raised awareness about

- i). Understanding beliefs and biases
- ii). Making issues of power a central focus
- iii). Cultural programming of the self



It is necessary to provide a nonjudgmental environment that allows students to examine belief systems. As students learn to raise questions about dominating power structures, they enact change inside their classrooms.

The findings of my study revealed that students used the discourse of discussion as a tool to comprehend texts without explicit instruction from the teacher. Moreover, the students went beyond recalling the literal details of the stories, and used dialogue to problem-solve about the meaning of the texts. Finally, in writing assignments that often followed the sessions, students incorporated ideas of the discussions in their writing. Discourse of the 'shy ones' also suggested that they participated in the dialogue, but with less elaboration and evidence from the text. All this was achieved due to instructional practices and talk used by Farhan: (i) connecting literacy practices to the everyday lives of students, (ii) encouraging multiple perspectives, (iii) relegating his power position. These practices and ways of talking created a world that valued students' backgrounds and discourses. All participants expressed experiencing transformed perspectives. Challenging their experiences led them to reverse their negative attitudes and increased their motivation and passion for the subject. Nodelman and Reimer point out that 'Knowing how to read against a text by identifying the subject positions it offers, becomes a highly significant skill for children as well as adults' (1992:179). Therefore, students can become empowered and consciously choose from a range of positions offered in Literary texts. Transformative theorists contend that transformative learning occurs when individuals examine personal frames of reference after being exposed to meaningful learning experiences. It was heartwarming to see participants as individuals and a part of interdependent world. This process of change can transcend the classroom situation to society in general, what Giroux (2006: 164) calls 'the transformative potential of the academia within wider society'. In turn, this concept could go beyond to encompass other cultures. The foreign literary text becomes a means of awakening the desire to learn about other people. This could result in critical understanding and tolerance. In a world torn by differences, image of other cultures is often built upon clichés, stereotypes, misunderstandings and forms of discrimination. Critical dialogue should help students deconstruct acquired cultural stereotypes. Because of the dialogic interaction neither teachers nor students feared raising issues. However, we should not

expect too much from a first experience of dialogue, particularly if participants' experiences do not provide them with a critical understanding of their own cultures.

My study advocates educating students to be reflective and literate, enabling them to ask: 'How can they make things better?' According to Troudi, agency is possible with literacy and where there is agency, there is hope for change (2007). Such hope-filled agency rejects a 'culture of silence' (Freire, 1996, p. 13). The teacher can act as a transformative intellectual, leading students to empowerment.

The importance of well crafted questions in eliciting higher-level thinking is brought forward through this research. Knowing how teacher created questions that motivated students to analyze and elaborate would be helpful to all educators. As I mentioned in my introductory chapter the study aims to broaden perceptions about dialogue; how it is generated supported and/or obstructed by the participants.

### **6.3.1 Implications for Further Research**

The value of dialogic discussion is not disputed, but research indicates that teachers do not apply it. The probable reasons mentioned by Farhan were: teachers may not know how to conduct a dialogue; it changes the power structure in the class and it takes away from covering the content. An area of research that would be beneficial in addressing this problem is professional development that would successfully meet teachers' concerns. Another important area of research is whether dialogic improves reading comprehension, writing, or thinking skills. It would be worthwhile to conduct comparative studies of different teaching situations with localized reference system of the classroom to discover similarities or differences.

This research was conducted in a female campus of a UAE university. It would be important to know if higher-level thinking could be encouraged and observed in lower level classes where students struggle with basic reading skills.

All the questions have not been answered. There are a number of aspects I have chosen not to examine, but spreading the scope of the study would have sacrificed breadth for depth or, at least changed its focus. I ponder upon several questions: Did all participants experience transformative learning? If not, what were the

characteristics of the participants who experienced transformative learning? Will teachers be able to resist the cultural constraints upon entering their teaching classrooms? I plan to investigate some of these questions in the future.

#### **6.4 Contributions of the Study**

A number of studies (Mercer, 1995, 2004; Nystrand, 1997; Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003) advocate that teachers need to organize discussion to promote students' participation. They found that in dialogically organized instruction, students responded to their peers and questioned one another's ideas. However, my study showed that, in a university classroom, teacher's dialogic organization was not enough for all students. Along with the dialogic discussion, the teacher's explicit explanation and demonstration of how to participate in discussion was also helpful. Although Mercer (1995) showed the importance of Exploratory Talk, but to my knowledge, he did not examine differences in students' participation and contributions based on gender and culture. My study shows that even though it seemed like students collaborated and constructed knowledge together in dialogic discussion, there was some reluctance too as some girls at times just listened to their peer's ideas. And at the other extreme were students who managed discussions for the group when the teacher let them interact without interruption.

In my study, students showed active participation and collaborative work. However, when I looked at the positions of focal students, I found differences in students' participation and contributions. During dialogic discussions, students built a learning community together. But when it came to constructing a joint understanding with higher levels of thinking, the contributions of some students were not as significant as that of others. Challenging is an important action for students to exhibit because if students accept their peer's ideas without critical thinking, the conversation will stay as Cumulative Talk (Mercer, 2004). Therefore, a teacher must encourage students to share their ideas and to train them to challenge another. Although the girls had no experience of dialogic learning in their schooling, they became attuned with it fairly quickly when Farhan invited them to share their ideas in dialogue.

Teacher's role as facilitator can foster dialogue, but if certain students remain engaged, I suggest teachers should interrupt students' talk and demonstrate how to

challenge or negotiate one another's ideas. I do not suggest teachers assign certain roles to students, but I suggest teachers look at student's emerging needs during discussion. Farhan's effort contributed in developing a positive classroom culture: he listened to students and valued their ideas, not only during discussions but also during regular classroom activities.

Although the research findings cannot be generalized across all female students in the UAE, they provide some insight into the learning experiences and preferences of Emirati women. Understanding how at least some Emirati women effectively learn can give ideas that may be helpful for developing programs that would be successful in the UAE. The participants of the study enjoyed being challenged. They responded to situations that challenge them to think differently. They only need more opportunities to understand that dialogue enhances learning and build competence. For that reason nonhierarchical learning design, which creates a nurturing environment for learning, that is supportive, is ideal for female students in the Gulf.

There are a number of limitations (self-selection of participants, sample size and exploratory methodology); but it provides a reference for educators and practitioners for understanding learning dynamics of Emirati women in college/university settings. Of course, future research in this area is needed.

I believe, my study develops a deeper understanding of our roles not as EF/SL teachers alone, but as educators. Although this study has focused on particular aspects of dialogic in some depth, Bakhtin's (1981) concept of internally persuasive discourse indicates that readers can elicit more from this study, more than I have been able to articulate.

Engaging in dialogue can result in 'new answers' to readers' questions about higher education. Creating spaces through dialogue offers enormous possibilities for educators. I hope that the study may help teachers to understand how they can practice dialogic more often. Although this classroom was not a space in which all students agreed, it became a place where students were able to discuss issues and learned to be different. Research must continue to assess how all voices based on ethnicity and gender can be heard without bias. By studying discussion practices from different perspectives, scholars may gain understanding of teachers' need. Freire (1996:24)

thinks that ‘to teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the appropriate conditions for its production’. He adds that through the act of teaching, both teachers and students, not only influence each other, but also make the world a better place. I hoped that I would encourage the readers of my research to reflect, to challenge their own views to create new ways. Researchers must continue endeavours for appreciation of all cultural voices. We may be, objectively, nothing more than a ‘quintessence of dust’ (Shakespeare’s Hamlet iii-I), but we can choose, and we can transform.

### **6.5 My journey towards tomorrow...**

This study represents merely a pause in the journey to reflect on the paths that led me here. Having gained a first degree in literature, my genetics pulled my poetic self to the fold of teaching flock! I always wanted to know more, so I embarked on the journey of research. The intentions of my research were not to seek answers. What seems important to me is that I hold each aspect of my thesis as a creative momentum that will bring forth new questions.

The purpose for this study has been to focus on a complex literacy event, namely the negotiation of meaning through dialogic process. But I could capture only a snapshot of what went on in classrooms. My aim was to provide some insight into the challenges of implementing dialogic learning in UAE Higher Education.

As I concluded this study, I wonder, what will happen when students go out to the real world outside the classroom? Will they be allowed to continue the dialogic way? I have some answers, and there are inevitably some new questions, which demand future research and learning. I plan to investigate some of these questions in the future. As farhan pointed out, in his last interview; ‘Umm...*no closures nayyer-- we are always, works in progress,*’ therefore my last words are Bakhtin’s (1986) words on last words,

*‘There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context’ (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future).*

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## APPENDICES

**Table-4.7: Discourse Features (adapted from Wilkinson, & Soter, 2006)**

<b>Discourse Features</b>	Explanation and Examples
Authentic Question	Where the person asking the question does not know the answer or is genuinely interested in knowing how others will answer (i.e., the answer is not pre-specified). An authentic question usually allows for a range of responses and generates several responses
UPTAKE	A person asks a follow-up question about something that someone else said previously (“ <i>How did it work?</i> ” “ <i>What causes this?</i> ” “ <i>What character grew out of this?</i> ”).
Generalization / Analysis / Speculation	Student talk that shows evidence of high-level thinking in the form of <i>generalization</i> (building up ideas, tying things together, “what’s the point”), <i>analysis</i> (breaking down ideas, “how or why”) or <i>speculation</i> (considering other possibilities, “what if”).
Elaborated explanation	Where a student explains her thinking in fairly detailed form to others, where a student explains how she arrived at a conclusion by giving a step-by-step description or detailed account of how a conclusion was reached or how a problem might be resolved. As the phrase ‘elaborated explanations’ suggests, students make some kind of claim and provide either two reasons to support it or one reason and evidence in support of the reason
Exploratory Talk	A kind of ‘co-reasoning,’ where students (sometimes with the teacher) <i>over several turns</i> share knowledge, evaluate evidence, and consider options in a reasonable and equitable way. In essence, it is a way of using language to think collectively, to ‘interthink.’ A key feature of exploratory talk is students giving reasons for their ideas or opinion. Hence, exploratory talk typically contains lots of reasoning words ( <i>because/’cause/ if, so, I think, agree/disagree, would, could, maybe/might/maybe, like, but, how, why</i> ).
Affective Response	Student makes connection between the text and his/her feelings or about his/her life ( <i>I felt, when I was little ...</i> ).
Inter-textual Reference	Student makes connection between the text and other literary or nonliterary works, other works of art, or media ( <i>In that other book we read ...</i> ).
Shared-knowledge Response	Student makes connection between current discussion and previous discussion the students have had, previous topics they have talked about, or previous knowledge they have shared ( <i>Last week we talked about ...</i> ).

**Table- 5.2a: Farhan’s teaching strategies for creating ‘spaces’ for students**

<b>Instructional practices</b>	<b>Instructional talk</b>	<b>Specific strategies used by Farhan to create a space</b>
Connection of classroom literacy practices to the everyday lives of students		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-Get to know students by reading students’ informal and formal writing about personal experiences</li> <li>2-Share his experiences with students</li> <li>3-Choose topics/literature that were relevant to students’ lives and literacies</li> </ol>
	Connection of classroom literacy practices to the everyday lives of students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-Invite students to share opinions and divergent Responses (What do you think?)</li> <li>2-Ask open-ended questions that promote discussion and personal connections.</li> <li>3-Re-voice and write down student contributions</li> <li>4-Share narratives of his experiences as a man in this culture, as reader and a writer</li> </ol>
Encouragement of multiple perspectives and viewpoints		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-Independent reading of books that deal with a variety of backgrounds and experiences</li> <li>2-Students share experiences through writing to class</li> <li>3-Collaboration through reading/writing workshop</li> </ol>
	Encouragement Of multiple perspectives and viewpoints	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-Ask for students’ opinions</li> <li>2-Ask students to step in shoes of another person</li> <li>3-Supportive responses</li> <li>4-Reinforce students’ perspectives by highlighting previous comments</li> <li>5-Elaborate on students’ contributions to provide another perspective</li> </ol>
investigation of sociopolitical issues		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-Read, write, and research about sociopolitical issues</li> <li>2-Provide a public and private space for these issues to be explore</li> </ol>
	investigation of sociopolitical issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-Elicit responses about social/political issues through literature</li> <li>2-Elaborate on students’ responses about the historical context</li> </ol>
Development of student agency		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Choice and respect</li> <li>2-Expect students to take assignments outside of class</li> </ol>
	Development of student agency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-Naming students as readers, writers, and Researchers.</li> <li>2-Inclusive language (“Let’s” or “We”)</li> <li>3-Ask students to retell an event from an agentive position (“How did you write this essay?”)</li> </ol>



## INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1-Tell me about yourself.

a. Where are you from?

b. What's your educational background? Describe your own experiences as a second/foreign language learner.

c. Where did you study and for how long?

2- Tell me about your school. What you liked and didn't like?

d. What were your teachers like?

e. Overall, how would you evaluate your language experience(s).

3- Tell me about your class and friends.

4-Who are good students in your class? Why?

5- Are you a good student? Why?

6-Who are readers in your class?

7-Are you a reader? Why?

f-Do you like reading?

g- Do you read at home?

h-What are you reading now? Why are you reading that book?

8-Do you like writing?

9-Do you write for pleasure at home?

### Dialogue

Did you enjoy the session today

Do you remember what we talked about in the story today? Tell me a bit about the discussion.

What do you do during discussions?

How do you feel when your teacher goes for a discussion rather than lecture?

What is it about you, the discussion, or the topic that made you share that idea with the group?

Why did you want to share that idea?

Are there other reasons that make you want to share an idea during the discussion?

*Okay, one more question about how discussions help you...I mean Do you think discussions help you? If so, how? In what ways? If not, why don't you think discussions help you?*

**We will continue our conversation tomorrow, thanks for your time.**

## INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DR. FARHAN

Tell me about yourself.

- a. Where are you from?
- b. What's your educational background? Describe your own experiences as a second/foreign language learner.
- c. Where did you study? For how long?

Tell me about your school. What you liked and didn't like?

- d. What were your teachers like?
- e. Overall, how would you evaluate your language experience(s)?
- f. How did you choose this area?
- g. How did you decide to become an English language/Literature teacher?
- h. Was there a particular person/teacher/experience that influenced your decision?

Have you given any thought to what teaching ES/FL should be like?

- a. What do you think it will be like when you become a teacher?

What qualities would the ideal language teacher possess?

- a. Please elaborate (quality by quality).

Who are good students in your class?

How does the topics relate to your teaching context?

To what extent does asking these questions make you reflect on your role and responsibilities as an educator?

In what ways is the literature you choose to teach appropriate for your student population?

What biases are you seeking to address? How will deconstructing this text help students better understand the world in which they live?

Interesting conversation dr Farhan, thanks so much, we shall continue this tomorrow!

Thanks a lot ( shukran jazila) if there is anything you would like to add to your responses, you are welcome to do so. My e mails are

[Chandella5@yahoo.com](mailto:Chandella5@yahoo.com) ; [Nic201@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:Nic201@exeter.ac.uk)

## My reflection log; 1/ D/15/3/2010

For me.....

**The significant aspect(s)** was: girls' willingness to participate in dialogue

**Important element(s)** were: teacher's will to create a 'dialogic space'

**relevant experience(s)** : selection of literature students could relate with

**Useful issue(s)**: understanding alien issues, for some discussing

Controversial issues with a male teacher

**Previously I** thought : the girls would take time to get 'engaged' I felt: they were not at ease , ( language and representations in the literature )

**I knew:** I knew the girls were reading stories of different culture and language

**I noticed** : few girls were enthusiastically involved

**Subsequently questioned:** was it because of language proficiency or shyness towards a male teacher( whether girls were conscious of the gender difference)

**This could be because of** : different cultural associations found in the literature they were reading OR

**Is probably due to** : the girls were –like most of us , used to the 'banking' education model

**Explained by:** girls in their interviews

**Outcome** Having experienced 'their' world I now feel : enriched , as compared to what I knew before I have significantly developed/improved my knowledge of another culture ability to understand how Arab girls feel about English and literature representations.

## **Transcript conventions**

- 1-Transcriber's comments (e.g., "overlapping") are put in brackets [].
- 2-Talk turns were identified with NAME
- 3-Commas were used for pauses in speakers' speech. Dots – were used for longer pauses.
- 4-If someone was interrupted the text was left with a dash – at the end of the utterance.
- 5-When two people spoke at once, the transcriber tried to capture as much as possible of the conversation, and wrote [overlapping].
- 6- (Simultaneous) The word 'simultaneous' in parenthesis indicates two or more speakers begin talking at the same time.'
- 7-= latched or continuous utterances
- 8-(Pause) The word 'pause' in parenthesis shows that a speaker has stopped talking momentarily or has completely faded out
- 9-(.) Untimed pauses of about one second
- 10-(..) Longer pauses: the number of dots approximating to the number of seconds
- 11-(Cannot hear) The words 'cannot hear' indicate that the transcriber knew the student was talking but could not make out the word(s).
- 12-CAPITAL represents emphasis
- 13-*Italics* show where students and/or teacher are reading from a text.
- 14-? Rising intonation
- 15-/ words given additional emphasis by the speaker
- 16-(-) / (interrupts) Hyphens in parentheses show a speaker has been interrupted before the end of his or her turn
- 17- Where two people speak at once, the overlapping portions of their utterances are enclosed with slash marks (i.e., / /) Interruptions Where one person interrupts another, the speech ends with two slashes with the first speaker and begins with two slashes with the second speaker (i.e., "that's like// //that's like adoption")
- 18-Omitted conversation When transcripts have been shortened, this is indicated by a series of dots (i.e., .....)
- 19-Explanatory comments When explanatory comments are added to a direct transcription, they are enclosed in brackets,
- 20-Inaudible speech When words or phrases are completely inaudible, they are indicated by a series of asterisks enclosed in parentheses (i.e., (\*\*\*))
- 21 -[] Indicates contextual and nonverbal information [laughs, points, etc.].
- 22\*okay\* Indicates a softer voice.
- 23-em, eh hesitation markers
- 24-! very animated tone
- 25-Utterances that signal interruptions, manage discipline, or ask participants to repeat information, will not be considered statements

## CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.  
I understand that: There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation. I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me. Any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

All information I give will be treated as confidential

The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

.....  
.....3/3/2010.....  
(Signature of participant)

.....  
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s) Contact phone number of researcher(s):

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

.....[chandella5@yahoo.com](mailto:chandella5@yahoo.com) and [nic201@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:nic201@exeter.ac.uk)

.....  
Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.



Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS  
**You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level research (e.g. Masters, PhD, EdD level).**

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guides.php> and view the School's statement in your handbooks.

**Your name:** nayyer iqbal ali chandella

**Your student no:** 570024949

**Degree/Programme of Study:** EdD TESOL

**Project Supervisor(s):** Dr. Troudi, Salah, Dr. Liu, Yongcan

Your email address: [NIC201@ex.ac.uk](mailto:NIC201@ex.ac.uk) and [chandella5@yahoo.com](mailto:chandella5@yahoo.com)

**Title of your project:**

*"The lighting of a fire: value of dialogical process in ES/FL teaching and Learning for university students in UAE"*

**Brief description of your research project:**

My study explores possibilities 'dialogic process' offers to teachers/learners. My dissertation research will be an exploratory study. This research seeks to take further, growing interest in the value of dialogical process in second language learning.

**Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):** The participants are, one teacher and a group of 20 female students of advanced composition class enrolled in English department of a university in UAE. The age bracket of the girls is 19 to 23yrs.

**Give details regarding the ethical issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (with special reference to any children or those with special needs)** a blank consent form can be downloaded from the SELL student access on-line documents:

Students participating are volunteers. I have explained the research study and the purpose of my presence to them. Participants will not be identified and information is confidential. Only

information relevant to the research questions will be used. Participants will be reminded that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any given time and that data related to them will be destroyed.

**Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:** Class observations, semi-structured interviews of teacher and students, students' written responses.

**Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):** During the data collection, data analysis and write up, data will be securely stored in a locked cabinet, electronic information will only be accessed by the researcher with username and password. Electronic information will be stored on a secure system, It will be destroyed when it is no longer required.

**Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):** Interviews will be recorded and if not, notes will be made during the interview. After the interviews, the recording and notes will be transcribed and the recording/notes deleted after confirmation of the accuracy of the transcript with the interviewee. The transcripts will be coded to maintain anonymity of the participants. Records of data kept securely will be available only to me. Participants have agreed that the content can be used.

*This form should now be printed out, signed by you below and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.*

**I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given above and that I undertake in my dissertation / thesis (delete whichever is inappropriate) to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.**

**I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.**

Signed: ... *Nayyar Iqbal ali chandella*  
.....date: ...23.10.09.....

*N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor*

**This project has been approved for the period:** *Oct Nov '09* **until:** *Nov 2010*

**By (above mentioned supervisor's signature):** *Saleh S. Al* **date:** *02/11/2009*

*N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occurs a further form is completed.*

**SELL unique approval reference:** ..... *D/09/10/13*

**Signed:** *Saleh S. Al* **date:** *02/11/09*  
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee