

THE *MAGICIANS* AND NORTH AMERICAN EDUCATION

THE *MAGICIANS* AND NORTH AMERICAN EDUCATION:
FANTASY FICTION AS A TOOL FOR PEDAGOGICAL CHANGE

By MEGAN SUTTIE, B.A., B.Ed.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
for the Degree of Master of Arts

McMaster University © Copyright by Megan Suttie, July 2016

McMaster University MASTER OF ARTS (2016) Hamilton, Ontario (English Literature)

TITLE: *The Magicians* and North American Education: Fantasy Fiction as a Tool for
Pedagogical Change AUTHOR: Megan Suttie, B.A. (Trent University), B.Ed. (Queen's
University) SUPERVISOR: Doctor Catherine Annette Grisé NUMBER OF PAGES: viii, 109

Lay Abstract

This thesis presents Lev Grossman's *Magicians* trilogy as a tool for teachers, scholars, and students to use in addressing the problems in education in North America today. Starting with Henry Giroux's research and writings on the problems with North American education, the *Magicians* is presented as the "imaginative vision" Giroux says must be located in order to inspire hope and present a plan for addressing these issues and modifying education to improve the outcomes for every student. Combining the theories of educators Paulo Freire and John Holt with the practice of literary analysis, this thesis examines the *Magicians* and argues that a critical reading of this fantasy series can serve educators by identifying the current problems and the need for reform, by introducing a new autonomous education practice that can be used in individual classrooms, and by supporting students in this new system through teaching the concept of agency directly.

Abstract

Taking up Henry Giroux’s call for an “enabling [sic], imaginative vision” and a “language of possibility” with which to generate hope and a plan for improving education in North America, this thesis presents Lev Grossman’s fantasy series – the *Magicians* trilogy, consisting of *The Magicians* (2009), *The Magician King* (2011), and *The Magician’s Land* (2014) – as providing this ‘vision’ and ‘language’ through its representations of education. Using a close reading practice alongside the method of thematic criticism outlined by Farah Mendlesohn, key passages in the series are analysed to explicate an “imaginative vision” of an ideal, alternative education and present this vision – alongside a plan for achieving it – to educators. I argue that the series can be a pedagogical tool to serve educators in recognising the issues inherent in the current North American education system and the need for reform, in facilitating and motivating the implementation of an ideal alternative in their classrooms – an autonomous education practice based on the theories of Paulo Freire and John Holt – and in aiding with explicit instruction on the concept of agency to foster student success within the new classroom practice. Through a process of literary analysis, the *Magicians* series is presented to educators to help them understand and implement theories such as liberating and dominating praxis, banking education, and autonomous education. Rather than waiting for institutional-level or school-level reforms, this thesis helps educators reform their classrooms immediately, improving education outcomes for students and demonstrating the possibilities and benefits of adopting an autonomous education practice. In addition to presenting the *Magicians* series as a pedagogical tool to address the issues in education, this thesis also posits fantasy fiction as a valuable body of literature for seeking solutions to real world problems by demonstrating the applicability of fantastic representations of education to solving real world issues.

Acknowledgments

I would like to offer my most sincere gratitude to Dr. Cathy Gris  for not only supervising this thesis, but offering endless support, advice, guidance, wonderful conversation, and every opportunity to pursue my interest in education alongside my love of English literature. I would also like to thank Dr. Donaldson for stepping in as first reader and Dr. Bruce for serving as second reader on my committee. In addition, I would like to thank Ilona Forgo-Smith and the other staff of the English Department Office at McMaster University for ensuring everything runs smoothly for myself and for the other students in the department.

I would also like to thank those who were there for me throughout this process simply because they wanted to be: Emily Sattler, Lene Trunjer, and Taylor Charendoff for offering a chance to get out of the office and commiserate; my family – Mom, Tom, Rob, Cassandra, Dad, Julie, Kaitlin, Alexis, Grampa, Grannie, Paul – for feeding me and always encouraging me to pursue what makes me happiest; and Steven, for living with me through the day-to-day and continuing to do so moving forward despite everything I’ve put him through.

Words cannot express how thankful I am for all of you – though I will certainly offer a great many of them attempting to convey my gratitude.

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Descriptive Note	ii
Lay Abstract	iii
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Abbreviations	vii
Declaration of Academic Achievement	viii
Introduction	
School Reform, Autonomous Education, and Fantasy Fiction	1
Fantasy Fiction	3
Autonomous Education and Liberating Praxis	8
Thesis Outline	16
Chapter One	
Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy: Explicating the Issues in Education and the Need for Reform	20
Literature, Fantasy, and Pedagogy	20
Brakebills' Dominating Praxis	27
Quentin as a Political Illiterate	35
Conclusion	42
Chapter Two	
The Ganymede Project: Modelling and Motivating Reformed Classroom Practices	43
Modelling Education Reform in Fantasy Fiction	44
Project Ganymede: A Summary	48
Project Ganymede: Explicating the Model	54
Conclusion	67
Chapter Three	
<i>The Magicians</i>: Teaching and Fostering Student Agency	70
Teaching Agency through the Metaphors of Fantasy Fiction	71
Using Magic in the <i>Magicians</i> Series to Teach Agency	79
Conclusion	93
Conclusion	
<i>Magicians</i>, Classrooms, and Speedboats	95
Bibliography	98

List of Abbreviations

TM	<i>The Magicians</i> by Lev Grossman
TMK	<i>The Magician King</i> by Lev Grossman
TML	<i>The Magician's Land</i> by Lev Grossman

Declaration of Academic Achievement

All research and analysis in this thesis, except where otherwise cited and acknowledged, is the sole work of Megan Suttie.

Introduction

School Reform, Autonomous Education, and Fantasy Fiction

“There is a general consensus among educators in North America that public and higher education are in a chronic state of crisis” (10) – this according to Henry Giroux, who goes on to explain in “Critical Pedagogy in Dark Times,” published in 2011, that this crisis “has crucial political, social, ethical, and spiritual consequences” for North America now and in the coming years (11). The infiltration of capitalism, commodification, neoliberalism, and market values into education beginning in the 1980s gave rise to an education system which Giroux describes as:

a stripped down version of education, the central goal of which was to promote economic growth and global competitiveness, which entailed a much-narrowed form of pedagogy that focused on memorization, high-stakes testing, and helping students find a good fit within a wider market-oriented culture of commodification, standardization, and conformity. (“Critical” 8)

This approach to education has proliferated and come to dominate institutions across North America, “despite its ill effects on students and teachers” (Giroux “Critical” 8). Giroux outlines the result of this system as a failure to create “citizens who are critical, self-reflective, knowledgeable, and willing to make moral judgments and act in a socially responsible way” (“Critical” 3), as a “stifling of critical thought” (“Critical” 8), and as an education practice centred on “a transmission model of teaching” which is “limited to the propagation of a culture of conformity and the passive absorption of knowledge” (“Critical” 5) and is predominantly focused on ‘teaching to the test’ (“Critical” 9). The current state of education in North America and its growing repercussions lead Giroux to conclude that “the threat to critical modes of education and democracy has never been greater than in the current historical moment” (“Critical” 8).

This thesis is not concerned with establishing that there is a crisis, what the crisis is exactly, or even what the best educational practices and policies to address this crisis are. There has been a significant amount of research and publication on these issues already. Taking this crisis as a given, and accepting the expertise of education experts about how this issue can best be solved,¹ this thesis intends to answer Giroux's call for sources of hope and inspiration in addressing these problems. Giroux explains that "schools are often rightly criticized for becoming adjuncts of corporations or for modelling themselves on a culture of fear and security," which leads to the devastating issues outlined above, but that these criticisms end with mere analysis and discussion of the problem without offering a solution, making it seem as though these issues are "intractable" and that education cannot be improved without serious overhaul or the complete abandonment of the current system ("Critical" 4). What must be done, in addition to offering these criticisms, is to offer hope, to show how these problems can be addressed: Giroux calls for "an enobling [sic], imaginative vision that takes us beyond the given and commonplace," something "to mobilize the imagination and develop a language of possibility in which any attempt to foreclose on hope could be effectively challenged" ("Critical" 5). "There is a real need," Giroux reiterates, "for developing a new theoretical, political, and pedagogical vocabulary" ("Critical" 8-9) with which to address the problems of education in North America. The aim of this thesis is to address this need: to find and present 'an enobling, imaginative vision' and help to create 'a language of possibility' in the service of generating and sustaining education reform and improvement to address the current crisis – and what better place to find an 'imaginative vision' than in fantasy fiction?

¹ These experts, of course, include Giroux, as well as the other theorists upon which this thesis draws: Paulo Freire, John Holt, David Hawkins, and Lynne Cameron. For further discussion of the crisis in education and suggestions for addressing these issues, see, for instance, Stanley Aronowitz's *Against Schooling*.

FANTASY FICTION

This thesis turns to fantasy fiction as a way “to think otherwise as a condition for acting otherwise,” as Giroux says we must (“Critical” 9). Giroux himself acknowledges the power of popular culture and its close connection to education, defending his own choice to incorporate popular and social media into his conception of critical pedagogy in order to develop an understanding of popular culture “as a teaching machine, rather than simply as a source of entertainment or a place that objectively disseminates information” (“Critical” 7). An ideal education, as opposed to that which we now have in North America, should help individuals “think critically, relate sympathetically to the problems of others, and intervene in the world in order to address major social problems” (Giroux “Critical” 13) – with the aid of fantasy fiction, education can achieve this ideal. .

Whether we locate the increased interest of fantasy in the 1960s (Tymn xi) or the 1980s (Slusser, Rabkin, and Scholes *Bridges* vii), the genre has found itself “at the centre of a thriving arena of academic debate” which continues strongly into the twenty-first century (Mandala 8). Fantasy’s ability to comment on and affect the real world has been thoroughly established and is well recognized – the flurry of academic activity of the past half century, in Susan Mandala’s words, “convincingly demonstrates that [science fiction and fantasy] are often powerful instruments of social and political commentary, effective means of disruption and dissent, and, ultimately, significant tools for speculation on the very nature of reality” (15). This ability of fantasy can be traced back to the genre’s roots in myth, folklore, and fairy tale,² and has been thoroughly explored: Eric S. Rabkin understands fantasy as a “medium” for portraying “the truth of the human heart” (*Fantastic* 37), while Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz note that fantasy worlds

² See, for example, Bruno Bettelheim, Terry Pratchett, or J.R.R. Tolkien.

must be related to, and therefore naturally comment on, the real world, and Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint establish that “all fantasy is political” (102). For Deborah O’Keefe, fantasy “poses questions” which help readers embrace an openness to change and possibility in the real world (9-10). Daniel Baker shows how, by creating the category of the ‘unreal,’ fantasy invites an understanding of the ‘real’ as another category which can be interrogated, and Rosemary Jackson analyses the ways in which the juxtaposition of the ‘unreal’ and the ‘real’ allows fantasy to ‘interrogate’ the world through emphasizing this difference.

Ann Swinfen’s *In Defense of Fantasy* is dedicated to showing the significance of fantasy fiction by demonstrating the ways in which it comments on real world issues. Kathryn Hume adopts a similar purpose, categorizing four types of fantasy, each of which offers different commentaries on and conclusions regarding the real world, establishing that “Departure from reality does not preclude comment upon it” but that, rather, “this is one of fantasy’s primary functions” (xii). Ursula Le Guin, a celebrated fantasy author, presents fantasy’s ‘use’ as being “to deepen your understanding of your world, and your fellow men, and your own feelings, and your destiny” (“Why Are Americans” 43) and argues that it presents “a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence” (“From Elfland” 84). Though fantasy is not ‘true,’ it is ‘factual,’ and it is quite capable of commenting on the real world (Le Guin “Why Are Americans” 44) – more capable of commenting than not, for pure escapist fantasy, which makes no comment upon the real world whatsoever, is far less common than fantasy which readily offers a critique or commentary upon reality (Hume 55). “Far from encouraging an escape from reality,” Caroline Webb concludes, fantasy provides “important lessons about the complexities and challenges of the real world – and how these may be faced and solved” (147).

Other scholarship has directly addressed the characteristics of fantasy which position the genre as an ideal source for locating the ‘imaginative vision’ which will help us to address issues in education. Scholarship on fantasy fiction has demonstrated the powerful connection between fantasy and education, showing how the one is ideally suited to comment on and shape the other.³ Fantasy both comments on education and is itself educative. Elisabeth Rose Gruner and Webb present two examples of how fantasy educates, demonstrating the ways in which fantasy facilitates an autonomous education for its readers (Gruner) and educates children into becoming mature readers (Webb). Education is such a frequent theme in fantasy texts that Gruner is able to identify the subgenre of “education of a wizard stories,” which foreground experiences of education through representations of learning magic (217). The commentary on education presented by fantasy authors such as Diane Wynne Jones (Webb), Terry Pratchett (Webb; Gruner; Williams; Hunt and Lenz), and Phillip Pullman (Gruner; Hunt and Lenz) have been well analysed, but few authors have received as much attention in this regard as J.K. Rowling has with the *Harry Potter* series – education in this series has been covered so thoroughly that it is hard to imagine what could be left to say on the subject.⁴

³ Other scholarship addresses the connection between fantasy and the concept of agency, another central topic of this thesis: Farah Mendlesohn notes that magic in these texts is often metaphorically connected to ideas of agency and societal change and justice (“Thematic” 126), while Webb establishes fantasy as “an important way for readers to learn about the real world,” part of which is “to develop the capacity for agency” (143). The importance of agency to addressing the crisis of education is discussed below.

⁴ Some of the scholarship on this particular topic includes: presenting the series as a metaphor for administrative politics and the role of educators (Skulnick and Goodman); explicating lessons within the series for medical practitioners (Conn; Conn and Elliot), for educators (Dickinson; Zoller Booth and Booth), and for youth activists (Rosen); using the series as a basis for interdisciplinary units of instruction (Beaton); interrogating the representation of teachers (Wong; Stypczynski) and of knowledge (Elster); commenting on the prominence of the Hogwarts setting (Gutiérrez) and Hogwarts’ relationship to other literary British boarding schools (Manners Smith); and examining the ways in which Hogwarts combines progressive and existential pedagogies (Black and Eisenwine), forwards a practice of self-guided learning (Gruner; Hopkins; Webb), champions the lost art of lecturing (McDaniel), and fosters agency and student resistance (Chappell; Helfenbein and Brown; Mayes-Elma).

Webb notes that fantasy authors use the conventions of the genre to establish and then subvert expectations, using fantasy “not only to entertain but to provide opportunities for critique and speculation about alternative possibilities for living” (4). I propose a turn to fantasy fiction as a source for the ‘enobling, imaginative vision’ and ‘language of possibility’ for which Giroux calls – specifically, I propose turning to Lev Grossman’s fantasy trilogy: *The Magicians* (2009), *The Magician King* (2011), and *The Magician’s Land* (2014). The *Magicians* series centres on the adventures of the protagonist, Quentin Coldwater, as he is invited to join the secret magical subculture hidden within our own world and study magic at Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy. After graduation, Quentin and his friends discover that Fillory – Grossman’s play on and parody of C.S. Lewis’s fictional world of Narnia – is real, travelling there and ruling as kings and queens with occasional forays back to our own world. *The Magicians* is primarily concerned with Quentin’s education at Brakebills and their initial adventures in Fillory; *The Magician King* chronicles their continuing adventures in Fillory and our own world as they attempt to save magic, interspersed with the backstory of the secondary protagonist, Julia, detailing her experiences learning magic outside Brakebills; *The Magician’s Land* focuses on Quentin, exiled from Fillory, as he seeks happiness in our own world, saving Fillory and creating a new land of his own in the process.

Grossman’s fantasy series does precisely as Webb explains fantasy can, using and subverting expectations of education within the fantasy genre to comment on education in the real world and suggest an “alternative possibility” – which we can explicate as an “imaginative vision of hope.” This is the primary reason Grossman’s *Magicians* series has been selected for this project, but it is not the only reason. As a fantasy series, the *Magicians* naturally exemplifies the characteristics and affordances of fantasy discussed above, but it is also located within the

subgenre of “education of a wizard” stories, foregrounding scenes of education and therefore privileging the relationship between fantasy and education and specifically inviting critique of and speculation on education in the real world. The *Magicians* series also provides more than one representation of education for us to interrogate, critique, and bring forward as an imaginative vision: Quentin’s experiences at the institution of Brakebills provide readers with an example of a more traditional education to examine, while Julia’s independent education in the safe houses and at the house in Murs present a very different approach to analyse and explore. Not many fantasy series within the “education of a wizard” subgenre represent more than one example of education, let alone provide two very different education experiences with comparable levels of detail both during the experience of education and afterwards, putting that education to use in the world. In addition, because Grossman’s texts skillfully integrate the magical “unreal” with the familiar “real” and focus on the complex interplay between the two, this series has, as L. Kaitlin Williams phrases it, “real-world relevancy” and is therefore better able to provide commentary than series which do not or only superficially combine the “unreal” with the “real.”⁵

The context in which the *Magicians* series was produced and received is also an important factor in its selection. Grossman is an American author, and the story is told within a predominantly American setting, influenced heavily by North American culture: the series is, therefore, better positioned to comment on education in North America than other fantasy texts

⁵ In defending the “real-world relevancy” of Pratchett’s *Discworld* series, Williams explains that fantasy series set in a secondary world, such as Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* series, are not as immediately applicable or powerful in this regard: “when this world is presented as distinct and separate from our world ... many of the ideological implications are more likely to lose their translatability and relevancy for readers” (73). Similarly, fantasy texts – such as Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series – which only superficially combine the “unreal” with the “real” also fail to provide insight and live up to the potential of fantasy (Williams 73). Where Pratchett’s *Discworld* – and, I would add, Grossman’s *Magicians* series – differ is in the power “to blur the lines between the real and the unreal, thereby saturating the work with a real-world relevancy” and creating complex, meaningful connections between the fantasy world and the world of the reader (Williams 74).

within this subgenre which emerge from a different sociocultural context, such as the works of Rowling or Pratchett, which are informed by, and so comment on, British education systems. Additionally, the *Magicians* series is contemporary – allowing it, once again, to more directly and accurately comment on current education issues – and it is popular. *The Magicians* won the 2010 Alex Award and garnered Grossman the honour of the 2011 John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer; all three titles made the New York Times Best Seller List in fiction, with *The Magician's Land* debuting at number one.⁶ *The Magicians* has also been adapted as a television series this year in the United States by SyFy and Showcase: the first twelve-episode season aired in January 2016, and a second thirteen-episode season is set to air in 2017.⁷ The series' status as both current and popular should make it readily available for educators and students, who should be able to find it easily in stores and libraries, as well as accessible and appealing for both educators and students to read and analyse. For these reasons, the *Magicians* series has been chosen as the focus for finding and presenting an imaginative vision which can be translated through a close, critical reading practice into a plan of action for reforming and improving education in North America.⁸

AUTONOMOUS EDUCATION AND LIBERATING PRAXIS

Giroux presents his own suggestion for addressing the problems with North American education: for educators and institutions to adopt a critical pedagogy. This approach to education

⁶ *The Magicians*, published August 11, 2009, was 9th on the August 30th New York Times bestseller list in fiction. *The Magician King*, published August 9, 2011, was 8th on the August 28th list and 15th on the September 4th list. *The Magician's Land*, published August 5, 2014, debuted at number 1 on the August 24th list and was 10th on the August 31st list.

⁷ The television series, called *The Magicians*, is written by John McNamara and Sera Gamble and produced by Michael London and Janice Williams.

⁸ Scholars have only just begun to analyse this series, though I predict much more research on these texts is to come. To date, there have been two scholarly articles – one by J.B. Himes, and another by Amanda E. Himes – and a Master's of Creative Writing Ph.D. thesis by Margot McGovern published.

is primarily based on the work and writing of Paulo Freire and his ideas of an “authentic education” and a “liberating praxis.”⁹ Freire explains an ideal education as one that is both “authentic” – in that it arises directly out of the lives, concerns, and interests of the students, who dictate what they wish to learn and interrogate – and based on a liberating praxis, which is designed to foster political engagement and position students as “active Subjects” rather than “passive objects.” For an education to be “authentic,” it must be directly and explicitly connected to the lived realities of students and extend beyond the artificial boundaries of the classroom, presenting all knowledge within a broader context. A liberating praxis complements an authentic education, as it insists students be allowed to dictate what they will learn and situates the teacher as a co-investigator whose job is to explore and discover alongside students, helping them learn and take ownership for this learning.¹⁰ A critical pedagogy, Giroux explains, is naturally suited to address the issues of education today, as it calls for educators to “connect pedagogy with the problems of public life, a commitment to civic courage, and the demands of social responsibility” (“Critical” 6) as well as “stresses the need for teachers and students to actively transform knowledge together rather than simply consume it” (“Critical” 7). Rather than the ‘blind acceptance’ which characterises the current approach, a critical pedagogy asks for critical questioning (Giroux “Critical” 5) – and critical reading, a practice which this thesis will undertake with the *Magicians* series as both a demonstration and support of this approach. An authentic, liberating education is the ideal alternative upon which Giroux draws for a plan to

⁹ ‘Praxis,’ as used by Freire, is akin to the term ‘pedagogy’ used elsewhere in this thesis, in that Freire uses ‘praxis’ to refer to attitudes towards and beliefs about teaching. ‘Praxis’ is used in this thesis when discussing Freire’s theories of liberating and dominating praxis; otherwise, ‘pedagogy’ is preferred. ‘Practice,’ meanwhile, is used throughout to refer to the activities and instruction in which educators and students engage which are informed by an educator’s praxis/pedagogy.

¹⁰ These ideas and arguments are set out in Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

address the current issues in education – issues which Freire understands as a “dominating praxis” and a “banking practice,” which we will analyse in Chapter One.

This thesis, accepting the expertise of Giroux, draws upon Freire’s theories, which are still in common use even though his most influential publication, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was published over forty years ago in 1972. A search of the Google Scholar databases demonstrates the continuing relevance and use of Freire’s works, particularly of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, with 56,169 total citations and an astounding 2,070 within the last twelve months alone. The other three texts by Freire upon which this thesis relies are also still in significant use, with the least used – *The Politics of Education* – still totalling 864 citations within the last five years.¹¹ This recent scholarship drawing on Freire’s works can be found in fields ranging from health care (Eldredge et al; Sharma) to social work (Miley, O’Melia, and DuBois) and from theatres (Fortier) and museums (Golding; McCarthy) to, of course, education (Shapiro and Stefkovich; Khany and Tarlani-Aliabadi; Wenner and Campbell; Armstrong, Armstrong, and Barton; Olsen; Buck, Akerson, and Gilles; Locke). Recent work also addresses interdisciplinary concerns such as research practices (McNiff; Thorne; Sullivan et al), feminist theories (Sprague), community development (Taylor and Taylor; Cicmil and O’Laocha; Yeh et al; Morgan) and social justice and political action (Thompson; Wilkinson and Kleinman; Diemer and Rapa). Freire’s theories remain foundational in discussions of education and critical pedagogy.

This thesis, however, does not focus on Freire’s theories alone: rather, it augments and complements Freire’s theories informing critical pedagogy with those of an autonomous

¹¹ The figures of this search, conducted on the 14th of July, 2016, are as follows: for *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1972, Google Scholar returned 56,169 total citations (14,600 since 2012 and 2,070 within the last twelve months); for *Education For Critical Consciousness*, published in 1973, there were 6,920 total citations (1,980 since 2012); for *The Politics of Education*, published in 1985, there were 3,617 total citations (864 since 2012); for *Pedagogy of Hope*, published in 1994, there were 2,699 total citations (864 since 2012).

education practice. E. Wayne Ross's recent article "Broadening the Circle of Critical Pedagogy" calls for precisely this expansion and inclusion, aiming to have more complementary theorists, such as John Holt, incorporated into discussions and implementations of critical pedagogy. Holt is a foundational theorist of "autonomous education," also referred to as "free school" or "unschooling." The central tenants of autonomous education are outlined in the answer Holt gave to the editors of New York City's *Education News* when asked what "one giant step forward" American schools could take to improve:

[The one giant step forward schools could take] would be to let every child be the planner, director, and assessor of his own education, to allow and encourage him, with the inspiration and guidance of more experienced and expert people, and as much help as he asked for, to decide what he is to learn, when he is to learn it, how he is to learn it, and how well he is learning it. It would be to make our schools, instead of what they are, which is jails for children, into a resource for free and independent learning, which everyone in the community, of whatever age, could use as much or as little as he wanted. (Holt *Underachieving* ix)

This is, in a nutshell, Holt's theory of autonomous education: individual learners of all ages identify areas of interest, begin working and experimenting in these areas, discover through this process the skills or knowledge they need, seek and obtain this knowledge and these skills, and continue to pursue their interests in a cycle of self-directed and self-motivated education which continues throughout an individual's life. Children are naturally curious, perceptive, and motivated, and they learn best when they are able to engage genuinely with their world in independent, interest-driven pursuits, which an autonomous education practice allows and encourages them to do (Holt *Learn* 184-185). What is learned through this natural process is not soon forgotten and becomes foundational knowledge and skillsets which individuals are readily able to draw on and apply throughout their lives – the same, Holt demonstrates, cannot be said of what is learned sitting in a classroom following a set curriculum (Holt *Learn* 93; *Fail* 118-119). The best place for this learning to happen is in the real world, and Holt argues passionately for

education to move out of isolated settings – and an isolated attitude – and for society to acknowledge that learning is and should be a part of everyday lived experiences for both adults and children. The failure of schools – and the failure of children in schools – is that this natural capacity and method for learning is not developed and is, instead, stifled through mandated education, which is artificially isolated from the rest of human experience and denies students the opportunity to pursue and explore their own interests (Holt *Fail* xiii).

In Holt's autonomous education, we see both Freire's idea of an authentic education – one that is connected to the world of students and reflects their interests – and a liberating praxis, as it is solely the students who decide what and how they will learn and who bear complete responsibility for discovering and transforming knowledge. Combining the foundations of a critical pedagogy with an autonomous education practice moves us closer to seeing what these abstract ideals look like when put into practice and provides a broader, more complex foundation on which to build an imaginative vision and a language of possibility to help make this ideal alternative a reality in North America.

The decision to integrate Holt's autonomous practice with Freire's theories also presents a greater focus on student agency, the importance of which Giroux emphasises repeatedly. Agency is a complex theory for which there are many definitions; this thesis – just as it is not intended to explicate and present the problems within the North American education system – is also not attempting to present a new definition of agency, or defend one in particular as superior. To avoid confusion and the possibility of misinterpretation or misunderstanding, however, we must establish what is meant throughout this thesis when we refer to an individual's "agency." This thesis draws on the work of Laura Ahearn, Jennifer Dornan, Kathryn Frazier, and Naila Kabeer and, from these separate works, presents a unified – and necessarily simplified –

definition of agency: agency is here understood as any given individual's ability to define meaningful goals and take action to pursue and accomplish them. There are, of course, a great number of details and complexities which influence, inform, and insist on expanding this definition,¹² but this thesis, just as it accepts the conclusions of education experts in order to focus on the work of analysing and presenting a plan for improving education, must be content with a simple definition and the assertion of experts that agency is a crucial capacity which must be developed and respected in every individual. Chapter One and Two each analyse the agency of a particular character – Quentin in the first and Julia in the second – and Chapter Three, which presents the *Magicians* series as a tool for teaching the concept of agency to students, revisits this definition in more detail and addresses some of the complexities and issues with defining, understanding, and exercising individual agency.

An autonomous education is primarily concerned with developing and fostering each individual's capacity for agency. In an autonomous education practice, each individual must decide for herself or himself what they¹³ wish to learn – establishing a goal – and then figure out how best to pursue this goal, choosing for themselves what path to take in order to gain the desired knowledge. The focus on free choice throughout the process both allows and requires learners to exercise their agency in selecting and pursuing a path for themselves. Rather than limiting the agency of students, as the current institution does by insisting that all students learn the same facts and skills in the same time-frame and in generally the same manner, an autonomous practice fosters agency. Through the process of an autonomous education, students

¹² For further definitions of and discussions regarding agency, see Ahearn; Dornan; Frazier; and Kabeer, as well as Lorenzo I. Bordonaro; Richard Ely, Gigliana Melzi, Luke Hadge, and Alyssa McCabe; Ruthann Elizabeth Mayes-Elma; Dan P. McAdams, Barry K. Hoffman, Elizabeth D. Mansfield, and Rodney Day; and Amartya Sen.

¹³ Throughout this thesis, the singular “they,” “their,” “them,” etc. are used to refer to singular individuals of unspecified gender.

exercise their agency at every step, learning through these experiences what goals and choices are available, what they are interested in pursuing, what actions are best suited to achieving their goals, and gaining an understanding of how this process is both internal and external as they encounter real life reactions to and resistance against – or support of – the goals and actions they are pursuing. Where a critical pedagogy looks at fostering student agency as a *result of* education, an autonomous practice explicitly supports and fosters this agency *within* the process of education itself, presenting another benefit of combining an autonomous practice and a critical pedagogy.

Holt's publications on autonomous education date back to the 1960s and early 1970s, but Holt, like Freire, is foundational in his field, and his texts are still in frequent use. Gruner, for instance, turns to Holt's publications in her exploration of an autonomous education in and through fantasy, discussed above.¹⁴ Holt's original theories are echoed in new proposals for reforming education, such as Salman Kahn's plan for a "one world schoolhouse," and employed in alternative schools, such as the Evangelical School Berlin Centre (ESBC) in Germany, which is being lauded for its successful approach and is working to help implement an autonomous practice in other schools around the country (Oltermann n.p.).¹⁵ A search of the Google Scholar databases for citations of the four books by Holt upon which this thesis draws returns 2,147 total citations for the most popular of these books, *How Children Fail* – 267 of which were published in the last five years.¹⁶ Most of this recent scholarship is, as would be expected, concerned with

¹⁴ See page 5.

¹⁵ The ESBC is a particularly notable example of a school employing an autonomous education practice because of its inclusion of open-ended courses like "responsibility" or "challenge." The challenge course, for example, has students planning and executing a solo adventure, which has seen students working on farms, trekking the South coast of England, or kayaking (Oltermann n.p.). The centrality of these courses to the operation of the school makes an autonomous practice a primary focus of education at ESBC and, therefore, an ideal example.

¹⁶ The figures of this search, conducted on the 14th of July, 2016, are as follows: for *How Children Fail*, published in 1964, Google Scholar returned 2,147 total citations (267 since 2012); for *How Children Learn*, published in 1967, there were 765 total citations (115 since 2012); for *The Underachieving School*, published in 1969, there were 274

education and with school institutions, though some of it has moved beyond traditional settings and into alternative education settings, such as museums (Tallboys). Within the last twelve months, Holt's texts have been used: as a framework with which to examine past schooling movements (Herrick); to establish current practices of non-formal adult education (Borrás); to improve education outcomes in math classes (Jaber; Foster), social studies classes (Shah), and any class which is able to incorporate practices of role-play (Banerjee); to address dyslexia (Reid; Elliot and Nicolson); and to analyse how teachers themselves are, and can best be, taught (Easton; Kapur; Lengelle and Ashby). Though Holt's texts are not as widely used as Freire's, they are nevertheless a foundational source for discussing an autonomous education practice.

Accepting an autonomous education practice – understood here as incorporating both Holt's vision and Freire's concepts of authentic education and a liberating praxis, which inform a critical pedagogy – as the ideal alternative to the current problematic education system in North America, this thesis will demonstrate the ways in which the *Magicians* series can be used by educators to facilitate and support the implementation of this new practice, from recognising the need for reform through to fostering student success within it. Rather than advocate for institutional or even school-level changes – which are slow to come and quick to leave¹⁷ – the intention of this thesis is to help educators across the continent implement this alternative practice in their classrooms now, without needing to wait for institutional progress and failing more students in the meantime. Margret Rasfeld, head teacher of the ESBC – where they are reportedly leading other schools in Germany into education reform by demonstrating the success

total citations (28 since 2012); for *Freedom and Beyond*, published in 1972, there were 210 total citations (32 since 2012).

¹⁷ Holt, in 1972, noted that, “For all the talk, experiments, federal funding, special programs, revolutions in education, and so forth of the past years, most of our schools have changed very little” (*Freedom* 238), an accusation which carries equal weight today, in 2016. Holt laments that schools “resist so well efforts to make them something else,” and asks “Why is it so hard for schools to move forward, and so easy to slip back?” (*Freedom* 239) – a question we can still ask of the school system today.

of autonomous education in their single school (Oltermann n.p.) – calls for the creation of ‘speedboats,’ small-scale changes to help drive larger change. Rasfeld explains:

“In education, you can only create change from the bottom – if the order comes from the top, schools will resist. Ministries are like giant oil tankers: it takes a long time to turn them around. What we need is lots of little speedboats to show you can do things differently.” (quoted in Oltermann, n.p.)

Fostering this type of change is the goal of this thesis: to show how the *Magicians* series can be read as an imaginative vision and contribute to a new language of possibility which can help educators turn their classrooms into ‘speedboats’ and lead the way in fixing the problems with education today by implementing an autonomous practice in their classrooms now. The *Magicians* series is presented in this thesis as a pedagogical tool for both educators and students to use in addressing the issues with education in North America today, improving education outcomes and developing student agency now and in classes to come.

THESIS OUTLINE

The chapters of this thesis are ordered in such a way as to follow the natural progression educators will take in implementing this reform, from recognising the need for change and locating a solution through to fostering student success in a reformed classroom. This thesis walks through the process and demonstrates how a critical reading of the *Magicians* series can facilitate and support each step along the way through a close reading of the series within a framework of thematic criticism, as outlined by Farah Mendlesohn – the most common approach to analysing fantasy, a thematic criticism is one which combines “a mode of reader response criticism” acknowledging the reader’s role in finding meaning within the text (“Thematic” 125-126). This framework of thematic criticism is a “self-conscious filter” which the ‘reader-critic’ chooses to use, understanding reading as an “active experience” and choosing to search for and apply deeper meanings and greater connections – it is an analysis of reading possibilities, rather

than one of authorial intent (Mendlesohn “Thematic” 127). Combining a thematic criticism with a close reading, this thesis is able to explicate a commentary on contemporary education through an analysis of scenes of education within the series.

Chapter One analyses the experiences of Quentin, the series’ primary protagonist, as he learns magic at Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy. Through a critical reading practice, what initially appears as an exciting, nearly idyllic experience is problematized, revealing the troubling attitudes towards education at Brakebills and the harm done to students as a result. Drawing on Freire’s theories, Quentin’s education is analysed as a “banking practice” informed by a “dominating praxis,” and his resulting identity as a “political illiterate” is explicated. The analysis of Brakebills explicates the institution as a critique of the current education system and a demonstration of its flaws, helping educators take the first step in creating classroom reform as they recognize the problems within the current system and acknowledge the need for change.

The second step in the process of classroom reform, and the ways in which a critical reading of the *Magicians* series can facilitate and support it, is the focus of Chapter Two. Here, Julia’s alternative education is analysed and explicated as a model of an autonomous education practice which educators can use when implementing this practice in their own classrooms. By representing the various practical activities that comprise the day-to-day workings of an autonomous practice and demonstrating how these activities are informed by a liberating praxis and true freedom of choice, Julia’s experiences provide educators with a foundation on which to base their own reformed practices. In addition, contrasting Julia’s magic abilities and her agency with Quentin’s political illiteracy clearly demonstrates the difference between these two approaches and provides educators with the motivation to begin and persevere in the work of reforming their classrooms.

Finally, Chapter Three demonstrates how the *Magicians* series can be placed directly into the hands of students to support the goals of a reformed classroom and foster the success of the new practice by explicitly introducing the concept of agency. Metaphor is a powerful teaching tool, and fantasy is inherently a metaphorical genre; by capitalizing on the metaphoric nature of fantasy, educators can use elements of the *Magicians* series as a tool for teaching and learning the concept of agency. An explicit introduction to agency helps establish students in an autonomous practice and fosters their success in it by ensuring they understand the overall goal and their position in the new classroom.

Literary scholars, particularly those interested in fantasy, and educators alike should find this thesis both appealing and applicable. The process outlined here should also be of equal interest – and serve an equally important purpose – to those who are interested in or working for education reform beyond the classroom level. The ideas and suggestions contained within this thesis are suitable and beneficial for all levels of education and students of all ages – including Chapter Three, the method of which can still be applied with younger students by using a different source text to provide comparable metaphors with which to teach the concept of agency. The theorists upon which this thesis draws were focused on different levels of education – Holt’s practice of autonomous education arises from his work in the elementary level, Giroux’s focus is secondary and post-secondary education, and Freire’s experience is predominantly with adult education – but their ideas and theories are all broadly applicable. The conclusions and suggestions in this thesis will be beneficial for any classroom and for all students; it is my hope that teachers at all levels will put this thesis to use turning their classrooms into speedboats and reforming their education pedagogy and practice.

Beyond its direct application in the field of education, this thesis should also be of interest to literary scholars working in various fields – such as young adult literature, fantasy fiction, or specifically working with representations of education or educators in literature – who will be able to see what this series in particular is able to accomplish as well as the broader applicability of this sort of research and analysis beyond the academic sphere. Ideally, this thesis will bring scholars from a variety of fields to fantasy fiction, helping to create an interdisciplinary conversation about the affordances of the genre, and will encourage scholars to apply the results of their literary analysis to solving issues in the wider world.

Chapter One

Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy: Explicating the Issues in Education and the Need for Reform

“Brakebills would be your college. ... Brakebills would become your world.”
– Dean Fogg, *The Magicians*, 38

Before the work of education reform can be started, turning classrooms across North America into ‘speedboats’ to lead the way to an improved education system with better outcomes for all students, there needs to be an acknowledgement that this work is necessary and an understanding of why this reform is required. Grossman’s *Magicians* series, by providing a representation of education as it is now – with all of the inherent issues and damaging repercussions for students – can facilitate this pre-requisite to reform and help educators recognize the need to implement an autonomous practice in their classrooms. Chapter One analyses the representation of education provided by Quentin and his experiences at Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy, explicating the ways in which this representation parallels the current problematic approach to education in North America. Drawing on Freire’s theories of problematic and ideal educations, this Chapter uses a critical reading practice to illuminate and present for educators the current issues in the education system and why they are so damaging, starting them on the path to classroom reform.

LITERATURE, FANTASY, AND PEDAGOGY

Every educator’s practice – what they do with and for their students and what they perceive the goals of these activities to be – is informed by their personal pedagogy: their beliefs and attitudes about education. This pedagogy is, in turn, influenced by a teacher’s own experiences with education. These experiences, as Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles explain, can be their own experiences or the experiences of others lived vicariously through various

media, and they can be experiences of formal or informal education (xiii). The foundations of personal pedagogy are laid long before an educator steps in to instruct their own class for the first time. Diane Dubose Brunner expounds upon this understanding of the influences on personal pedagogy, arguing that “Many of the ideas prospective teachers have about their roles as teachers and about schooling, in general, are developed long before they enter teacher education programs” (68). The teachers of popular culture, represented in literature, in movies, and on television, are just as notable an influence as the flesh-and-blood teachers of an individual’s past: “The myths of our childhood are powerful,” Brunner notes (115), and they cannot be ignored as one of the primary influences of pedagogy. James A. Muchmore demonstrates how fictional teachers uphold stereotypes – many of them problematic – which influence individuals’ understanding of their work, while Nancy Niemi, Julia B. Smith, and Nancy Brown’s article extends the sphere of influence of these stereotypical representations to include children as well as adults, noting that popular culture serves to reinforce and replicate these understandings of teachers and education on both sides of the classroom. Representations of education, including those found in literature, are a powerful force at work shaping attitudes towards education and the pedagogy of those who practice it.

Educators can take advantage of this reality by using fictional representations of education to improve their pedagogy, consciously analysing the images and attitudes the literature presents and using these depictions to interrogate their own practices and beliefs. Through scenes of education and learning, literature offers critique, commentary, and a situation to reflect on, which can be mobilized in a process of self-reflexive inquiry to help educators interrogate their own pedagogy and the influences which have informed their beliefs. Cole and

Knowles are passionate advocates for this practice of self-reflexive inquiry,¹⁸ which they consider to be among the most effective practices for professional growth and development. This practice asks teachers to examine and reflect critically upon their own pedagogy and the experiences that have informed it, allowing them to identify their strengths and work to address their weaknesses. Incorporating a critical analysis of literature and other media in this practice, educators are able to address fictional representations of education as one of the primary influences informing their pedagogy. If teachers are to be able “to do more than play school,” Brunner argues, they must interrogate the myths and attitudes about teaching and learning they have internalized from fictional representations in addition to their own life experiences in order to explicate what is good and what is bad in these beliefs, allowing them to make conscious decisions about their pedagogy and their resulting practice, rather than unknowingly and unintentionally replicating the past, problems and all (115). Brunner demonstrates how an examination of familiar representations can help educators see the ways in which the attitudes within have informed their pedagogy, as well as the advantages of analysing new representations, which present different situations and attitudes which educators must react to and reflect upon, facilitating further understanding of their existing beliefs and how these have been shaped by fictional representations in the past.

In addition to facilitating a process of self-reflexive inquiry – that is, helping educators understand and improve their personal pedagogies through interrogations of literature and of their own experiences as recalled by literature – fictional representations of education can generate understandings of critical education theories and important concepts and issues regarding pedagogy and practice, which can then be incorporated into educators’ understanding

¹⁸ See the first chapter of Cole and Knowles’ book, *Researching Teaching*, for an in-depth discussion on the practice of self-reflexive inquiry.

of their role as teachers. Stories about teaching and learning, in addition to inviting self-interrogation and self-reflection, present examples of educational practice that can serve as “vehicles” to help educators understand abstract concepts and educational theories (Brunner 2). Where textbooks and other critical literatures tend to present issues and concepts in fairly abstracted scenarios – precluding an examination of the importance of sociocultural influences and structures in these situations and so preventing a complete understanding of the concepts in actual practice – fictional representations of education are usually well-developed, fully-situated, and contextualized examples which facilitate further exploration with and understanding of critical theories (Brunner 4, 7). The contextualized nature of these fictional representations is a particularly important affordance for new and pre-service teachers, who may not have applicable first-hand experiences to draw upon in understanding these concepts (Brunner 3, 99). Brunner champions this particular use of fictional representations to augment lived experience: detailing the struggles of pre-service teachers attempting to understand critical texts, Brunner notes that “narrative seems to help; it provides a bridge; it creates a world that students can enter” (102). Expounding upon this affordance, Brunner explains that reading fiction alongside critical texts “may enrich the perspectives students need for critically reading against and reshaping their educational texts and terrains,” helping them modify and improve their pedagogy as they come to understand important concepts (103). By providing a ‘bridge’ from “abstraction to situation” (Brunner 102), fictional representations of education help educators achieve a full understanding of critical theories and concepts and so allow them to use these theories to inform and improve their pedagogy.

Neither Brunner nor Cole and Knowles focus on any particular genre or mode of literature as having particular merit for facilitating this professional growth, though the nature of

fantasy fiction and its inherent strengths of commentary and critique present it as an ideal literature for this purpose. Fantasy fiction, through its depictions of the ‘unreal’ and the ‘not-quite-real,’ invites readers to look at what is real through the lens of the fantastic to see the world differently, to take note of what had previously passed unnoticed, and to question what had previously been accepted. Jackson, a foundational scholar in the field of fantasy literature, establishes fantasy’s affordances for commenting on reality, arguing that, “Like any other text, a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context. Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it,” negating claims that fantasy, for being ‘unreal,’ cannot possibly show readers anything about the ‘real’ (3). The *Magicians* series, accordingly, is informed by Grossman’s experiences with education in contemporary North America. Juxtaposing an ‘unreal’ school and an education in an ‘unreal’ subject with life during and after school in our own ‘real’ world,¹⁹ the series is able to comment directly upon education as it really exists in North America.²⁰

“The fantastic,” Jackson continues, “traces the unsaid and the unseen of our culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’” (4). In this case, what has been “covered over” are the many issues inherent in education systems and institutions across North America, where problematic practices go unchallenged – or unnoticed. The *Magicians* series, in commenting upon North American education, reveals “the unsaid and the unseen” of the education system and presents it plainly – though metaphorically – for readers to

¹⁹ The *Magicians* series, like Rowling’s *Harry Potter*, takes place in a magical subculture within our own reality, exploring both the magical ‘secondary’ world of a magical school and the lives of its graduates and the interactions and intersections of this secondary world with our own ‘primary’ reality.

²⁰ McGovern supports this interpretation, noting that the *Magicians* series offers a criticism of the failure of elite American universities “to prepare arts graduates for practical careers and adult lives” (96).

acknowledge and to comprehend. In this way, fantasy creates “a space for a discourse other than a conscious one” (Jackson 62), allowing readers to address the sociocultural norms, ideologies, and structures which are “reproduced and sustained” predominantly within the subconscious, which fantasy provides access to through implicit exploration of these issues (Jackson 6).

Fantasy creates conscious awareness of that which usually remains unnoticed by “re-present[ing] the relations between ideology and the human subject” (Jackson 8). In this way, fantasy invites readers to look at what they do not normally consider worth noticing – or which they have not previously understood as noticeable at all – and begin to interrogate their world and the forces which have shaped it into its current form.

A critical reading of fantasy illuminates and explicates the implicit discourse inherent in works of fantasy and, in bringing it to the foreground, facilitates greater attention to the issues this discourse calls forth and the comments and critiques it makes on the ‘real’ world. A critical reading of the *Magicians* series brings to light the implicit discourse the series generates regarding North American education; this discourse can then be presented to educators, who can examine and analyse this commentary in a process of self-reflexive inquiry. In this way, educators can use the implicit discourse of the *Magicians* to interrogate their own pedagogy and to aid them in understanding important theoretical concepts and issues which should inform their attitude and approach to teaching. The representation of education presented through Quentin Coldwater and his experience at Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy creates an implicit discourse on the problems with the current education system in North America which, when explicated, can help educators understand Freire’s theories about what is wrong with this approach to education and to see the problems and the repercussions for themselves. In this way, a critical reading of the *Magicians* series allows educators to understand Freire’s critique of

“dominating” education systems and recognize the need for reform, guiding them through the first steps towards creating autonomous classrooms.

Freire’s ideas about authentic education and a liberating praxis are outlined in the Introduction²¹ and play a key role in the analysis of Chapter Two, which is focused on the ways in which this ideal education can be achieved with the aid of the *Magicians* series. This chapter, in contrast, focused as it is on the ways in which the series reveals the current *problems* with education in North America, relies on Freire’s articulation of what exactly is happening when education is *not* ideal: what Freire refers to as a “dominating praxis,” a “banking practice,” and a “program of hopelessness,” which produce individuals who are “political illiterates.” The *Magicians* series, through its representation of a problematic education, helps educators see the issues in the current system and understand Freire’s theories, which further demonstrate the issues and their repercussions. The remainder of this chapter analyses the representation of Quentin and his education at Brakebills, explicating the ways in which Freire’s theories can be used to understand the problems with this depiction, thereby leading to an understanding of these same problems within ‘real’ education and an acknowledgement of the need for reform.

Issues with Brakebills and with Quentin have been noted previously: J.B. Himes, for instance, laments that Brakebills students graduate “with immense world-bending powers but without sanction to use those powers openly in equally epic ways” (69); Margot McGovern reads Brakebills as a critique of liberal arts education and the failings of elite institutions to demonstrate the practical value of these studies (96), locating Brakebills’ problem specifically with Dean Fogg, who she claims “fails to tell potential students ... that there will be no practical application for their studies once they graduate from Brakebills and, moreover, the highly

²¹ See pages 8 to 9.

disciplined education they receive will in no way prepare them for life in the non-magical community” (95); and Robbi Nester notes that Quentin lacks “the psychological wherewithal” to think before acting (n.p.). The following analysis intends to demonstrate that all of these issues – the inability of Brakebills graduates to use their powers in “epic ways,” and of Quentin specifically to act with intention – are a result of the dominating praxis which informs education at Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy and positions its graduates as political illiterates.

BRAKEBILLS’ DOMINATING PRAXIS

As discussed in the Introduction,²² Freire outlines both a liberating praxis and a dominating one. Whereas a liberating praxis is designed to foster agency and political engagement by allowing students to dictate the subject and course of their education, acknowledging their position as active Subjects, a dominating praxis achieves the opposite result: a dominating praxis serves to create and reinforce oppression and prevent political engagement and other manifestations of individual agency by denying students an active involvement in their education. Students who graduate from a dominating praxis are, rather than Subjects, passive objects to whom education has been done without their active or, sometimes, willing participation. A dominating praxis does not effectively foster student agency – or even, really, student learning. This practice is, unfortunately, the one employed at Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy, where this dominating praxis manifests as a “banking practice” and a “program of hopelessness.” The following analysis of the representation of education at Brakebills reveals the ways in which the *Magicians* series simultaneously demonstrates what Freire means by a “dominating praxis” and critiques this praxis in contemporary education.

²² See pages 8 to 9.

The dominating praxis to which all Brakebills' educators seem to subscribe results in a method of instruction Freire calls a ““banking” concept of education.” This banking practice situates teachers as those *with knowledge* – which is understood as abstracted facts, as an ‘inert gift’ to be given – and students as empty containers *without knowledge*, making it the teacher’s job to “fill” these empty students by giving them “deposits” in the form of lessons and lectures (*Oppressed* 57-58). A banking practice assumes that knowledge has inherent power, and that all a teacher needs to do is deposit this knowledge in students “in order for its power to effect the desired change” (Freire *Hope* 111).²³ This approach to education requires little to no participation on the part of the students, whose only job in this scenario is to receive the neatly packaged facts which teachers have already analysed and parsed on their behalf. In this practice, a good student is one who complacently “records, memorizes, and repeats” with no attempt at understanding, inquiry or reflection (Freire *Oppressed* 57-58), establishing a binary with teachers as active Subjects who educate and students as passive objects to whom education is done (Freire *Oppressed* 59-61). The teacher’s existence in this practice is justified by their students’ relative ignorance, creating teachers as the authority from which all knowledge is obtained (Freire *Oppressed* 59) – which lends itself to an authoritarian practice, as the teacher’s authority as ‘possessor of knowledge’ is greatly exaggerated. Consequently, this complete control of content results in a manipulation of students, who are not able to participate in the selection, delivery, or even understanding of content (Freire *Hope* 112). Invariably, this approach to education imposes the teacher’s worldview upon their students, since all knowledge is presented within the

²³ Holt illuminates the prevalence of this practice in *How Children Fail*, noting that this practice is the one with which most educators are familiar and that thinking about education in this way is “comforting to teachers, who have felt all along that their job is to drop, or push, one at a time, little bits of information into those largely empty minds that are moving slowly before them down the academic assembly line” (105).

framework of the teacher's particular perspective on the world, which makes a banking practice a naturally dominating praxis (Freire *Hope* 111).

Those familiar with the *Magicians* series will likely already see many parallels between this description and Grossman's depiction of what happens at Brakebills – which predominantly seems to be 'recording, memorizing, and repeating.' Quentin and the other students read their textbooks, listen to teachers lecture, drill endlessly in skill-development exercises, and perform on command the spells which they have been taught. When Quentin returns to Brakebills as a professor in *The Magician's Land*, readers are presented with Quentin's thoughts on education and how it is best done; Quentin's pedagogy, informed by his own experiences as a student, is an almost verbatim repetition of Freire's definition of a banking practice. Though Quentin initially feels insecure and ineffective in his role as a teacher, he finds confidence and security in situating himself as the possessor of knowledge and, therefore, as the teacher. Quentin confidently articulates his pedagogy as follows:

But gradually it dawned on him that at least he knew what he was talking about. His track record in life and love wasn't exactly flawless, but he did possess a large amount of practical information about the care and feeding of supernatural forces, and teaching was just a matter of getting that information out of his head and into the clever, receptive heads of his students in orderly installments. (TML 25)

Quentin is the possessor of knowledge and therefore the educator; the students are passive receptacles – note that Quentin even thinks of them as “receptive heads” rather than as individuals – and knowledge is something that will be transferred between them as Quentin dictates and delivers, deposited in the heads of students “in orderly installments.”

In addition to providing a nearly verbatim replication of what a banking practice is, Quentin as a professor also highlights a central aspect of a banking practice: the pre-eminence of

the teacher.²⁴ This belief in the necessity of teachers and their absolute authority is the prevailing attitude at Brakebills, to which readers are introduced even before Quentin begins his classes there as a student. Eliot regurgitates Brakebills' pedagogy to Quentin during the summer before Quentin's first year and, in explaining what is necessary to work magic, Eliot lists – alongside attributes like raw potential and dedication to hard work – the importance of teachers, a concept which Brakebills itself champions. Those who cannot do magic, Eliot explains, “lack the guidance and mentorship provided by the dedicated and startlingly charismatic faculty of Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy” (TM 44). Eliot, it should be noted, is a remarkably cynical and sarcastic character; taking this remark, then, as likely being less than genuine, readers are still given a clear indication of how Brakebills views the process of learning magic and how students are intended to view their teachers (whether or not Eliot himself would agree). The teachers of Brakebills are understood as an essential aspect of learning magic: they possess the knowledge students covet and, without these teachers to share this knowledge with them, learning magic simply would not be possible.²⁵ Quentin accepts this idea as fact during his time as a student at Brakebills and replicates it when he returns as a teacher, at which time he justifies his role and understands himself as necessary in the process of learning: “Fillory pretty much ran itself,” Quentin muses, thinking on his ‘job’ as King in a magical land before becoming an educator, “Whereas these kids, floundering as they were in the choppy, frigid waters of introductory gramarye, would have been lost without him. They needed him, and it felt good to be needed” (TML 26). Quentin has become one of the faculty whose “guidance and mentorship” is seen as an integral component of any individual's ability to learn magic, and his teaching

²⁴ Holt also notes the privileged position teachers are accorded when “education” is defined as “schooling,” which suggests that all learning requires the involvement of a certified teacher (*Freedom* 126-127).

²⁵ This idea is proven false by Julia's education outside formal institutions, as analysed in the next chapter.

practice replicates and reinforces this belief exactly, furthering the dominating praxis which informs Brakebills' instruction.

Another aspect of a banking practice is that teachers – as possessors of knowledge, who have analysed the facts in isolation and decided what to present to students as deposits, and how – have a very tight control over knowledge. At Brakebills, students are able to learn and access only the knowledge which teachers have sanctioned for them: by stifling and failing to develop critical thinking and inquiry skills, the dominating praxis of Brakebills further ensures students will not be able to access unsanctioned knowledge outside the classroom. The professors decide what students need to know, and they present this knowledge – and only this knowledge – to students as they believe it will best be learned.

Professor March, for example – Quentin's first teacher, and later his colleague – teaches the Practical Applications course, in which literally nothing is taught but the practical application of magic. The emphasis, from the very beginning, is on *using* magic rather than *understanding* it, which March considers unnecessary for their particular purpose. In Quentin's first lecture, Professor March emphasizes that they will not be pursuing an understanding of magic, and that there is no need to, making his control of the content and, therefore, of knowledge, clear: "In any case, we do not and cannot understand what magic is, or where it comes from, any more than a carpenter understands why a tree grows. He doesn't have to. He works with what he has" (TM 48). March discourages any inquiry into the theory which informs their practice, focusing instead on rote memorization of abstracted words and gestures which compose pre-existing spells and rituals. There is no call for March's students to engage with the content beyond memorizing and replicating what they are shown – and they are shown only what March and the administration has previously decided First Years in a Practical Applications course should learn. Furthermore,

March's assertion that a carpenter "works with what he has" serves as an indirect lesson for students on what they are expected to do in his course, which is to work with what they are given as they are told to, and no more.

Alongside this banking approach to education – and its inherent control of knowledge and the pre-eminence of teachers – Brakebills creates and reinforces a dominating praxis through a 'program of hopelessness.' A program of hopelessness fosters the meekness and complacency which characterise a good student in a dominating praxis and discourages any attempts by students to exercise their agency by, for instance, attempting to learn unsanctioned knowledge. While Freire notes that hope alone is not enough to end oppression, he emphasizes the integral role hope plays in strengthening any attempts to this end: hope generates attempts at change, while hopelessness paralyzes individuals, creating a sense of fatalism about the world and making it impossible for the oppressed to struggle, to "re-create the world" and end their oppression (Freire *Hope* 8). Progressive educators in an ideal practice work to "unveil opportunities for hope" and help students find the strength to struggle; teachers within an oppressive system, however, either actively mask or simply fail to reveal these opportunities (Freire *Hope* 9). Instead of fostering a struggle, the passivity instilled in students through a program of hopelessness causes inaction, the consequences of which are hopelessness and despair, which, in turn, generates more inaction and more despair and effectively maintains the 'status quo' (Freire *Hope* 9).

Returning to Quentin's first lecture with Professor March, we can see that Brakebills actively attempts to obscure opportunities for hope by discouraging students from pursuing knowledge beyond the sanctioned curriculum – in the case of March's Practical Applications course, students are actively discouraged from pursuing any inquiry into the theory of magic and

are told instead to focus purely on its practical use, as analysed above. At the end of his lecture, March reiterates the practical focus on magic and the unimportance of understanding the theory behind it in a clear attempt to extinguish any hope students may have that they can access this theory on their own. March tells the assembled students:

“I urge you again to think of this as a purely practical course, with a minimum of theory. If you find yourself becoming curious about the nature and origins of the magical powers you are slowly and very, very painfully cultivating, remember this famous anecdote about the English philosopher Bertrand Russell.

“Russell once gave a public lecture on the structure of the universe. Afterward he was approached by a woman who told him that he was a very clever young man but much mistaken in his thinking, because everyone knew that the world was flat and sat on the back of a turtle.

“When Russell asked her what the turtle was standing on, she replied, ‘You’re very clever, young man, very clever. But it’s turtles all the way down!’

“The woman was wrong about the world, of course, but she would have been quite right if she’d been talking about magic. Great mages have wasted their lives trying to get at the root of magic. It is a futile pursuit, not much fun and occasionally quite hazardous. Because the farther down you go, the bigger and scaliier the turtles get, with sharper and sharper beaks. Until eventually they start looking less like turtles and more like dragons.” (TM 53)

Looking for knowledge which is left off of the curriculum is a “futile pursuit” and possibly even “quite hazardous,” and surely these beginning students will not pretend to know better than the “great mages” who “wasted” their lives looking for this theory? March presents a ‘myth’ of magic which reinforces the practical approach he employs and attempts to instill fear in students and so prevent them from questioning this dictate. This practice is a perfect example of what Freire means when he says that oppressors “mythicize” the world in order to present it as a “fixed entity, something given” and so prevent opposition by eliminating the hope that there may be other ways or that a different reality might be possible (*Oppressed* 135). In this case, March consistently reiterates that theory is unnecessary and a worthless pursuit to prevent students from hoping that theory might provide access to something which they feel is missing, or which might improve their lives or their abilities as spellcasters.

Furthering this program of hopelessness is the way in which a dominating praxis positions magic and magical knowledge as meaningless and disconnected from any real goal or application. The avoidance of all theory and complete focus on rote memorization, drilling skills, and endless repetition, which is a consequence of the banking pedagogy employed at Brakebills, results in knowledge and skills which seem to have no real use and further serves the purpose of fostering inaction. Quentin is still in his first semester of his First Year when he begins to feel that “The work had lost all connection to whatever goal it was supposed to be accomplishing” (TM 63), and this feeling only grows stronger, until Quentin in his Fourth Year²⁶ displays a belief that everything he is learning is a ‘meaningless chore’ when he calls their extracurricular activities “a chore just like anything else, except even more meaningless” (TM 124). Quentin and, it seems, most of the other students all share a particular attribute: the students are willing to work simply for work’s sake, what Quentin refers to as “the familiar, perverse satisfaction of repetitive, backbreaking labor” (TM 63). Yet even these particularly dutiful students come to feel as if there is no purpose to what they are learning and, therefore, no reason to apply themselves beyond the minimum requirements. This disconnect between the work of spellcasting and the rest of their lives, like the myths which discourage theoretical learning, creates students who pursue only sanctioned knowledge and perform only the required acts, because it turns performing magic into a meaningless labour.²⁷ By making magic both mechanical and meaningless, the Brakebills faculty, intentionally or not,²⁸ foster students who have no hope for

²⁶ Quentin completes both the First and Second Year curriculums during his first year as a Brakebills student, meaning that he is in the Fourth Year class during his third year at Brakebills.

²⁷ Holt foregrounds this disconnect between the busywork of the classroom and real life pursuits as one of the primary failures of the education system (*Fail* 23-24). This disconnect causes students to view the day to day activities of the classroom, not as part of a ‘journey to knowledge’ which will eventually culminate in learning a skill or concept, but as a series of meaningless tasks which must be “done, or at least got out of the way, with a minimum of effort and unpleasantness” (*Fail* 24) and which bear no greater significance or purpose.

²⁸ Teachers do not need to be intentionally oppressive to create an oppressive pedagogy and a dominating praxis – in fact, these problematic practices can even develop out of a desire to liberate students, if approached incorrectly

the possibilities magic presents to them and so will go on to lives of inactivity or, at best, endless repetition of what they have already studied – creating the “political illiteracy” which will be analysed below.

A critical reading of the *Magicians* series explicates the ways in which the representation of Brakebills and Quentin’s education there provides educators with an example to help them understand Freire’s theory of what is wrong with an oppressive education and recognise the issues present in the current education system in North America. This analysis is only a brief overview of the ways in which the *Magicians* series presents an example of a dominating praxis through the institution of Brakebills – there are many more moments in the three books which present scenes of educational practice which can be analysed in this way, and I would strongly encourage educators to look for these scenes and interrogate them for both the practices shown and the pedagogy which underlies the choices made by both educators and students.²⁹

QUENTIN AS A POLITICAL ILLITERATE

The dominating praxis of Brakebills results in little chance that Quentin and his schoolmates³⁰ can become anything but “political illiterates” as a consequence of the education

(Freire *Oppressed*). According to Freire, many teachers unconsciously replicate these oppressive practices without realizing what they are doing. The professors of Brakebills all seem earnest, with good intentions for their students. Quentin, in particular, has only the best of intentions for his students when he begins teaching with a dominating praxis – there is no indication in the text that he intends to replicate for his students the problems he himself encountered as a result of his own education. Preventing this sort of unintentional replication of problematic practices is another reason the sort of critical inquiry and self-reflection advocated here is so important.

²⁹ These additional scenes include, for instance, Julia’s education in *The Magician King*, aspects of which are analysed in Chapter Two, or the period of Quentin’s education at Brakebills South in *The Magicians*. Again, this list is not exhaustive, as I hope to encourage educators to employ the practices of analysis and reflection they see modelled here in their own process of reflection and professional development.

³⁰ There are some notable exceptions among the Brakebills students who do manage to become more active agents and not simply political illiterates – among Quentin’s acquaintances, the most prominent examples are Alice and Penny. Alice manages to maintain and even increase her position as an active agent due to her particularly strong will and sense of self and the formative experiences of her childhood, which have made her critically aware of the oppressive structures to which other students are blind – namely, her experiences of being neglected by two magician parents in an unhappy home, the death of her brother at Brakebills, and the circumstances of her entrance examination. Penny, because of his highly unique Discipline, spends a great deal of his time at Brakebills in

they receive; through their time at Brakebills, these students internalize the messages of their oppressors, learn to conform to the expectations of others, and come to understand the world as fixed, as unchangeable, as a “fait accompli.” The *Magicians* series does more than help educators recognise and understand the problems with current North American education: it also shows educators the consequences of these problems for students in the current system by giving a fully-situated and detailed example of Quentin’s political illiteracy as a result of his education at Brakebills. This privileged view into the life of a student and the consequences of political illiteracy will help educators to recognize the need for reform as they come to understand Freire’s theory of “political illiterates” through the example of Quentin.

As a result of its oppressive pedagogy, Brakebills produces graduates who are what Freire refers to as “political illiterates.” To be a political illiterate, as explained above, is to view reality as complete and to see no opportunities for change in one’s society. Some of the component aspects of political illiteracy include internalizing the views of the oppressor, adapting to prescribed goals, and – of course – failing to see how one can act to change society. As Brakebills is a prime example of an institution with an oppressive pedagogy, Quentin – as a graduate of this system – is a prime example of its result: it produces politically illiterate individuals.

When individuals are subjected to a dominating education praxis, they internalize the images of themselves and the world presented to them by their oppressors (Freire *Oppressed* 31). Quentin, for example, very quickly internalizes the idea of his own passivity and helplessness as a student and accepts that the Brakebills faculty are absolutely necessary in order to learn magic – an attitude which we see Quentin replicate when he becomes a teacher, as discussed above.

independent study under the guidance of Professor van der Weghe: this autonomous education helps Penny maintain his status as an active agent and allows him to pursue his interests without the restriction of the usual curriculum.

This internalized notion persists after Quentin graduates from Brakebills and reconnects with Julia, who is a powerful magician educated without the “guidance and mentorship” of Brakebills.³¹ Though Quentin has seen and accepted Julia’s magical ability, his response when first introduced to the safe house system³² is to proclaim that it is not possible for people to learn magic this way, despite having clear evidence to the contrary: “These people can’t do magic,” Quentin tells Julia, “They’re not – there’s no safe-guards. They aren’t qualified. Who’s even supervising them?” (TMK 130). Here, we see Quentin’s internalization of the concept of the pre-eminence of and necessity for teachers established by a banking practice. Following this initial rejection of the safe houses as a viable alternative, Quentin expresses a clear belief that an education at Brakebills is the only proper way to “earn” magic and to ‘pay your dues’ (TMK 134). The presence of the safe houses comes to represent, for Quentin, the ‘collapse’ of the “containment field” Brakebills enforces on magic (TMK 138) – which Quentin, used to the tight control of magic at Brakebills, understands as essential. Though Quentin is eventually, albeit reluctantly, able to accept that Julia and other self-taught magicians he meets, such as Stoppard, might have been capable of learning magic without the Brakebills faculty, Quentin cannot believe that he could have accomplished the same feat: reflecting on Stoppard’s ability to learn on his own, Quentin notes that he personally “never would have gotten anywhere near magic all by himself in Brooklyn” (TML 164). Even confronted with clear evidence that such self-guided

³¹ Julia’s education is analysed as an ideal alternative in Chapter Two.

³² The safe house system is a loosely-connected network of houses around the world where amateurs with proven magical ability learn magic outside the traditional institutions, such as Brakebills. Julia locates a safe house in Bed Stuy and, after passing the entrance test of learning a simple flash spell, begins to study magic there and at other safe houses around the United States. The safe houses use a level system (borrowed from role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons) to track each individual’s progress; each level is represented by a blue star tattoo. By the time Julia leaves the safe house system, she has reached level seventy-seven – the levels end at two-hundred-fifty. The majority of the information on the safe houses is provided in *The Magician King* in chapters 15 and 18 detailing Julia’s past, though the safe houses are also featured in the present-day plot in chapter 11.

learning is possible, Quentin still cannot break free of the habit of thinking of himself as helpless without Brakebills instructors and of the institution itself as necessary for learning magic.

Having internalized their messages, political illiterates also come to accept the purposes ascribed to them by their oppressors. Along with knowledge, students who are educated within a banking practice are filled with a prescribed purpose and are taught how to adapt to these goals, rather than formulating and pursuing their own (Freire *Oppressed* 63). Political illiterates learn to feel productive and fulfilled when pursuing a goal, but they require these goals to be externally provided, as they are “incapable of autonomous projects” (Freire *Education* 12). In learning to accept the purposes prescribed to them by others, students in a dominating praxis lose the ability to define purposes and goals for themselves as their agency is continually stifled and denied.

As Quentin notes at the beginning of his final year, when students graduate from Brakebills, their greatest challenge is finding an application for their abilities and a purpose for themselves going forward: “They could do more or less whatever they wanted as long as they didn’t interfere with one another,” Quentin muses, but “The real problem was figuring out to their own satisfaction what that was” (TM 181). Quentin struggles with this challenge throughout his final year, blaming himself – but never his education – for his failure to find a purpose or even articulate an ambition: “What was he going to do? What *exactly*? Every ambition he’d ever had in his life had been realized the day he was admitted to Brakebills, and he was struggling to formulate a new one with any kind of practical specificity” (TM 210, emphasis in original). As far as Quentin understands, he should have everything he needs to pursue a happy and fulfilling life; Quentin is not able to see from within the system how his education has failed him and positioned him as a political illiterate, causing his inability to define a goal.

There is no focus at Brakebills on effectively – or even ineffectively – preparing students to find a purpose and become active agents; rather, students are given endless short-term goals to work towards while their critical capacities, which would allow them to develop an autonomous project, are stifled. Though the Fifth Year “mandatory senior thesis” presents a nominal attempt to help students find a meaningful, individual purpose for their magic and demonstrate its practical applications after graduation, the pedagogy informing Brakebills’ practice makes it wholly ineffective in achieving this goal, so that the thesis becomes, in practice, yet another prescribed purpose to which the oppressed students must adapt at the insistence of their oppressors. Both Quentin and his girlfriend, Alice – who has a better understanding of the potential practical applications of magic and a better ability to define her own goals than the average Brakebills’ student displays – are said to have “plugged away” at their thesis “with steadily diminishing enthusiasm,” and neither staff nor students seem to treat these projects as anything important³³ (TM 211). The lack of enthusiasm for their projects illustrates the failure of this assignment to inspire and transform the students, which situates this attempt at fostering autonomous goals within Brakebills’ program of hopelessness rather than as a refreshing example of a liberating praxis.

Through the course of his education, Quentin comes to believe that he is helpless without the Brakebills faculty, and he is able to act effectively only when he is adapting to a goal that has been set for him. Quentin and the other Brakebills students accept this way of life and understanding of magic without struggle.³⁴ These students have, as Freire notes all oppressed

³³ Alice is given the lowest possible passing grade for a project which no one can prove to have been successful or not; Quentin plans to fly to the moon, then immediately abandons the attempt, and no mention is made of whether he passes or fails or is made to pursue another project – or whether the completion of or a passing grade on the mandatory thesis is even a requirement for graduation (TM 211-212).

³⁴ With the notable exception, once again, of Alice and of Penny.

individuals do, ‘fatalistically accepted their exploitation,’ conforming to the structures presented to them and failing to understand that the situation in which they find themselves is not an unalterable reality (*Oppressed* 51). Quentin notes that, when he graduated from Brakebills, “he’d thought life was going to be like a novel, starring him on his own personal hero’s journey, and that the world would provide him with an endless series of evils to triumph over and life lessons to learn” (TML 73). As a result of this belief, Quentin spends the remainder of *The Magicians*, all of *The Magician King*, and most of *The Magician’s Land* waiting for (and eventually seeking out) and then pursuing external goals rather than attempting to formulate one for himself.

Quentin’s position as a political illiterate causes significant problems for him throughout his life. Since Quentin strongly believes that fantastic quests and meaningful goals will present themselves to him, he spends most of his time feeling miserable and unfulfilled as these fail to materialize and often acts without considering the consequences, constantly counter-acting his purposes and thwarting his own pursuit of happiness. Quentin, as a result of his education, fails to define his own purpose in life and also fails to understand how his choices and actions affect his reality, since he views reality as fixed. Waiting for external goals to materialize, Quentin latches on to any possible quest he thinks he sees, from sleeping with Janet after a dinner party because that seems to be what she wants (TM 237), going to Fillory because Penny proposes it and Alice forces him to begin the quest (TM 251), and fighting to save Ember because that’s the adventure that “finds them” (TM 289, 311). In pursuing each of these external goals, Quentin is unable to understand that his actions can have an impact beyond the obvious goal to which he is working, and so he hurts both himself and others – particularly Alice, who is first emotionally wounded when Quentin cheats on her with Janet and then dies as she sacrifices herself to save

Quentin from a situation he inadvertently created³⁵ (TM 362-364). Quentin is little better over the course of the next book in the series, *The Magician King*, where readers find Quentin is just as miserable and directionless as a King of Fillory as he was in the real world. Once again, Quentin chases after every external goal which presents itself: first attempting to turn an encounter with a bewitched Clock Tree into a quest (TMK 13), then taking on the very next task that is presented to him, that of collecting back taxes from an outlying island (TMK 26) – which leads him reactively into a quest to hunt for magic keys (TMK 71), which turns out really to be a quest to save magic itself (TMK 180). Like the second half of *The Magicians*, the plot of *The Magician King* is largely driven by Quentin's pursuit of an external goal and the disastrous consequences of his status as a political illiterate.

Throughout the series, educators are given an intimate view of the ways in which Quentin's status as a political illiterate negatively affects his life. This sort of privileged understanding of the course of someone's life and the causes influencing it are not usually available to educators in the lives of their own students; fictional representations provide fully-situated and intimate understandings which are not available in the real world. Analysing the *Magicians* with the specific intention of interrogating the pedagogy and practice in the scenes of education, educators may see the repercussions of being a political illiterate, and understanding that the students have been positioned as political illiterates by the dominating praxis of Brakebills, educators may then become aware of the repercussions for students in real life who

³⁵ It is arguably Quentin's fault that he and his companions end up in a battle with the Beast, since Quentin is the one who decided that *now* was the time to go to Fillory and that this mission was the quest they should pursue – and because he is the one who summoned the Beast into their classroom back at Brakebills, and so brought their group to the Beast's notice in the first place. Of course, the revelation that Jane Chatwin has been manipulating events to lead to this conclusion might suggest that she is, in fact, responsible for this situation, but Jane explains that this reality is 'the most effective timeline' (TM 380), which maintains the idea of the individual characters' autonomy of action in each timeline, with Jane manipulating only the circumstances to force them into reacting – which still holds Quentin as ultimately responsible for his actions within each externally-influenced timeline.

are currently experiencing problematic educations informed by the same negative pedagogy as Brakebills. The fictional representation of education presented by the *Magicians* helps educators to understand the need for reform – underscoring the urgency for working now to reform individual classrooms to mitigate as much damage as possible, rather than continuing to fail students as educators wait for institutional change – and sets them on the path to instituting a reformed practice in their classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The goal of Brakebills is to create magicians, and this it does – but the individuals it shapes as magicians are political illiterates who have not been adequately prepared to define a purpose for their life and, in pursuing this purpose, to find happiness. A critical reading of scenes of education in the *Magicians* series shows the problematic pedagogy and practice employed by the Brakebills staff, which generates an understanding of Freire’s theories which address this problematic approach and helps educators recognise where these problems exist in the current North American education system. Furthermore, by analysing the repercussions this education has for Quentin, the series’ protagonist, educators can see the serious and negative effects this approach has for students. Reading the *Magicians* series and paying critical attention to the critique it makes of real life education, educators may come to understand and acknowledge the need for reform.

This chapter outlines the first step to creating successful ‘speedboats’ to guide greater reform across North America; the next step is implementing a new pedagogy and practice in the classroom to replace the one that is now understood as problematic and damaging. Chapter Two, through an analysis of Julia’s alternative education in the series, explicates the ways in which a critical reading of the *Magicians* series can also facilitate this next step by modelling and

motivating the implementation of an autonomous, liberating education practice in classrooms
across North America.

Chapter Two

The Ganymede Project: Modelling and Motivating Reformed Classroom Practices

*The house at Murs was the best thing that had ever happened to Julia in her entire life.
– The Magician King, 269*

Once the issues with the current education system – and the repercussions this system has for students – have been recognised and the need for reform has been established, the next step is, naturally, implementing a reformed practice. Rather than wait for institutional or even school-wide change, this thesis advocates for classroom-level reform, which can have an immediate impact and help individual classes lead the way as ‘speedboats’ to guide further change. Chapter One analysed the representation of education in the *Magicians* series presented through Quentin and his experiences at Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy, helping educators to see the ways in which this fictional representation explicates ‘real’ world education issues and illuminates the need for reform. Chapter Two will demonstrate how the *Magicians* series can also facilitate the next step – implementing a reformed practice – by modelling and motivating the implementation of an autonomous practice in the classroom.

Analysing the alternative representation of education presented in the series through Julia and her independent studies, this chapter will explicate the model that this representation provides to educators, focusing on one particular period in Julia’s education: her time at the house in Murs working on the Ganymede Project. First demonstrating the ways in which the Ganymede Project models both the practice and the pedagogy of an autonomous education and how educators can make use of this representation, the chapter will end with a discussion of the ways in which this model – and the impact this alternative education has on Julia, particularly

when placed in contrast with Quentin – can motivate educators to begin and sustain the work of implementing an autonomous practice by showing the positive impact it has for students.

MODELLING EDUCATION REFORM IN FANTASY FICTION

Once the need for change has been recognised, the next step is, logically, implementing this change. For the reasons discussed in the Introduction,³⁶ this thesis champions classroom-level change accomplished through the implementation of an autonomous education practice, as outlined by Holt and Freire, which re-engages the process of independent, interest-driven learning and discovery children naturally employ and fosters student agency. The need for reform and improvement has been recognised, and the theories of both Holt and Freire are readily available and still in significant use³⁷ – why, then, are educators not already working to implement these practices in their classrooms? What is stopping every educator from picking up one of Holt’s texts, or one of Freire’s, or any number of other books or studies on the subject and simply doing as the texts suggest in order to implement an autonomous practice in their own classroom?

Perhaps it is not quite as simple as that. Returning to Brunner’s argument outlined in the previous chapter – that abstract theories are not always easily translatable from page to personal pedagogy³⁸ – it is not hard to imagine that it would be just as, if not more so, difficult to translate an abstract theory into a concrete classroom practice. Fictional representations of education provide situated and contextualized examples to facilitate the process of translation from theory to pedagogy; in the same manner, fictional examples can provide models of classroom practices to help educators implement these theories as new instructional methods and activities. By

³⁶ See pages 8 through 16.

³⁷ These issues are also covered in the Introduction: see page 1 and pages 8 to 15, respectively.

³⁸ See Chapter Two, pages 21 to 23.

providing context and a privileged view into the minds of students, fictional models can help educators successfully implement new practices by demonstrating what these practices look like, why they look this way, and what the positive outcomes are for students.

We will again turn to fantasy fiction as a source for representations of education to model an autonomous education practice. Hume suggests that there are four distinct categories of literature in which the fantastic can be found: illusion, vision, revision, and disillusion.³⁹ Upon first reading, Grossman's *Magicians* series – and the majority of fantasy texts today – would seem to fall into Hume's category of 'vision:' texts which "present the reader with a new interpretation of reality and offer the pleasures of emotional engagement with such a new world" (xiii) while also 'inviting' the reader "to acknowledge the possibility of a different reality" (xiv). Hume locates texts in this category between escapist and didactic literature, situating it as a little bit of both while not truly being either: "the author does not force his interpretation on us intellectually or morally, nor does he flatter us into agreement with attractive fairy tales. He engages our emotions and tries to persuade us at least to consider his interpretation of reality, however different from our own it may be" (xiii). Certainly, most fantasy fits this description; this category recalls Jackson's argument of the fantasy genre's inherent power to use the 'unreal' in order to critique and suggest new possibilities for the 'real,' as discussed in Chapter One.⁴⁰

Hume goes on to suggest, however, that many texts which should more rightfully be considered 'didactic' are intentionally disguised as merely visionary literature, since overt didacticism has become widely unpopular (56). Due to this tendency to disguise didacticism, a

³⁹ The categories of illusion and disillusion are not discussed here, as neither is applicable to Grossman's *Magicians* series: Hume classifies the category of illusion as pure 'escapism' which disengages from a reality it believes it cannot change (55) and disillusion as that which 'declares reality unknowable,' such as the absurdist tradition (xiii-xiv).

⁴⁰ See pages 24 to 25.

good portion of fantasy which rightfully belongs to the next category, ‘revision’ – that which goes from reaction to action, from providing an *experience* of the alternative to creating a *plan* for actually “revising reality” according to what fantasy shows us to be possible (Hume 56) – is mistakenly considered as merely visionary literature. Many writers of fantasy have chosen to mask their texts in this way, “clustering near the mid-point, their programs for action reduced to brief sketches, or left implicit” (Hume 56). A close and critical reading of these texts can develop the sketches they present, to make their “programs for action” explicit and, therefore, available to act upon in order to ‘revise reality.’ Making these programs of actions available is precisely what the critical reading of the representation of Julia’s education in the *Magicians* series intends to accomplish: by making this alternative model of education explicit and, thereby, bringing forward the implied plan to revise education according to this fantastic possibility, this chapter presents the fictional model of Julia’s experiences to educators as a plan which they can use to revise and reform education in their own classrooms. Understanding Grossman’s trilogy as belonging to Hume’s category of revision, rather than vision, this thesis explicates its implied proposal for a better approach to education and makes it available for educators to put into practice.

Implicit models of and advocacy for an autonomous education practice have been noted in other fantasy fiction texts, primarily by Gruner. Analysing Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy, and the first three of Pratchett’s *Discworld* novels to feature Tiffany Aching, Gruner explicates the plans for an alternative education these three fantasy series provide, positioning them, in the process, as revisionary literature. Gruner demonstrates that these fantasy texts advocate for a practice of autonomous education as well as actively facilitate this education process for their readers, working in this way to revise reality

according to the ideal of fantasy. Though Gruner notes the advocacy for and the facilitation of an autonomous education through these texts, she does not fully explicate the model of this practice provided in any of them: this chapter intends to fill this gap, explicating the model of autonomous practice in Grossman's series and demonstrating what this model affords educators who are looking to reform their classrooms. This same close, critical reading practice could easily be applied to the texts Gruner considers, or any number of other texts in the subgenre Gruner identifies as "education of a wizard stories" – applying this practice to other texts would expand the available models for educators to use and further support the implementation of an autonomous practice at the classroom level.

Fantasy fiction, then, not only presents a view of what the world *could* look like, but often includes suggestions for how to change the world so it looks the way that fantasy suggests it can. In the case of Grossman's *Magicians* series, there is a plan for implementing an autonomous education practice buried within the representation of a fantastic education, and explicating this plan can make it readily available for educators to use in order to improve real-life education and make it function more like the ideal, magical alternative. The remainder of this chapter focuses on explicating the plan within Julia's experiences at the house in Murs working on the Ganymede Project and explaining the ways in which educators can make use of this model to implement an autonomous education practice in their classrooms.

Julia's education is detailed in flash-back chapters throughout the second book in the series, *The Magician King*, through which readers are presented with many different experiences and examples of an autonomous education.⁴¹ While all of these examples are worth analysing –

⁴¹ There are also examples of an autonomous education presented through the experiences of other characters, such as Penny (during his time at Brakebills studying independently under Professor van der Weghe) and even with Quentin in *The Magicians' Land*, when he has begun to dismiss his identity as a political illiterate, claim his agency, and teach himself the spells from the Neitherlands and from Fillory.

particularly Julia's initial, independent study of magic – this chapter will focus on her experiences working with the Ganymede Project. The reason for this exclusive focus is three-fold: first, this particular experience demonstrates – and, therefore, models for educators – both the practice of and the pedagogy informing an autonomous education; second, out of the available scenes to analyse, the circumstances of the Project best mimic a traditional classroom, which will help facilitate the transfer of this model from a fictional example to real-life practice; and third, the close, critical reading practice required to explicate the model presented in the fictional example necessitates a level of detail which makes a larger focus prohibitive within the constraints of a single chapter. An analysis of the Ganymede Project – how it is formulated, the ways in which various characters pursue it, and its impact for Julia – will explicate it as a model of autonomous education incorporating Freire's liberating praxis and the practical phases of Holt's theory of autonomous education as outlined by David Hawkins. This analysis will present this model as a plan for educators to use in order to implement the practice themselves. In addition, by demonstrating the positive outcome of Julia's education, this chapter will also establish the ways in which this model can motivate and sustain the work of implementing these classroom reforms.

PROJECT GANYMEDE: A SUMMARY

The details of Project Ganymede are presented through a number of flash-back chapters narrating Julia's past, which are scattered throughout the present-day plot of *The Magician King*. Due to the way this project is presented piece-meal in the text, and because of the level of detail required for an effective critical reading practice, the details of Project Ganymede will be summarized below before we begin an analysis of the model it presents and the affordances this model has for educators in the following section.

The Ganymede Project is the name given by the Murs magicians⁴² to their collective search for greater magical energies and a way to access them, which starts long before Julia's arrival at the house in Murs. After reaching level two-hundred-and-fifty – the final level in the safe house system⁴³ – the magicians at Murs begin to “run the permutations,” combining known spells to create new magic. Asmo tells Julia that they ran “a hell of a lot of permutations” before they recognized that this process would lead only to minor advances and began to wonder how they could speed up their progress: “Once we realized that the way forward consisted of an indefinite series of incremental advances,” Asmo explains, “we began to wonder if there was an alternative to that. A way to break the cycle. To take the power curve nonlinear” (TMK 282). “We think there's more to magic than what we've seen so far,” Pouncy expounds, “A lot more. We think we're just dicking around in the minors while there's power sources out there that could put us in the bigs” (TMK 282). Coming to this realization, the Murs magicians begin searching for a “magical singularity” that will point them in the direction of “exponentially bigger energies,” of greater “power sources,” which they can then begin working to access (TMK 282). “We were assuming, until it could be proved otherwise, that there were bigger energies out there, far bigger, and that there was a technique by which those energies could be manipulated,” Pouncy summarizes (TMK 314) – this theory is the hypothesis Project Ganymede is developed to test and, ultimately, to prove.

⁴² The Murs magicians are a group of self-taught magicians who have been invited to live and research at the house in Murs, France, owned by Pouncy. Some, though not all, of the magicians at Murs happen to be part of the online mental health support group called Free Trader Beowulf which Julia joined prior to finding the Bed Stuy safe house; these characters are referred to by their screen names: Pouncy, Asmodeus (Asmo), Failstaff, Gummidy, etc. Julia (also referred to by her screen name, Circe) earns her invitation to Murs after she has attained her seventy-seventh level in the safe houses and proved herself to one of the Murs magicians who visits her at the Bed Stuy safe house. Once she arrives in Murs, Julia is “power levelled” to level two-hundred-fifty, and then invited to pursue whatever magical project interests her most. All of this information is detailed in flash-back chapters throughout *The Magician King*, primarily in chapters 18 and 20.

⁴³ See footnote 32 on page 37 for a description of the safe house system and a brief outline of Julia's experiences learning magic within this system.

The Murs magicians begin their search for a “magical singularity” by observing the world around them and reflecting on their own knowledge of magic, then pursuing anything which might lead to a significant advance. Noticing a “minor effect, barely measurable” in the increase of Asmo’s power when they are closer to the centre of the Earth, their first line of inquiry is to test whether proximity to the Earth’s core has any consistent effect on the power of spells – what they eventually discover, unfortunately, is that “Asmodeus’s spellwork performed slightly better once you got half a mile underground,” but “the most probable explanation for that was that spelunking got Asmodeus really excited” (TMK 313). From there, they pursue a number of other theories related to astrology, ocean magic, dream magic (oneiromancy), the Earth’s magnetic fields, and quantum physics, all of which prove to be dead ends (TMK 313-314).

Rather than abandon the search after so many failures, the Murs magicians regroup and collectively identify a new avenue of exploration: divine beings, who seem to have access to the powers they are attempting to locate (TMK 314). Religion, then, becomes the next most-likely area in which to experiment, and so – despite the skepticism shared amongst the magicians at Murs about the existence of gods or miracles, or the power of faith – they begin a systematic survey of the material in that subject (TMK 314). Pouncy explains to Julia the principles and method guiding this inquiry:

“Forget everything you ordinarily associate with religious study. Strip away all the reverence and the awe and the art and the philosophy of it. Treat the subject coldly. Imagine yourself to be a theologian, but a special kind of theologian, one who studies gods the way an entomologist studies insects. Take as your dataset the entirety of world mythology and treat it as a collection of field observations and statistics pertaining to a hypothetical species: the god. Proceed from there.” (TMK 315)

“Fastidiously at first,” the narration continues, “with rubber gloves and tweezers and haughty distaste, as if they were handling the intellectual equivalent of medical waste, Pouncy and the others took up the study of comparative religion” (TMK 315). This focused inquiry is the true

beginning of Project Ganymede, as the magicians of Murs begin “combing the world’s religious narratives and traditions for practical information” (TMK 315), examining both written texts and the physical objects associated with various religions (TMK 318). The goal, Pouncy explains, is to learn the “techniques” of the gods, “to be able to do what gods did” (TMK 315) – and to distill this knowledge from the vast body of information on and about religion.

From this initial survey, the magicians construct a large and complex diagram to organize their massive dataset, record their discoveries and insights, and help them to notice patterns, which becomes a centre-piece in the house’s library: “The diagram showed the primary narratives of the major and minor religious traditions, collated and cross-referenced – and color-coded! – to highlight areas where they overlapped and confirmed one another” (TMK 316). From this point, the Murs magicians identify a number of common narratives and narrow their focus to stories of ascension, “the process by which a human being is brought bodily into heaven, without dying, and accorded some measure of divine status,” and of apotheosis, in which a human “actually becomes a god” (TMK 316-317). The magicians take these repeated narratives of ascension and apotheosis as ‘practical and historical proof’ that it is possible for “a mortal to gain access to divine power” – which is precisely what the Murs magicians are seeking to do (TMK 316-317). It is at this time that the title “Project Ganymede” is officially bestowed, named for the beautiful mortal who ascended to Olympus to serve as Zeus’ cupbearer (TMK 317).

With a narrowed focus and new hope that this goal is possible, the Murs magicians continue to experiment within the field of religion, looking for new insights or new discoveries to bring them closer to replicating these scenarios of ascension and apotheosis. Julia joins Project Ganymede at this time, participating in their experimental attempts to replicate what they now view as historical moments of mortals accessing divine levels of power:

She pitched in with the others, doing what nerds do: she sliced and diced, organized and spreadsheeted, drew up checklists and then checked the hell out of them. The magicians of Murs chanted, drank, sacrificed, fasted, bathed, painted their faces, consulted the stars, and huffed odd gases from bubbling liquids. (TMK 318)

The goal of these initial trials is to search for connections and patterns, “to find out if there was a magical technique behind all this messy crap” which can help direct their future experiments (TMK 318). The random successes they have – such as objects moving by themselves, glass shattering, ‘phantom giant footsteps,’ or a swarm of insects issuing from Iris’s mouth – keep them dedicated to this pursuit, though they remain frustratingly far from being able to articulate the technique underlying it all, or even being able to replicate these successes (TMK 318-319).

From here, two separate programs of research emerge: each located within the field of religion, and each with the same ultimate goal, but with very different approaches to solving the problem before them. Pouncy and some of the others, including Julia, continue to “[pore] over sacred texts” and extract “pseudo-data” from their research and experiments performing rituals and ceremonies with the hope of finding the underlying pattern, while Asmo and a handful of others decide that they will begin to search directly for a divine being, hunting for a “live specimen,” a “shortcut” to the moment of transcendence (TMK 319). Asmo’s reasoning is that, by working their way up the ‘hierarchy’ of magical beings on Earth, they should eventually be able to make the acquaintance of – or at least discover the existence of – a truly divine being whom they could pursue as their means of ascension (TMK 319-320). To this end, Asmo’s group begins combing the local Provençal area – much the same way they initially combed the world’s religious traditions – looking for magical beings and seeing what can be learned from them (TMK 320). This group, like the other, has their share of failures and their share of minor successes as they pursue this new course searching for a divine being (TMK 320-321).

Though Pouncy “wasn’t thrilled to find Asmo leading a splinter movement” (TMK 319), the separate groups nevertheless cooperate as they continue to pursue the goal of greater power. The two groups meet daily to discuss their newest attempts, successes, and failures and share their insights and discoveries:

Most days the two groups would debrief at noon, over lunch for Pouncy’s team and breakfast for Asmo’s, who were out all night in the field most nights and got up late. Each side presented its data, and each side would feed what the other side had learned back into the next stage of its investigations. (TMK 321)

A sense of competition develops between the two sides – some healthy, helping spur on new attempts and discoveries, and some less healthy – as well as a desire to redirect and interfere with the efforts of the other side to help serve their own attempts (TMK 321-322).

Eventually, after very little progress is made on either side, the two groups set aside this competition and decide to spend a month concentrating their separate efforts on the same topic – the “local folk and myth” of Provençal – and see where a concerted joint effort can take them (TMK 323). Julia, who is familiar with the projects of both sides through her work with Pouncy and her discussions with Asmo, insists that Pouncy’s group would benefit from listening to Asmo’s insights: they need to narrow their focus and go deeper, rather than broadening their search again. Combining their efforts, both sides are able to make progress: “When they narrowed their focus to the local mythology only, Project Ganymede began to get traction. Once they started looking at just one corner of the puzzle – and stuck all the rest of the pieces back in the box – everything started to fit together” (TMK 324). Julia finds that narrowing the focus allows her to finally start to “get a feel for the local magic,” which generates insights and discoveries for her and for the rest of the Murs magicians: specifically, it hints at the presence of a divine being in their area, a goddess (TMK 324-325). As they begin to make serious progress, the whole atmosphere of the house at Murs changes, becoming more like a sombre “religious

retreat” and less luxurious than it had been at Julia’s arrival (TMK 327-328). As Pouncy’s team starts to experience replicable success performing rituals connected with this goddess (TMK 328-330), Asmo and her team, pursuing this same rumour, manage to make contact with an ancient monk who can connect them directly to this local goddess, known now by the Murs magicians as Our Lady Underground (TMK 326-327, 330-331).

The result of this intensive combined effort is a written invocation, provided to them by the holy man Asmo’s team locates and executable because of the expertise Pouncy’s team has developed with understanding and performing written religious rituals. They perform this invocation in the hopes that the goddess will respond and, sooner or later, help them ascend to divine levels of power; though there are unforeseen components to this summoning, and unintended consequences,⁴⁴ their attempts are successful in that Julia is granted a measure of divine power and becomes, with some more time and effort on her part, a demi-goddess – a dryad and a daughter of Our Lady Underground (TMK 380-381).

PROJECT GANYMEDE: EXPLICATING THE MODEL

The Ganymede Project presents a model of autonomous education which can be unpacked and analysed to explicate the plan it presents for improving education in the real world. Due to the contextualized and intimate nature of fictional representations of education, this model demonstrates not only what an autonomous approach to education looks like in practice, but why it looks this way, how it is informed by an underlying liberating praxis, and what the

⁴⁴ Unbeknownst to the Murs magicians, *all* gods hear when any god is summoned, and any one of them can intercept and answer the call. Reynard, a local trickster deity, intercepts and answers the invocation the Murs magicians make to Our Lady Underground; after slaughtering the rest of the magicians, Reynard accepts Julia’s sacrifice and allows Asmo to escape, raping Julia and, in the process, conferring divine power upon her and destroying her humanity (TMK 367-377). Julia’s struggle in the present-day plot of *The Magician King* is with coming to terms with this traumatic experience and accepting the death of ‘Julia the human’ so she can become ‘Julia the divine,’ which she does at the close of the novel, successfully replicating the process of apotheosis and achieving the goal of the Project.

importance – and the impact – of this practice is. The analysis of the Ganymede Project model will begin at the surface level, looking at the practice itself: what is done and why. Following this surface analysis, we will examine how the practice is informed by the pedagogy of a liberating praxis and why this influence is essential to the success of the autonomous approach. Finally, we will end with a discussion of how seeing this practice – and really understanding it – combined with seeing the results of this education for Julia demonstrates the positive potential of this practice and so can motivate educators to begin and then sustain the work of implementing classroom reform.

Our analysis of the practice modelled by the Ganymede Project will focus on the three phases Hawkins identifies in an autonomous education practice. Hawkins, based on his experiences implementing and observing an autonomous education practice as outlined by Holt, divided the activities in which students and teachers engaged into three categories which occur and re-occur in random order, lasting for varying amounts of time, all of which are equally important to the success of the overall practice. Hawkins called these three phases Messing About, Multiply Programmed, and Discussion, and all of them can be seen in – and understood through – the Ganymede Project. Combining Hawkins' explication of these three phases with the example provided by the Ganymede Project, educators can understand not only what each phase looks like but also what it accomplishes, why it looks the way it does, and the crucial role each phase plays in the success of the practice as a whole.

Most of the time spent pursuing an autonomous education, Hawkins demonstrates, will be spent in the Messing About phase, which educators can see is true – and productive – for the Murs magicians. The Messing About phase is characterised by “free and unguided exploratory work” – in children, this phase looks like (and is) play, though in older students these practices

evolve and take on a different, more academic shape, looking more like the research and preliminary experiments in which the Murs magicians engage. Messing About, Hawkins explains, “becomes a way of working that is no longer childish, though it remains always childlike, the kind of self-disciplined probing and exploring that is the essence of creativity” (7), and lies at the heart of an autonomous practice. The primary purpose of Messing About is to provide students with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with a concept or structure, to examine it without a particular agenda or any external pressure, so that they might eventually begin to recognize patterns and discover what interests them most and what they would like to pursue in their future inquiries (Holt *Learn* 50) – as Julia puts it, to “get a feel” for the problem at hand (TMK 324-325). This process creates a “store of latent insight” (Hawkins 9), also referred to as an “apperceptive background” (Hawkins 6), which allows students to develop a complex understanding of the issue and eventually generates “a more analytical sort of knowledge” (Hawkins 6) as latent insight becomes conscious discovery and articulation of principles and concepts. From their time spent Messing About, students develop genuine insight into and understanding of concepts and issues which they are better able to retain than the abstracted facts of traditional classroom learning.

With Julia and the other magicians at Murs, educators can see the Messing About phase in action – most of what is undertaken in the name of Project Ganymede is Messing About, from collecting religious artifacts and reading religious texts to going out to meet local magical beings and attempting chants and rituals. Just as Julia began her initial independent study of magic⁴⁵ by seeking out and taking in as much information as she could find about anything even tangentially related to magic (TMK 121-125), the Murs magicians began Project Ganymede with a lengthy

⁴⁵ Julia’s initial attempts in learning magic are, as mentioned above, another representation of education which could be analysed to present a model of autonomous education in a more individual, isolated context.

phase of Messing About, testing hunches and experimenting with various areas of magic to see what, if anything, had an effect. The question they are trying to answer is already defined – what might grant them access to higher levels of magical power? – but the line of inquiry they will pursue to find this answer has not yet been set, and so they Mess About and experiment with hypotheses suggested by the ‘store of latent insight’ that has been built up during their time spent levelling individually. For instance, Asmo’s store of latent insight suggests that proximity to the Earth’s core may have an effect; while this hypothesis does not prove to be true for the group collectively, they are able to measure an increase in Asmo’s power due to the excitement of spelunking, proving that Asmo’s insight was, for her at least, correct (TMK 313). As the Murs magicians test each possible line of inquiry, their only goal is to experiment with the field or concept and look for any patterns which emerge from the data generated; without a predefined purpose for each experiment, they are able to accept the results and move to the next hypothesis, rather than fruitlessly attempting to force a given line of inquiry to fit their purpose, and they learn how to learn from their mistakes, turning what looks like failure into a productive step forward.⁴⁶

Eventually, the pattern which emerges out of their random experiments suggests a productive line of inquiry, and the Murs magicians are able to make an informed decision to pursue a study of religion as the most likely way to answer their question. This decision is not, by any means, the end of the need for Messing About: they still require a great deal of time familiarizing themselves with religious narratives and artifacts before further patterns emerge and latent insight becomes conscious breakthrough and guides their next round of experiments and inquiry. The first breakthrough in their study of religion comes from Messing About with the

⁴⁶ The inability to learn from mistakes – or even recognise that learning from a mistake is possible – is another failing Holt notes with traditional education and which is avoided in an autonomous practice (*Fail* 34).

religious narratives of the world, which shows them the possibility of ascension and apotheosis; their final breakthrough comes from Messing About with local magic beings on the one hand and prayers to Our Lady Underground on the other, which leads them to the invocation which seems to be the final answer to their question.

The majority of the experiments conducted by the Murs magicians throughout the Ganymede Project might be considered as failures, since they do not provide the answer to the question driving their inquiry. We can see, however, that these experiments were *not* failures, because they created and expanded the store of latent insight which allowed the magicians of Murs to discover the patterns which informed their next step each time. Each discovery or revelation which leads them closer to their final success comes as a result of Messing About, of experimenting and playing with a particular field or concept simply to see what can be done or what might be found, and noticing a pattern or a detail which points them in the right direction. Even with a pre-defined goal and some idea of how they will solve it – as well as pre-existing and well-developed magical powers, and the store of latent insight generated by their autonomous education reaching this point – the Murs magicians still require a great deal of time Messing About to discover each step on the path which leads to their final success. The more time they spend getting to know the field as a whole, the better they are able to identify the shape of the ‘hole’ in their existing knowledge that their research is attempting to fill (Holt *Fail* 88), pointing them in the right direction for their next experiments. The Ganymede Project demonstrates for educators what they can expect an autonomous education practice to look like in their classrooms and validates the time spent on seemingly unrelated or unproductive endeavours as students use this method to solve a given problem, explore a set issue, or simply to discover the next question they wish to take on – educators can see how each discovery or

breakthrough the Murs magicians make is a direct result of time spent Messing About, which occasionally seemed unproductive and tangential even to those engaged in it,⁴⁷ but eventually proved to be worthwhile and necessary.

Alongside the Messing About phase is the Multiply Programmed phase – occurring before, after, and during the time spent Messing About – in which different students will discover different entry points to a topic and pursue their interests in vastly different ways. These different approaches and experiments, Hawkins insists, must be supported and encouraged, even though it can be difficult to facilitate – and impossible to predict and prepare for every line of inquiry students might identify. Whatever experiment a particular line of inquiry has a student conducting, or whatever tangential skill or knowledge they decide they must pursue in service of the original goal, the student knows best what they need to continue learning, and the teacher’s role is to make this learning possible by working with each student individually to see they are provided with the information and materials they require (Hawkins 7-8).

Even when the work is towards a collective goal, as with Project Ganymede, different approaches will arise and must be allowed and supported: though at first the division between the two groups causes some tension, allowing each magician to pursue the approach in which they are most invested results in more success for each group individually and is what facilitates the collective breakthrough which leads them to Our Lady Underground. The Multiply Programmed nature of the Ganymede Project is also what creates the different areas of skill and expertise which allow the Murs magicians to pursue this final breakthrough successfully and locate and

⁴⁷ Pouncy’s patience with this process is explicitly noted, implying that the other Murs magicians are not as patient: “Pouncy had the patience for it, to sit and wait out the noisy data until the patterns emerged, but Pouncy was a singular individual” (TMK 319). This impatience the others feel – a symptom of disinterest – leads Asmo and her group down a different path, showing the importance of the Multiply Programmed phase in combination with Messing About.

perform the invocation to the goddess. In this way, the Ganymede Project demonstrates both what the Multiply Programmed phase can look like, with individuals pursuing the path which is most interesting and promising to them, and the importance of this phase to the success of the overall practice, as it retains freedom of choice, acknowledges evolving interests, and allows students to maintain their personal commitment to the overall goal in the way which seems best and most interesting to them. Though the Multiply Programmed phase – particularly in combination with the various activities of each period of Messing About which arises from these various programs of inquiry – can look like divergent chaos, it leads to greater learning and greater insight for each individual, which, in turn, supports the collective goal.

The third phase, Discussion, is evident throughout the Ganymede Project, from Julia's introduction to the Project's purpose right through to the collective decision to proceed with the final invocation. Hawkins has less to say about the Discussion phase than the others, noting that most teachers and students will already be familiar with Discussion, as it is a staple of most instruction, whether in a lecture or a conversational format (9). What Hawkins does specify is unique about Discussion as part of an autonomous practice is that this phase helps learners to articulate their discoveries and to formulate new questions, solidifying the learning – bringing it from the background to the foreground, activating the store of latent insight – and generating a conscious understanding of the concept or theory (9).

Some of the Discussion modelled by the Murs magicians is formal, such as the daily meetings around the dining table to share the progress and discoveries of each group. Other Discussion is much more informal: we see Julia, for instance, in frequent casual discussion with Pouncy during and after their experiments, and also debriefing one-on-one with Asmo in a much more social setting than the collective meetings. As a result of these informal conversations, Julia

has a very good idea of where everyone is and, therefore, what progress has been made on the Project as a whole, and Julia is able to use this informally gathered information to inform her own next steps. Sharing the insight generated by this casually developed familiarity with the whole group, Julia is also able to guide them into what proves to be the final line of inquiry before their ultimate success: understanding where both Asmo's and Pouncy's groups are, what they have discovered, and what they are struggling with, Julia suggests and supports the combined inquiry into the local Provençal area which brings Our Lady Underground to their attention (TMK 322-323). These conversations, formal and otherwise, are shown to be a crucial part of progressing towards the ultimate goal, as it is where latent insight becomes concrete knowledge: there is no mention from Julia of the need to concentrate on a local focus, for instance, until the course of the discussion brings to the foreground a thought which had been developing unnoticed, and Julia is suddenly and confidently able to articulate this need to narrow and combine their efforts. In this way, along with demonstrating the importance of Messing About and allowing for Multiply Programmed approaches, the Ganymede Project shows educators the importance of facilitating both formal discussions and allowing informal opportunities for students to socialize and share, which will, in combination, create new interests, new lines of inquiries, and new discoveries and successes in the classroom.

We have now seen the ways in which the Ganymede Project presents a model of autonomous practice in action which educators can use to so understand and implement this approach to education. Looking deeper, at what is implicit even in an explicit practice, we can also see the ways in which this practice is informed – as it must be – by a liberating praxis.⁴⁸ By searching for evidence of the ideas informing the actions of the Murs magicians, we can

⁴⁸ Freire's liberating praxis is defined in the Introduction (see pages 8 to 9), as well as in Chapter One (see page 27).

explicate how these choices are informed by this pedagogy and so present this fictional representation as a model for educators to use. This model is important for educators to see and understand, because forcing students into pursuing an autonomous practice will defeat the goals of this approach before it is even begun by denying or undermining the students' right to choose, which is the foundation of this practice.⁴⁹ A liberating praxis must underlie all true practices of autonomous education, in which every student is "the planner, director, and assessor of [their] own education" as they decide what, when, and how they will learn (Holt *Underachieving* ix).

The attitude surrounding the Ganymede Project, and the way the other Murs magicians interact with Julia, demonstrates the liberating praxis which informs their collective research: it is the choice of each individual magician whether they will pursue this Project and, if so, how they will apply themselves to this endeavour. The Ganymede Project, as Freire explains all liberating praxis must, "[reflects] the aspirations of the people" and is fundamentally connected to their "preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears" (*Oppressed* 85). Each individual feels a personal commitment to and ownership of the collective goal, demonstrated in the inclusive language they use when speaking about the Project – it is always "we" think, "we" believe, "we" are trying, and never "I" or "they."

Though a liberating praxis naturally informs all elements of the Ganymede Project, it is most explicitly influential – and, therefore, most clearly modelled for educators – in the way that the Murs group introduces Julia to the Project. Julia's involvement with the Ganymede Project

⁴⁹ Take, for instance, the failure of the Fifth Year Thesis at Brakebills, discussed in Chapter One, which is an attempt at an autonomous practice within an institution that is based on a dominating praxis. The Thesis is a failure because the students have not been allowed to make and pursue their own choices in the past, and so the attitude surrounding the Thesis is one of trying to figure out what the 'rules' are when they are suddenly told that, this time, there are no rules. The Thesis is also mandatory, forcing students to define an interest and work to a given timeline. If the Thesis was part of a liberating praxis, then – like Julia does (TMK 282, and see the analysis below) – the Brakebills students would likely have many interests and ideas that they were ready (and able) to pursue for this Thesis.

develops naturally out of her own interest to know what the others are pursuing, which she expresses during a group conversation centred on what Julia is interested in pursuing now that she has finished levelling. When the others sit Julia down, the conversation begins, not with an introduction to the Project and a request that she join, but the question, “What would you like to do?” (TMK 281). There are no attempts to persuade Julia to join the Project, or to coerce her to adopt their goal. The Project is introduced to Julia because she asks to be told about it, and they do not dismiss her concerns or hesitations as it is explained to her: rather, they explain how they themselves dealt with these issues and leave it to Julia to address her own concerns in her own time, as she sees fit (TMK 315). Even after Julia’s interests are found to be aligned with the goals of Project Ganymede, there is still a genuine sense that the others will support whatever Julia decides to pursue, demonstrated through comments such as Pouncy’s “Unless you have any better ideas” throughout the explanation (TMK 283). When Julia eventually commits to the Project, she does so because she finds herself genuinely interested in the goal and curious about the line of inquiry they are pursuing: as she listens to the history of the Ganymede Project, Julia “felt her curiosity stirring” (TMK 316) and so is able to commit eagerly and fully, after she addresses her own skepticism about pursuing religion as a means to greater power (TMK 318).

In this particular moment of the Project, educators can see how an autonomous practice will only work if every element of it is informed by a liberating praxis: right from the moment of the practice’s introduction, students must be allowed to decide for themselves whether they will commit and what they shall commit to, and everything from then on must be an equally free choice. Julia commits after she has learned enough about the Project to be genuinely interested and after she has had a chance to address her concerns about it; the other magicians provide her with information, but there is no pressure from them for Julia to make up her mind, in their

favour or at all. This models the approach educators must take when introducing an autonomous practice to their classrooms: they can tell the students about it, show them what can be done, and address questions and concerns,⁵⁰ but a truly autonomous practice must begin with each student deciding, on their own, to commit to a project and a method of pursuing it.

In addition to demonstrating what an autonomous practice looks like in action and how this practice is, and must be, informed by a liberating praxis, the model presented by the Ganymede Project serves yet another purpose: in showing what the results of this particular project, and an autonomous education in general, are for Julia, this model can serve to motivate educators to undertake and then sustain the work required to implement this reform in their own classrooms. Seeing Julia's growth through her autonomous education and her involvement with the Project – and contrasting her during and after the Project with Quentin, who learned magic in the dominating praxis and banking practice of Brakebills and is, as a result, a political illiterate⁵¹ – shows educators the benefits for students to be gained through an autonomous practice. The privileged insight fiction provides into the lives of characters makes these benefits, which can be hard to see in the lives of real students, clear for educators to examine and understand in Julia's example.

As discussed in Chapter One, Quentin's experiences learning magic in an institution guided by a dominating praxis position him as a political illiterate: Quentin views the world as fixed and does not understand that he can (and does) influence his reality, and his capacity to pursue his interests and learn from them has been stifled during his time at Brakebills. Quentin and the majority of his peers are unable to apply their learning and pursue their interests outside

⁵⁰ Part of this introduction to an autonomous practice can include an introduction to the concept of agency which informs the new practice; this introduction can be facilitated with the *Magicians* series, as demonstrated in Chapter Three.

⁵¹ See Chapter One pages 35 to 41.

the confines of the institution, and finding a purpose after graduation proves to be a remarkable and daunting challenge for the majority of Brakebills graduates – summarized neatly in Quentin’s lamentation that “They could do more or less whatever they wanted as long as they didn’t interfere with one another. The real problem was figuring out to their own satisfaction what that was” (TM 181).⁵² In contrast, Julia is ready to begin experimenting and pursuing magical interests and projects even before her education is ‘done’⁵³ and – when she finally has the skills, the knowledge, and the ‘permission’ to pursue whatever interests her – she is full of ideas and eager to go, rather than paralyzed by the overwhelming possibility of doing *anything*, as the Brakebills graduates are:

You could do a lot with what she had. She already had some ideas about spells involving extreme temperatures, extreme states of matter. Plasmas, Bose-Einstein condensates, that sort of thing. She didn’t think they’d ever been tried. Maybe Pouncy would front her some money for equipment. (TMK 282)

Told that performing magic from here on out is a matter of inventing new spells using what she already knows, Julia is more than ready to meet this challenge – and the greater challenge of the Ganymede Project, to which she is introduced moments later.

Julia’s education in magic has resulted in what Holt refers to as “real learning:” rather than attaining a fleeting and superficial understanding of a concept that will last only until the final test, Julia has gained a lasting, meaningful, and complex understanding of magic which she is able to sustain and continue to apply effectively throughout her life (Holt *Fail* 118-199; *Learn*

⁵² This passage is analysed in more detail on page 38 as being a result of Brakebills’ dominating praxis.

⁵³ Julia, used to an autonomous education practice, rebels against the linear, teacher-controlled program Iris employs when power-levelling Julia after her arrival in Murs: “She kept trying to run ahead, and Iris had to drag her back and make her trudge through the levels in order. I mean, it was so blindingly obvious that if you took the kinetic elements from level 112, and borrowed the reflexive bits from the self-warming spell at level 44, then you had a basic working model for how to make yourself hover a few feet off the ground. But that wasn’t till 166, and 166 was 54 more levels away” (TMK 278). Julia’s thorough understanding of magic suggests to her alternate ways of learning and accessing new spells which she is eager to pursue; unlike Quentin and his Brakebills peers, Julia is not content to learn only what she is told in the way she is told to learn it.

93). Holt tells us that someone “who has really learned something can use it, and does use it” (*Learn* 99), which Julia shows readers is true: Julia understands how magic can be modified and rearranged to solve new problems or create new effects, something that escapes Quentin and his peers leaving Brakebills. Julia has learned *how* to learn, and so will be able to continue pursuing new knowledge and answering the questions which interest her most successfully throughout her life; Quentin, in contrast, causes nothing but trouble for himself as he waits around for someone else to show him a goal and the path to it, because his education has failed to develop the capacities Julia has. Learning how to learn is Quentin’s greatest struggle, one which occupies him long after his time at Brakebills is over; Julia, in contrast, learns to learn even before she begins learning real magic.

Julia is aware that her education has given her an understanding of magic beyond Quentin’s and that Quentin’s education has failed him, as demonstrated by Julia’s accusation that Quentin’s understanding is inferior: “You think magic is what you learned at Brakebills,” Julia tells Quentin, “You have no idea what magic is” (TMK 127). This awareness is shared by the other magicians of Murs, who view an education at Brakebills as inferior:

They considered Brakebills – to the extent that they considered it at all – rather cute: a sanitized, safety-wheeled playpen for those who didn’t have the girt and will to make it on the outside. They called it Fakebills, and Breakballs. At Brakebills you sat in classrooms and followed the rules. Perfectly fine if you like that kind of thing, but here at Murs you made your own rules, no adult supervision. (TMK 273)

Brakebills, by isolating magic from the rest of the world, prevents its students from engaging in the potentially dangerous but necessary process of exploring and experimenting with magic to discover its applications and consequences. The restrictions put on students at Brakebills in the

name of safety limit the potential of its students.⁵⁴ The difference between learning magic within Brakebills and learning magic outside it – and, implicitly, the difference between learning under a dominating praxis and a liberating praxis, with a banking practice or an autonomous practice – is clear to see, and this demonstration of the superior results of an autonomous practice should help educators find the motivation they need to implement and then sustain these beneficial reforms.

The practices modelled through the Ganymede Project – and the Project’s availability as a model – are not explicit; it requires a close reading and analysis of what is being represented to explicate the approach employed in this fictional representation and the plan this representation presents for transforming and improving education in the real world. When this work is done, what is revealed is a complex, fully-developed example of an autonomous education practice, the liberating praxis which informs it, and the results for students of learning in this system. Educators can translate this fictional model from the page to the classroom and use it as the basis for implementing an autonomous practice (something which is not so easily done with theoretical texts alone) and can find the motivation needed to support them in this endeavour.

CONCLUSION

Project Ganymede presents a model of an autonomous, liberating education practice, incorporating and demonstrating the importance of each of Hawkins’ three phases to this approach and the underlying pedagogy of a liberating praxis which must inform it. This fictional representation is able to model both the explicit, practical appearance of this practice and the more abstract, implicit components, such as the ways in which the underlying pedagogy informs

⁵⁴ In these restrictions, we see also that Brakebills has modelled itself on the “culture of fear and security” for which modern North American schools are frequently criticized (Giroux “Critical” 4), limiting and controlling students in the name of safety and security.

certain practical choices, or the positive outcomes this approach has for students. A critical reading of this model brings it forward and allows educators to see these practices in action, generating an understanding of what the practice is, why it looks the way it does, and what the results of successfully implementing it are. This contextualized and complex template can be used by educators to implement this practice in their own classrooms, basing their approach on the model and facilitating similar practices according to the plan this fantasy series presents. This fictional model also provides educators with the motivation to make this change and to sustain this effort in order to make their classrooms into ‘speedboats’ which can help prompt further improvement at the institutional level in North America. There are other models of education practices within the *Magicians* series besides Project Ganymede – many of them positive and beneficial for students – and other fantasy texts beside the *Magicians* series which contain detailed representations of education, all of which could be accessed by educators and utilized by employing a critical reading practice to illuminate the practices shown at work in the scenes of education and learning.

As Chapter One demonstrated the affordances of a critical reading of fantasy fiction to help educators recognise the issues within the current education system of North America and acknowledge the need for reform and improvement, Chapter Two has demonstrated how an analysis of these same representations of education in fantasy can serve as a tool to help educators implement new practices to improve student learning by modelling a new approach. The *Magicians* series has, so far, been presented as a tool to assist educators through the first two steps down the path to reformed classrooms, recognising the need for change and then creating this change. Chapter Three will demonstrate how the *Magicians* can also serve to facilitate and support the final step, that of supporting this practice and fostering student success within it, by

providing metaphors with which to explicitly teach the concept of agency and introduce the goals of the new, autonomous education practice to students.

Chapter Three

***The Magicians:* Teaching and Fostering Student Agency**

They would be on their own this time ... They would have to do it all themselves.
– *The Magician's Land*, 394

The final step in creating classrooms which successfully employ an autonomous approach to education and become ‘speedboats’ to lead the way to broader reforms is fostering the success of the new approach by supporting students within it. Chapter One helped us recognize the need for change; Chapter Two showed us how to create that change; Chapter Three intends to demonstrate the ways in which this change can be supported by explicitly introducing the concept of agency to students and ensuring they understand the goals of the new practice in which they find themselves. Once again, Grossman’s *Magicians* series can support this step, this time by providing metaphors with which to introduce and teach the concept of agency, which is both a result of and a requirement for a successful autonomous education practice. This Chapter maps various elements of Grossman’s system of magic to a broad definition of agency in order to demonstrate how fantasy texts can be used to teach important abstract concepts, as well as the benefits of teaching them in this way. Of course, within an autonomous practice, it must be the students’ choice to explore agency at all, let alone using this series, but educators can present this affordance as an option to help students begin their autonomous educations and move successfully forward into it, or use it as a springboard into an autonomous practice, after which everything will be student-directed. Ensuring students understand what agency is and why it is important will support classroom reform and contribute to improved education outcomes for students in these new ‘speedboat’ classes.

TEACHING AGENCY THROUGH THE METAPHORS OF FANTASY FICTION

Recalling the discussion of agency in the Introduction,⁵⁵ we know that agency is a key component of an autonomous education practice. Agency is defined in the Introduction as any given individual's ability to define meaningful goals and take action to pursue and accomplish them.⁵⁶ One of the issues in the current problematic system we are looking to solve with the implementation of this new approach is the stifling of students' agency: where the predominant approach to education denies students' agency by insisting that they conform to the goals and expectations outlined by curriculum and school boards, an autonomous education practice acknowledges, respects, and develops students' agency. With an autonomous practice, students maintain their status as active Subjects rather than learning to be passive objects, and they leave school as capable agents rather than political illiterates. For an autonomous education practice to work, however, some measure of agency is required at the start of this process, for it is up to students in an autonomous practice to decide what they wish to pursue in their learning and how – this decision-making requires students to exercise their agency, for they must be able to define goals for themselves and decide what actions they will take to see these goals accomplished.

To ensure students' success within a newly-implemented autonomous practice, educators can explicitly introduce the concept of agency to students, helping them exercise their own capacity for agency as they come to understand what it means and what it requires. Giroux considers teaching students "how to make a difference in [their] life as a social agent" and fostering a critical capacity for agency to be one of the essential aspects of any educator's job ("Is There a Role" 166). The benefits of explicitly teaching the concept of agency to students are

⁵⁵ See pages 12 to 14.

⁵⁶ This basic definition is, as explained in the introduction, derived primarily from Kabeer's definition of agency as "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them" (438), though it is also informed by the work of Dornan, Frazier, and Ahearn, whose discussions of agency inform the sub-concepts explored below.

numerous and significant. Explicit instruction in the concept of agency helps students to recognize their own agency and develop this as a *critical* capacity by creating an awareness of the complexities of agency while fostering the ability to utilize their own individual agency in achieving their personal goals.⁵⁷ The exposure to and assistance in recognizing alternatives and resources that occurs throughout the process of explicitly teaching agency also fosters a greater capacity for agency in students than they might be able to develop without this support – the ability to recognize alternatives and access the resources necessary to make these alternatives viable options is an essential component of exercising individual agency, and one which explicit instruction fosters.⁵⁸

In addition to increasing each individual's capacity for agency, explicit instruction also helps individuals to recognize the agency of others. This recognition increases the odds that all individuals will be able to exercise their agency effectively, since the success of an action – particularly actions intended to transform or modify existing societal norms or structures – relies upon the intent of the action being recognized and accepted by others, as Frazier demonstrates (357-358). An awareness among students of the way agency works can help these attempts to succeed, accomplishing students' individual goals and building towards a more socially just and equitable society. These three benefits of an explicit instruction in agency – creating a critical capacity, increasing individual ability by providing more alternatives and resources, and fostering the success of agency – are of importance to all students, but can be of particular use to

⁵⁷ For a discussion on the importance of teaching agency and the role theory plays in this process, see the interview with Giroux by Manuela Guilherme titled “Is There a Role for Critical Pedagogy in Language/Cultural Studies?”

⁵⁸ See Kabeer (437) for a discussion of the types of “human and social resources” this instruction can supply and how these affect the exercise of an individual's agency. Also see Sonia M. Rosen for a discussion of how this initial increase in available options can facilitate even greater increases in the future as students begin to employ their agency and engage with societal structures.

students who are beginning to learn in an autonomous practice and consciously exercise their agency, perhaps for the first time.

As an abstract concept, agency can be a difficult subject to introduce and explain to students. One way to address this challenge is by connecting the new, abstract concept of agency to another concept with which students are already familiar, using metaphor to introduce the new subject. There is a metaphor commonly used in teacher education which compares the process of teaching to helping students to cross a gap, such as a canyon or river. The teacher's role in this scenario is to ensure every student gets safely from one side to the other, metaphorically moving from a place of lesser knowledge to one of understanding and mastery of a given concept. In the case of teaching the concept of agency, the goal is to have every student cross the gap and arrive at a place where they both understand and are able to exercise their own agency. The task of crossing the gap is often broken down into two sequential parts. First, the teacher must describe the Destination,⁵⁹ presenting a general explanation of the concept to be learned, so that students will know where it is they are going and when they have arrived. Following this presentation of the Destination, in order to help students across the gap and to their ultimate goal, teachers present lessons, explain sub-concepts, and provide general instruction and individual assistance – tasks which are metaphorically represented as providing Stepping Stones⁶⁰ to help students cross the gap, with each Stone representing an incremental increase in student understanding.

⁵⁹ This metaphor of crossing a gap is a guiding image throughout this chapter; in order to acknowledge the significance of the ideas of the Destination and of Stepping Stones in this analysis and to indicate the position of these terms as part of the broader metaphor, the terms will be capitalized throughout the chapter.

⁶⁰ A 'bridge' is another common way to represent this process metaphorically, but a 'bridge' implies a single, linear path on which all students must travel. In comparison, Stepping Stones present numerous possible options, few of them linear, which is far more in keeping with the liberating praxis informing an autonomous education practice and is, therefore, the metaphor employed here.

Lynne Cameron, in her study on the presence and use of metaphor in education discourse, takes up this common metaphor for teaching and uses it to demonstrate how metaphors in general can be effectively used as part of the process of education:

[Helping students to understand a new concept] can be visualized as the teacher reaching across the gap, offering stepping stones, and helping students move across the stepping stones to the new understanding. ... Metaphors can act as stepping stones and as a description of the end point... (132)

Metaphors, as Cameron demonstrates through her study, can be employed in the first part of this process – describing the Destination, explaining the concept as a whole – and then used as the Stepping Stones provided to help students cross the gap. By drawing on a familiar metaphor from teacher education to explain the new concept of the efficacy of metaphors in teaching, Cameron employs her own theory – that metaphors serve as pedagogical tools by linking known ideas with the new concept to be learned – and models it in practice. By connecting the concept being taught with something already familiar to students through metaphor, a basic idea of the Destination can be easily and effectively introduced, helping to guide students’ learning towards this ultimate understanding. As instruction moves beyond this basic level and more complexity is added to students’ understanding in order to develop their knowledge of the new concept further, new metaphors can be introduced or the same metaphor can be extended to connect each new sub-concept with something already familiar. This process creates the Stepping Stones needed to cross the gap and help students reach a complete understanding.

To use metaphor in this way is simply to take advantage of metaphor’s inherent affordances. If, as L. David Ritchie notes, language is understood as serving “to represent objective facts about the world, and to report these facts to other people,” then what metaphor does, as a linguistic device, is offer another way of representing and reporting facts about the world, which is the “classic” approach to understanding and using metaphor (18). Taking this

basic concept a step further, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson claim that metaphors do more than represent and report reality, suggesting that metaphoric concepts underlie every aspect of our lives, and that these concepts “structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people” (3). Metaphors, understood in this way, are used for more than representing and reporting, as they also govern and shape the ways in which we understand and experience reality in essentially every aspect of human life.

Why are metaphors so important to us? Why is it that we rely on them to help us interpret our world? And how does this position them as tools for teaching? According to Lakoff and Johnson, we understand the world in terms of metaphoric concepts because metaphors “allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another” (117): through metaphor, we can relate a complex or intangible concept to a more familiar idea or experience, often one that is tangible and has been intimately familiar since infancy, such as the idea that “happy is up” (Lakoff and Johnson 15). An awareness of our pre-existing tendency to link new concepts with familiar ones allows us to harness metaphor as a pedagogical tool simply by putting this tendency to use consciously. As Eva Kittay reminds her readers, metaphors have been recognized as “a way of learning something new about the world, or about how the world may be perceived and understood” through these connections since at least the time of Aristotle’s writings (3).

Cameron’s research with metaphor in educational discourse lends further support to this understanding and use of metaphor: “It is often suggested that a major function of metaphor is ideational,” Cameron expounds, “helping to explain something abstract or complicated in terms of something more familiar or concrete” (23). Metaphors are able to educate by explicating the

similarities between familiar and unfamiliar mental concepts (Cameron 28-29).⁶¹ Providing students with specifically selected metaphors which link the details of a new concept to something already known, making the new concept immediately accessible through this metaphoric connection, educators are able to use metaphor to build on pre-existing student knowledge and support the acquisition of new knowledge.

Cameron presents three ways that metaphors can serve as teaching tools by making these connections: by transferring conceptual information from a familiar to an unfamiliar concept through the analogy; by facilitating the structuring and re-structuring of the schema students use to understand the world; and by helping with recall, as metaphors are often more memorable than isolated facts (36-37). This thesis focuses on the first of these affordances – the transfer of information from one concept to another – and the ways in which the metaphors of the *Magicians* series can be used to introduce the new concept of agency to students through the analogy of magic.⁶² Dedre and Donald R. Gentner’s 1983 study clearly demonstrates the potential of using metaphor to achieve this outcome, showing that metaphors which link a new concept to a known concept work effectively to help adults understand and attain new knowledge.

There are, of course, risks and limitations when using metaphor as an instructional tool. The greatest risk is that an initially useful metaphor will become an “impediment” as learning

⁶¹ Stella Vosniadou, for instance, demonstrates that metaphor and metaphorical thinking play an important role in the learning processes of young children for both physical skills and mental concepts, as the children use metaphor to help them apply their limited knowledge and skills to the acquisition of further knowledge and abilities in new situations.

⁶² This focus on the first affordance is not to suggest that the *Magicians* series in particular, and fantasy fiction in general, cannot provide metaphors to be used in the other two ways outlined by Cameron. For instance, fantasy fiction is also readily able to provide memorable metaphors to help with recall: by pairing metaphoric lessons with fantastic elements, fantasy increases the likelihood that these lessons will be recognized, parsed, understood, and remembered by readers. For a discussion of how the indirect, metaphoric nature of fantasy serves to engage and educate readers, see O’Keefe, as well as Attebery’s “Introduction” in *The Fantasy Tradition*.

continues if the metaphor cannot extend far enough to address further levels of complexity effectively and accurately (Cameron 39) – which, if the new concept is extended far enough, will almost always prove to be the case, since metaphors are naturally limited in the ways they can be extended and how far they can go in any given direction (Lakoff and Johnson 13). In addition, using metaphor to teach risks creating a false or a ‘too-simple’ understanding of a concept, and there is always the danger that the metaphor will generate unintended connections and inferences which will lead to misunderstandings or an entirely false idea of the new concept (Cameron 39, 195).

Lakoff and Johnson, however, do not see this last potential issue – of generating unintended connections – as a particularly likely occurrence, since the “systematicity” which structures our understanding of metaphor will “hide” aspects of the topic and vehicle⁶³ which are inconsistent with the metaphor presented, allowing students to focus only on the aspects which have been emphasized as salient in a particular metaphor (10). Cameron also defends the use of teaching with metaphor and suggests countering these possible limitations, not by avoiding their use, but by using even *more* metaphors, introducing new comparisons as needed to understand additional complexities of the topic and using different metaphors for each Stepping Stone as required. Being explicit and upfront with students about the limitations of each metaphor, and about which aspects are and are not salient and, therefore, to be transferred from vehicle to topic, addresses and overcomes most of the limitations of using metaphor in instruction (Cameron 39). For Cameron, the benefits of teaching with metaphors far outweigh the risks; for Lakoff and Johnson, teaching with metaphor is unavoidable, since metaphors govern our understanding of the world.

⁶³ In metaphor theory, the ‘topic’ – also called the ‘tenor’ – is the concept or object being discussed (in this case, agency) and the ‘vehicle’ is the metaphor applied to it (in this case, magic).

In order to find “something more familiar or concrete” (Cameron 23) which can serve as a metaphor to introduce and teach the concept of agency to students, I propose a turn to fantasy fiction. Fantasy is inherently a genre of metaphor, commenting on and providing a model for everyday life in the real world using fantastic analogies.⁶⁴ Just as we can take advantage of the educational affordances inherent in metaphor, we can take advantage of the naturally metaphoric nature of fantasy fiction: Swinfen notes that “metaphysical concepts” are often presented as “physical realities” in fantasy narratives (10), and explicating the abstract concept underlying a given aspect of a fantasy text can turn the fantastic element into an ideal metaphor to teach the concept it represents. The elements of fantasy fiction are familiar and accessible and, when linked with abstract concepts in this way, can serve as known experiences to help students process new knowledge.

This indirect approach to presenting life lessons and analysing complex issues makes fantasy an ideal source for instructional metaphors. Jill Paton Walsh notes that fantasy must be read “in a ranging way, seeking a metaphorical meaning, or many such meanings,” encouraging readers to extend the text to real world experiences (38). Though realistic fiction may seem to be a better source for lessons on reality than fantasy fiction, it can be hard for readers to move away from a literal interpretation and apply the lessons of a realistic text to any concept which is not explicitly addressed. While realistic fiction only allows for “very literal-minded readings,” fantasy “compels a reader into a metaphorical state of mind,” which naturally facilitates the connection of fictional experiences with a wide range of issues and concepts in real life and

⁶⁴ This affordance of fantasy is, of course, also the premise on which this thesis has been based, in which the *Magicians* series is presented as a way to understand and shape reality. For more on the inherent strengths and affordances of fantasy, see the Introduction pages 3 to 8, as well as the first sections of each Chapter One and Chapter Two.

presents opportunities for instruction through metaphor (Paton Walsh 38).⁶⁵ It takes effort when reading a fantasy text to discover the ways in which its lessons might apply to and comment on real life, and, in seeking meaning and applicability, readers are encouraged to view the text as a metaphor with many possibilities for application and interpretation. In this way, fantasy texts are an ideal source for finding metaphors which are complex and fully developed, yet still familiar and accessible for students.

Within Grossman's *Magicians* series, the representation of magic serves as a physical manifestation of agency,⁶⁶ providing an indirect treatment of the concept which can be analysed and explicated as a metaphor for educators and students to use in teaching and understanding agency. This Chapter presents magic in the *Magicians* series, as the more familiar concept, as the metaphor vehicle through which students can be introduced to the new concept of agency in order to support their success in reformed classrooms. This metaphor and its affordances are mapped below to help teachers and students access this instructional tool.

USING MAGIC IN THE *MAGICIANS* SERIES TO TEACH AGENCY

In addition to the reasons discussed above – that fantasy is an ideal source for instructional metaphors, and that magic in the series can be understood as a physical manifestation of the concept of agency – the *Magicians* series is also an ideal tool to use in teaching the concept of agency for a number of practical reasons. The *Magicians* is widely available in stores and libraries and is currently popular, making it both accessible and appealing

⁶⁵ Paton Walsh's claim for fantasy echoes Hume's categorisations of fantasy, particularly the 'visionary' and 'revisionary' categories in which fantasy indirectly comments on and offers a plan to improve reality.

⁶⁶ The metaphoric connection between magic and agency has been previously analysed, particularly by Gruner, who notes that, when children in fantasy stories have magical powers, they are therefore "empowered" and are "agents in their world" (232). Furthermore, Gruner argues that these children's education in magic can be understood as learning "socially-sanctioned agency" (218), with magic allowing these children to "demonstrate a surprising and significant degree of agency" in the process of learning (219). Attebery also links magic and agency, suggesting that the meaningfulness of action in fantasy is 'magic' (*Traditions* 13-14).

to students.⁶⁷ The series is also a relatively efficient text to use for this purpose: the entire series is three books, each of approximately three hundred pages, which – when compared to the seven books of the *Harry Potter* series, which range from 223 pages to 870 pages⁶⁸ – means it is a relatively short fantasy series. The concept of agency could even be taught with the metaphors provided by *The Magicians* alone, as there is enough material in the first novel to develop a metaphor suited to introducing the main concept and each sub-concept considered here (though the analysis in this chapter reaches across all three texts to select the best examples for mapping each metaphor). Finally, the particular attributes of the system of magic in Grossman’s texts are ideally suited to provide metaphors for both a description of the Destination and a number of Stepping Stones to address sub-concepts which can expand students’ understanding of agency as learning progresses. By staying within one metaphor for the Destination and the first few Stepping Stones, students should be able to begin making their way across the gap more efficiently and effectively than if they had to use a new metaphor for their first Stepping Stones.

This section maps the metaphors available for this purpose in the *Magicians* series, presenting them for educators and students to use in understanding the Destination and finding the Stepping Stones needed to reach a full understanding and use of their agency. Mapping metaphors, as defined by Ritchie, is “a process in which certain attributes of a metaphor vehicle are associated in a systematic way with (‘*mapped onto*’) comparable attributes of the topic” (9, emphasis in original). The rest of this chapter is dedicated to mapping the metaphors in the *Magicians* series, with the ‘vehicle’ of magic applied to the ‘topic’ of agency. First, the general structure of magic will be mapped with the basic definition of agency to provide the description

⁶⁷ The reasons for selecting the *Magicians* series as the focus of this thesis are discussed in more detail in the Introduction: see pages 6 to 8.

⁶⁸ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* and *Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix*, respectively. The series totals approximately 3,400 pages, depending on the editions considered.

of the Destination on the other side of the gap; following this, two of the many sub-concepts of agency⁶⁹ – agency’s sociocultural influences, and its role in shaping society – will be mapped with some of the details of Grossman’s system of magic, presenting two sturdy Stepping Stones to assist students in their crossing.⁷⁰

In mapping these metaphors, key passages from all three books in the series have been selected and analysed to illuminate the metaphoric connections with agency. These passages are not, by any means, the only ones with affordances for mapping these metaphors: there are many more mentions of magic in the series which present a metaphor for agency than there could possibly be room to take up here. In this sense, the very metaphoric richness of fantasy fiction might present an impediment in using these texts as a pedagogic tool, as the wealth of passages to choose from can make the work of analysis an overwhelming task. In light of this possibility, I have selected *only* the key passages to discuss here, though I would invite all those who take up the task of teaching and learning agency using this series to find other moments and passages

⁶⁹ There are other sub-concepts and theories which are components of agency and contribute to a complete definition of the concept, such as the importance of being able to recognize and select alternative choices and the interior aspects of agency (for a discussion of both of these components, see Kabeer). Though there is neither room nor material with which to address them here, I would encourage educators to introduce these and other sub-concepts to students, perhaps using other fantasy texts to provide metaphors to facilitate that instruction. Two sub-concepts which some scholars argue should not be addressed as part of defining and understanding agency, however, are the ideas of agency as ‘free will’ and agency as ‘resistance’ – for a discussion of why these should not be considered core aspects of agency, see Ahearn, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Sherry Ortner.

⁷⁰ Two Stepping Stones is as far as the metaphor of magic in the *Magicians* will be extended to avoid the risk of creating a too-simple understanding or encouraging incorrect comparisons with the other sub-concepts, since this particular system of magic is not naturally or ideally suited to explain other sub-concepts and complexities of agency. Other metaphors can and should be used to augment these two Stones and provide the rest of the Steps needed to see all students across the gap and to a full understanding of the concept of agency – these additional Stepping Stones could even be presented using other fantasy texts and staying within the overall metaphor of magic as agency: for instance, the system of magic in Patrick Rothfuss’s series *The Kingkiller Chronicles* seems well suited to developing a Stepping Stone for the interior aspects of agency, as using magic in that fantasy world requires an individual to draw directly on their own life force, which can be understood as metaphorically representing the interior processes of agency.

which further develop and extend these metaphors.⁷¹ There are many, many more to be found in *The Magicians* alone.

First, we will map magic in the *Magicians* series on a general level to the broad definition of agency to provide a clear view of the ultimate understanding to which we are progressing: presenting, as Cameron would have it, the Destination first. The connection between magic and agency is introduced early in the series; in fact, Quentin's first lecture at Brakebills presents an ideal scene with which to begin this process of mapping. In this introductory lecture, Professor March explains in general terms how magic works and how it is learned:

“Magic is a craft. When we do magic, we do not wish and we do not pray. We rely upon our will and our knowledge and our skill to make a specific change to the world.” (TM 48)

Returning to our general definition of agency – the ability to define goals and then act to accomplish them – we can see how these two concepts relate. March notes that the result of magic is a “specific change to the world,” in which we have the idea of a ‘defined goal.’ The ways in which these goals are achieved also correlates directly with agency: actions must be taken in order to realize them. When March says that magicians “do not wish” and “do not pray,” and that instead they use their will, knowledge, and skill, it is an acknowledgement that magicians must bring their abilities to bear and exert themselves in a particular way in order to realize the specific change they have decided to work towards – magicians must *act* in order to work magic. This idea is echoed by Julia later in the series when she notes that, in working magic, “a magician did not beseech, she commanded” (TMK 269) – by which Julia means a magician acts to *make* the change occur, and does not merely wish it into being. The actions a

⁷¹ There is an interesting extension of this metaphor, for instance, developed in *The Magician's Land*, in which magic *itself* is attributed agency – in the form of desires and movement – when the pages on which spells are written act and react of their own accord (TML 35-39, 246, 363).

magician performs in Grossman's texts are always some combination of gesture and incantation: what words they say and what movements they make are dependent on the goal to be achieved. In this aspect of performing magic, we have the second component of our definition of agency: the actions taken to accomplish the goal.

As with agency, the actions a magician takes to work their magic will not always be successful and may have unintended consequences. Magic, in Grossman's world, often requires more than one attempt – or for attempts to be adjusted, as will be discussed below – just as real-life agency does not always work perfectly the first time. Plum, another Brakebills student, muses on this aspect of magic and, in doing so, provides another passage which can be mapped with a basic definition of agency:

It was funny about magic, how messy and imperfect it was. When people said something worked like magic they meant it cost nothing and did exactly what you wanted it to. But there were lots of things magic couldn't do. ... And even with the things it could do, it didn't always do them right. And it always, always cost something.

And it was inefficient. ... Magic was decidedly imperfect. But the really funny thing, she thought, was that if it were perfect, it wouldn't be so beautiful. (TML 260)

In this moment, Grossman makes clear the distinction between something 'working like magic' in the sense that it happens instantaneously and without effort, and what it means for something actually to work *like magic* in the world of the text: here, magic is not instant and it is not effortless. Magic *can* effect certain changes in the world and realize certain goals, though not *any* goal, but getting there is not always a straightforward path, with unexpected turns and multiple attempts made in order to realize the goal – which, as discussed above, requires action, what Plum here refers to as the 'cost' of magic.

The *Magicians* series presents a particular version of the familiar concept of magic which is ideally suited to introduce students to the Destination they are attempting to reach across the gap. The passages we have analysed so far both address the idea of specific desired outcomes

and of taking action to achieve them, developing this understanding further with the acknowledgement that achieving these goals requires sustained effort and multiple attempts along the way. The last aspect of agency at a general level which we will map with magic is the purpose of agency, the point of magic. When Plum asks Quentin – who is, by this point in the series, a former Brakebills professor and a far more mature and capable agent than he was as either a student or a King in Fillory – what magic is “for,” Quentin responds that he “still [has] no idea what magic is for,” but that he believes magic can be ‘for’ any number of things, and it is up to each individual to decide what end they will employ it to achieving. Quentin explains:

“In our world no one ever knows what to do, and everyone’s just as clueless and full of crap as everyone else, and you have to figure it all out by yourself. And even after you’ve figured it out and done it, you’ll never know whether you were right or wrong. ... Maybe you just have to decide for yourself. But you definitely have to decide. It’s not for sitting on my ass, which I know because I’ve tried that.” (TML 252-253)

Agency, at its core, is the ability of an individual to take actions towards the goals which will, cumulatively, create the life they most desire: their ‘best life.’⁷² It is highly unlikely that anyone could accurately know what another’s best life would be, which means that no one can really tell another person to what ends they should be employing their agency. Teaching agency is not about showing students what goals they should be directing this capacity towards; rather, it is about fostering the ability of students to realize for themselves what their goals are and creating an awareness of the process by which they can attain these goals and their best life – which is also the purpose of an autonomous education practice. This passage from *The Magician’s Land* addresses that aspect: as Quentin says, “you have to figure it all out by yourself” and “decide for yourself” what magic is meant to be for – but, for magic to have any effect, you have to decide that it’s for *something*, because otherwise nothing will be accomplished.

⁷² For a discussion of the concept of the ‘best life’ and how agency is related, see Amartya Sen, as well as Kabeer.

These three passages – which, as mentioned before, are far from the only passages which develop the metaphor of magic as agency – provide a general understanding of how magic works in the series and can serve as a description of the Destination across the gap which is to be crossed through learning the concept of agency. Applying a close, critical reading practice to these and other passages, the metaphor can be developed and extended to provide a foundation for an understanding of agency: what it is, why it's important, and what it has to do with the new classroom practice. From here, students' understanding of agency can be both broadened and deepened by introducing new metaphors which address specific components or sub-concepts within this basic understanding of agency, as will be demonstrated below.

The first sub-concept of agency to which we will extend the metaphor of magic in Grossman's series is the influence of sociocultural factors on agency. These factors manifest as both internal and external influences affecting an individual's agency, which we understand in our basic definition as their goals and their actions, but which also include the interior processes informing these elements and the way others interpret them.⁷³ Agency does not and cannot exist independently of the society and culture in which it is exercised. Ahearn presents her own provisional definition of agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act,” with the understanding that “all action is socioculturally mediated, both in its production and interpretation” (112). To reiterate, agency is influenced by an individual's culture and society at all levels, from what goals they define (and the interior process of defining them) through to the actions they take to accomplish them and how others will view and understand these actions and goals. The sociocultural factors also influence the alternatives that an individual is able to

⁷³ For an in-depth discussion of the interior processes of agency, see Kabeer; for how these interior processes are influenced by sociocultural factors, see Frazier, as well as Ahearn. For a discussion of the importance of the interpretation of others, see Frazier.

recognize and access, affecting agency on this level, as well.⁷⁴ This sub-concept is the first of the two Stepping Stones which the metaphor of magic in the *Magicians* series offers, helping students further develop their understanding of agency as they come to see how it is influenced by social and cultural factors at all levels.

In the *Magicians* series, there are two elements of magic which can be employed as a metaphor for this sub-concept: the idea of personal Disciplines and the impact of external Circumstances. Disciplines in the series are “a kind of sorcerous fingerprint,” a “natural predisposition to a certain specific kind of magic” which every magician has (TML 21). At the end of their Second Year, every Brakebills student is tested to determine their Discipline.⁷⁵ In Quentin’s year, these tests are performed by Professor Sunderland (TM 91), who, as she tests Quentin, explains the theory behind Disciplines in more detail:

“Everybody at Brakebills has an aptitude for magic, but there are individual variations – people tend to have an affinity for some specific strain. ... It’s a very personal thing. It has to do with where you were born, and where the moon was, and what the weather was like, and what kind of person you are, plus all kinds of technical stuff that’s not worth getting into. There are two hundred or so other factors which Professor March would be happy to list for you.” (TM 91-92)

As Professor Sunderland explains, Disciplines are not about being able to *do* magic, but about *what* magic a person is particularly inclined to engage in and excel at. In this passage, we see how personal factors, which are in turn influenced by social and cultural factors external to the individual, work together to determine the type of magic an individual has a particular “affinity”

⁷⁴ See Kabeer, specifically page 461.

⁷⁵ Grossman makes note in *The Magicians* that Disciplines “were socially divisive, the theory behind them was weak, and everybody ended up studying nearly the same curriculum anyway,” suggesting that they are unnecessary and stating explicitly that they are only continued due to tradition (TM 91). This belief seems, however, to be mistaken, since Disciplines continue to be a focus in the series, learning his Discipline has a significant impact on Quentin (TML 24-26), and the magicians at Murs outside the tradition of Brakebills also discover and develop ‘specialities’ which are akin to Disciplines (TMK 274). This dismissal of Disciplines seems rather to reflect Quentin’s pessimism and disillusionment at this point in the series, as well as the generally dismissive attitude common among Brakebills students, rather than a reality of this alternate world.

for. The concept of Disciplines takes into account the position of an individual within their particular culture and society, acknowledging that an individual's sociocultural position has an impact on who they are and will become – and, therefore, on the goals they will define and the actions they will take to accomplish them, which manifest as their magical speciality. Disciplines can be presented to students as a metaphor to introduce the concept of sociocultural influences on agency and the ways in which these factors inform an individual's choice of goals and actions.

In addition to the influence of an individual magician's Discipline, every act of magic is influenced and affected by the Circumstances of its casting. Circumstances are first described in the series as follows:

The same way a verb has to agree with its subject, it turned out, even the simplest spell had to be modified and tweaked and inflected to agree with the time of day, the phase of the moon, the intention and purpose and precise circumstances of its casting, and a hundred other factors... (TM 55)

The next explanation of Circumstances develops this concept further, addressing what must be done to accommodate for this influence:

Every spell had to be adjusted and modified in a hundred ways according to the prevailing Circumstances – they adorned the word with a capital letter at Brakebills – under which it was cast. These Circumstances could be just about anything: magic was a complicated, fiddly instrument that had to be calibrated precisely to the context in which it operated. Quentin had committed to memory dozens of pages of closely printed charts and diagrams spelling out the Major Circumstances and how they affected any given enchantment. And then, once you had all that down, there were hundreds of Corollaries and Exceptions to memorize too. (TM 149)

In these two passages, Circumstances are explained as every possible external factor – from the time of day to the purpose of the casting⁷⁶ – and the very real impact these factors have on the

⁷⁶ Though a spell's purpose may seem like a purely internal factor, since it is closely linked with the defined goal, as noted by Frazier, when the purpose of an action is subversive, the success of the action is largely dependent on others recognizing it as such and responding appropriately, which can be considered a factor external to the individual.

actions of an individual. The crucial importance of these Circumstances to spellcasting is denoted in the term itself, which we see is purposefully “adorned ... with a capital letter” (TM 149). In the *Magicians* series, any attempts at magic – which we are here reading as a metaphor for agency – must take into account the prevailing Circumstances in which the caster finds themselves acting.

In order to progress as magicians – metaphorically, to develop their capacity for agency to a point where, more often than not, their actions will be successful in helping attain their goals – Quentin and the other students of Brakebills must come to know and understand these Circumstances on a level where they do not need to consult them consciously in order for their magic to be successful.⁷⁷ A strong magician is not one who can force a spell to be successful in spite of the Circumstances; a strong magician is one who understands the Circumstances they are in so thoroughly that adjusting for them becomes automatic and intuitive – what Professor Mayakovsky, who is in charge of fostering this ability in students, refers to as “unusual under-the-hood machinery, the delicate but powerful correlating and cross-checking engines necessary to access and manipulate and manage this vast body of information” (TM 149). In the same vein, successful agency relies on an understanding of the society and culture an individual finds themselves in and, as a result, being able to take the actions best suited to achieving their goal in that particular sociocultural environment. As Julia notes, once you have learned how to wield magic, your attempts moving forward will, more often than not, be successful: “The thing about real magic was, once you learned a spell, and you cast it properly, and you weren’t too tired, and the Circumstances hadn’t shifted while you weren’t looking, then it worked, generally speaking” (TMK 319). An awareness of the external Circumstances, and an understanding of how to work

⁷⁷ The entire purpose of the semester spent at Brakebills South in Fourth Year is for students to drill repeatedly in every possible Circumstance so that they may develop this fluency.

with them, results in successful magic, metaphorically developing the concept that – just as internal factors influence the goals and actions an individual chooses – external factors influence the success of the actions taken and the likelihood that the goal will be achieved. In this way, magic in the *Magicians* provides students with a Stepping Stone to help them understand the impact of sociocultural influences on agency and so progress in their understanding of agency as a whole.

The second Stepping Stone which we will map here addresses agency's role in shaping and then either transforming or maintaining societal structures. Giroux's definition of agency as "the ability to imagine the world *differently* and then to act *differently*" ("Is There a Role" 167, emphasis added) begins to address the idea that agency can be a driving force for societal transformation. It is not only goals and actions intended to create change or which are subversive in nature which shape society; goals and actions taken that are in line with dominant ideologies and societal norms also shape society by reinforcing and maintaining the existing structures. This final sub-concept extends our understanding of agency, demonstrating the impact of agency when it is employed and explicating the ways in which individual agency is intricately involved in creating and maintaining societies – an important concept for students (and educators) working in an autonomous practice to understand.

There are many mentions scattered throughout the series which explicitly note magic's ability to shape society and, effectively, to change the world. In *The Magicians*, Dean Fogg notes that those who do not have access to magic "move through a blank and empty world" and that, because magic is lacking, "there's nothing they can do about [the emptiness of the world]," and that living in the magical world and having access to the affordances of magic is a "great gift" because there *is* something magicians can do if they find their world blank and boring (88). In

The Magician King, with the threat of losing access to magic looming large, Quentin finds himself wondering “what he would do if magic went away” –

What you felt and thought, all the longing and desire in your heart and mind, would count for nothing. With magic you could make those feelings real. *They could change the world*. Without it they would be stuck inside you forever, figments of your own imagination. (304-305, emphasis added)

Here, it is clear that magic in this series is a powerful force for shaping the world and that Quentin fears losing the ability to influence his reality alongside losing his magic. Finally, in *The Magician's Land*, Quentin's fully-developed understanding of magic helps him acknowledge and articulate its most important affordance: “the power to enchant the world” (399). This affordance, Quentin realizes, is “where the power began,” and everything else comes from this ability to influence the world. These three passages, and the many others throughout the series, acknowledge that the ability to use magic is, through the power to effect specific changes, the ability to change the world, to shape society to conform to the desires of the individual. Magic is presented as the conduit through which desires can become reality, through which a different world can be realized.

Dean Fogg, in his graduation speech to Quentin and his peers, links this ability to change the world with an inherent desire in each magician to make the world a ‘better place.’ Fogg explains his belief that magicians are magicians because they are unhappy and pained by the state of the world they find themselves in. A magician, Fogg claims, “feels the difference between what the world is and what he would make of it,” with this pain and disappointment manifesting as the ability to wield magic and, thereby, shape the world to fit their expectations (TM 217). Accessing and using this pain teaches and allows magicians to change the world: as Fogg says, “You have learned to break the world that has tried to break you” (TM 217). Phrased

another way, Julia exclaims: “Magic: it was what happened when the mind met the world, and the mind won for a change” (TMK 232).

This particular Stepping Stone is literally extended in three ways throughout the series: magic (and, metaphorically, agency) provides access to the Neitherlands⁷⁸ and, through them, an infinite number of possible worlds; through the Neitherlands and their magic, Quentin and his friends are able to access Fillory,⁷⁹ a world *of* magic which is perfectly suited to realize (most of) their desires for a perfect world; and finally, through magic spells found in the Neitherlands and Fillory, Quentin is able to cast a spell that literally creates the world of his dreams. In each of these major plot events, magic is shown as *literally* providing access to a new world or giving the wielder the power to create one; by extension, agency is metaphorically shown to have the power to access or create a different – hopefully better – world.

This last event – Quentin’s creation of a world through magic – is particularly apt as an extension of this Stepping Stone addressing agency’s capacity to shape society. Quentin’s creation of a land, rather than being portrayed as a monumental and rare occurrence of grand proportions, is presented as the culmination of serious effort and many intermediary steps, from creating space and matter through the final moments of introducing weather. As Quentin notes, the formation of the land “wasn’t a cosmic act of creation, a thunderbolt from Olympus, it was much more subtle than that” (TML 249). This casting is a human act of creation, one accomplished through agency (in the guise of magic). And the role Quentin plays in this new society he has shaped is a human role, as well: “You wouldn’t own it, or rule it, but you could take care of it,” Quentin realizes. “You could have stewardship of it” (TML 249). Magic is not

⁷⁸ Key passages on the Neitherlands and the access they provide to other worlds are found in *The Magicians*, pages 247 and 260.

⁷⁹ Key passages on Fillory as a world *of* magic and as the world in which their desires are manifest can be found in *The Magicians* on page 259 and 263, in *The Magician King* on page 24, and in *The Magician’s Land* on page 394.

presented as creating a land where an individual can be an ultimate ruler; rather, magic creates a land in which an individual can be happy, and in which the individual's role is to work to sustain this particular iteration of society – for their own benefit, and for others, as Quentin brings Alice through with him into this new land, and she finds that she, too, can be happy in the world Quentin has shaped (TML 297).

Using magic to create a land – and using your individual agency to shape society – is working on a grander scale than simply using magic to achieve your individual desires. The spell to create the world is, as Quentin is very aware, “grand magic. It was sorcery on a scale he'd never attempted before, and it was going to test him severely” (TM 248). Working the spell requires lengthy preparation, serious effort, and collaboration with others, and the end result is not entirely Quentin's alone: the agency of others has an impact on the shape of society, and – without depriving others of their agency through severe oppression – this influence cannot be avoided. Alice, exerting her own magic opposite Quentin's, significantly alters the first land Quentin produces (TML 269). Even with the second land, which more closely realizes Quentin's expectations and desires, he acknowledges that it is not – and will never be – solely his: “Quentin recognized this land and at the same time he didn't. Could this be home? He didn't see any reason why not. But it was a strange, wild country. It was no utopia. It wasn't a tame land” (TML 399). Though Quentin is the one to cast the spell, the resulting land is shaped by the influence of other forces, which is not necessarily an impediment to finding happiness.

This act of magic within the fantasy series shows the ways in which the actions taken by many individuals accumulate and, together, work to shape society, demonstrating for students the impact of agency beyond achieving individual goals. In the second casting of the spell to create a land – the culmination of the series – we are presented with the culmination of magic as

a metaphor for agency: the Stepping Stone which addresses agency's ability to shape society also generates an understanding of the importance of this concept and its significance beyond each individual, drawing together the other sub-concepts of agency to produce a complete understanding and help students arrive at their final Destination. The process of working the spell incorporates the elements of magic which map to agency at a broad level and are also, through the plot events leading up to this climatic moment, linked with Quentin's personal Discipline (and, naturally, account for the Circumstances of the casting, which Plum, Quentin, and Alice are seen accommodating for in their preparations). This act of creation presents a metaphoric Stepping Stone which addresses both the details of this sub-concept and its position in the concept of agency as a whole. This second Stepping Stone can help students understand, not just the complexities of agency, but its larger significance.

CONCLUSION

Magic, when developed as a metaphor, provides students with tools and resources for understanding the concept of agency – and not at a merely superficial level, but with a grasp of its inherent complexity as well as its potential for significant and far-reaching impact. By providing both broad metaphors to introduce the concept in general, presenting an image of the Destination, and specific, detailed metaphors to address specific sub-concepts – agency's sociocultural influences and its role in shaping society – the *Magicians* series links the unknown to the known and helps generate an understanding of the concept of agency. The *Magicians* can be presented to students as a way to generate this understanding and so access the knowledge and the capacity they will need to move forward successfully into an autonomous education practice. The explicit instruction of agency will help foster the success of an autonomous practice and support the goals of classroom reform. This instruction can be done either immediately preceding

the implementation of an autonomous practice to prepare students for success in the reformed classroom, or it can be offered to students as a potential project if they find themselves without purpose at the introduction of an autonomous approach. It is also always available as a resource to which students who have independently discovered an interest in agency can be directed.

Using the metaphors of the *Magicians* to teach agency to students in order to foster and support their success in a new autonomous approach to education is the last step in creating ‘speedboats’ to help students now and guide education in the future in a new direction so that, someday soon, all students can benefit from a reformed system.

Conclusion

Magicians, Classrooms, and Speedboats

By facilitating and supporting all of the steps in the process of reforming individual classrooms, the *Magicians* series is presented in this thesis as a tool for educators to use in turning their classrooms into ‘speedboats’ which will improve learning and education outcomes for their students now and prompt further changes and reforms in the future on a larger scale. A critical reading of the *Magicians* helps educators recognize the need for reform, identify a promising alternative in autonomous education, find the motivation to undertake the work of creating and sustaining this change, implement the new practice, and foster successful outcomes for their students by explicitly introducing the practice and its goals to them – as well as explicating “an enobling, imaginative vision” and a “language of possibility” in order to sustain hope that the issues with North American education *can* be addressed (Giroux “Critical” 5).

Chapter One focused on helping educators identify the problems in the current education system in North America through a close reading and a critical analysis of the fictional representation of Quentin and his education at Brakebills College for Magical Pedagogy. This literary analysis demonstrated the existence of a dominating praxis both in Quentin’s fictional classroom and classrooms in our own world and the serious repercussions of this practice, which positions students as political illiterates and causes long-term problems in their lives. With the need for education reform established, Chapter Two presented the education of Julia within the *Magicians* series as a model for educators to use in implementing classroom reform to address the issues in the current system. Once again employing a close reading practice, Julia’s experiences with Project Ganymede were explicated as a model of an autonomous education practice – an ideal alternative to a dominating praxis and a banking practice – and presented the

model to educators to use in implementing these practices in their own classrooms. The positive alternative illuminated through an analysis of Julia's experiences was also presented to educators as a motivating example of what could be achieved through this process of reform. Finally, Chapter Three aimed to support the success of this classroom reform by demonstrating how students would benefit from explicit instruction in the concept of agency and the ways in which this could be achieved using the *Magicians* series as an educational tool. Educators were shown how to employ the metaphors present in this fantasy series to introduce the concept of agency to their students and, thereby, foster their success in a reformed classroom.

As many others have noted, there is a close relationship between fantasy fiction and education in general, and an even more profound relationship between education and texts within the "education of a wizard" subgenre.⁸⁰ What this thesis has demonstrated is that a critical reading of fantasy texts is beneficial, not only to scholars and academics who can analyse these representations of education for their own sake, but to educators and those working within the field of education who can apply the critiques, comments, and suggestions these texts make – and literary analysis illuminates – to their own practice, pedagogy, and policies. Analysing and explicating the representation of education in fantasy fiction has significant potential to help educators and students when the messages of these texts can be explicated through a critical reading practice and applied to real world issues.

Jackson calls for "a more extensive treatment" of the fantasy genre which will "relate texts more specifically to the conditions of their production, to the particular constraints against which the fantasy protests and from which it is generated" (3) – this thesis has analysed Grossman's *Magicians* series within its context, illuminating the constraints and issues in

⁸⁰ See the Introduction, page 5, for a partial summary of the literature on this relationship.

education against which it is written, proving this type of analysis and application to be a worthwhile approach to research within the fantasy genre. It is my hope that, seeing what is possible with one fantasy series, future scholarship will explore what else fantasy fiction can reveal about education – or other areas of life – and then examine and experiment with the ways that these commentaries and critiques can be mobilized in the real world. For instance, what might a critical reading of Patrick Rothfuss’s *Kingkiller Chronicles* reveal about American colleges, and how could this commentary be applied to improve these institutions? What does the mockery of Hermione’s studiousness in Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series tell us about stigmas around intelligence and scholarly application, and how can educators and other adults work to counteract these attitudes and help all children love learning the way young Hermione does? It is my fervent hope that this thesis will be the first of many such studies on the relationship between fantasy fiction and education and that we will come to regard fantasy fiction as a body of literature with valuable insights into and immediate applicability to the real world.

Bibliography

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women." *American Ethnologist* 17.1 (1990): 41-55. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 March 2016.
- Ahearn, Laura M. "Language and Agency." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 109-137. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 January 2016.
- Armitt, Lucie. *Fantasy Fiction: An Introduction*. New York: Continuum, 2005. Print.
- Armstrong, Felicity, Derrick Armstrong, and Len Barton. *Inclusive Education: Policy, Contexts and Comparative Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.
- Aronowitz, Stanley. *Against Schooling: For an Education that Matters*. 2008. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.
- Attebery, Brian. *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980. Print.
- . *Strategies of Fantasy*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992. Print.
- Banerjee, Jhumur. "Role Play: An Innovative Method of Low Cost Teaching Learning." *International Journal of Scientific Research* 5.5 (2016): 474-475. Web. 9 July 2016.
- Baker, Daniel. "Why We Need Dragons: The Progressive Potential of Fantasy." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 23.3 (2012): 437-459. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 July 2016.
- Beaton, Tisha. "Taking Time: Harry Potter as a Context for Interdisciplinary Studies." *The English Journal* 95.3 (2006): 100-103. *JSTOR*. Web. 18 September 2015.
- Bell, Christopher E. *Legilimens!: Perspectives in Harry Potter Studies*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013. Print.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977. Print.
- Black, Mary S. and Marilyn J. Eisenwine. "Education of the Young Harry Potter: Socialization and Schooling for Wizards." *Educational Forum* 66.1 (2001): 32-37. *Education Full Text*. Web. 20 January 2016.
- Bordonaro, Lorenzo I. "Agency does not mean freedom. Cape Verdean street children and the politics of children's agency." *Children's Geographies* 10.4 (2012): 413-426. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 26 October 2015.
- Borrás, Isabel. *Adult Learning for Self and Relational Growth (ALG): An Integrative Developmental Model*. Boston, MA: Sense, 2016. Print.

- Bould, Mark and Sherryl Vint. "Political Readings." *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 102-112. Print.
- Brunner, Diane Dubose. *Inquiry and Reflection: Framing Narrative Practice in Education*. New York: State U of New York P, 1994. Print.
- Buck, Gayle A., Valarie L. Akerson, and Brent Gilles. "Garnering the Experiences and Understandings Emerging from Self-Studies in Science Teacher Education." *Enhancing Professional Knowledge of Pre-Service Science Teacher Education by Self-Study Research: Turning a Critical Eye on Our Practice*. Eds. Buck and Akerson. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2016. 3-22. Print.
- Cameron, Lynne. *Metaphor in Education Discourse*. New York: Continuum, 2003. Print.
- Carter, Kathy. "Meaning and Metaphor: Case Knowledge in Teaching." *Theory Into Practice* 29.2 (2001): 109-115. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 6 May 2016.
- Chappell, Drew. "Sneaking Out After Dark: Resistance, Agency, and the Postmodern Child in JK Rowling's Harry Potter Series." *Children's Literature in Education* 39 (2008): 281-293. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 26 October 2015.
- Cherland, M. R. and C. Edelsky. "Girls and Reading: The Desire for Agency and the Horror of Helplessness in Fictional Encounters." *Texts of Desire: Essays on Fiction, Femininity, and Schooling*. Ed. Linda K. Christian-Smith. Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis, 1993. 28-44. Print.
- Cicmil, Svetlana and Eamonn O'Laocha. "The logic of projects and the ideal of community development: Social good, participation and the ethics of knowing." *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* 9.3 (2016): 546-561. Web. 9 July 2016.
- Cole, Ardra L. and J. Gary Knowles. *Researching Teaching: Exploring Teacher Development through Reflexive Inquiry*. New York: Pearson, 1999. Print.
- Conn, Jennifer. "What Can Clinical Teachers Learn from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*?" *Medical Education* 36.12 (2002): 1176-1181. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 20 January 2016.
- Conn, Jennifer and Susan Elliot. "Harry Potter and Assessment." *The Clinical Teacher* 2.1 (2005): 31-36. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 20 January 2016.
- Crossley, Robert. "Education and Fantasy." *College English* 37.3 (1975): 281-293. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 September 2015.
- Delpit, Lisa D. "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children." *Harvard Educational Review* 58.3 (1988): 280-299. Web. 20 January 2016.

- Dickinson, Renée. "Harry Potter Pedagogy: What We Learn about Teaching and Learning from J. K. Rowling." *The Clearing House* 79.6 (2006): 240-244. *JSTOR*. Web. 18 September 2015.
- Diemer, Matthew A. and Luke J. Rapa. "Unraveling the Complexity of Critical Consciousness, Political Efficacy, and Political Action Among Marginalized Adolescents." *Child Development* 87.1 (2016): 221-238. *Wiley Online Library*. Web. 9 July 2016.
- Dornan, Jennifer L. "Agency and Archaeology: Past, Present, and Future Directions." *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 9.4 (2002): 303-329. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 26 October 2015.
- Easton, Graham. "How medical teachers use narratives in lectures: a qualitative study." *BMC Medical Education* 16.3 (2016): 1-12. *BioMed Central*. Web. 9 July 2016.
- Eldredge, L. Kay Bartholomew, et al. *Planning Health Promotion Programs: An Intervention Mapping Approach*. 4th ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016. Print.
- Elliot, Julian, and Rod Nicolson. *Dyslexia: Developing the Debate*. Ed. Andrew Davis. New York: Bloomsbury, 2016. Print.
- Elster, Charles. "The Seeker of Secrets: Images of Learning, Knowing, and Schooling." *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Elizabeth E. Heilman. New York: Routledge, 2003. 203-220. Print.
- Ely, Richard, Gigliana Melzi, Luke Hadge, and Alyssa McCabe. "Being Brave, Being Nice: Themes of Agency and Communion in Children's Narratives." *Journal of Personality* 66.2 (1998): 257-284. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 20 January 2016.
- Frazier, Kathryn E. "Agency on the Move: Revisioning the Route to Social Change." *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 47.3 (2013): 354-366. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 26 October 2015.
- Freire, Paulo. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Seabury, 1973. Print.
- . *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Robert R. Barr. New York: Continuum, 1994. Print.
- . *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Herder and Herder, 1972. Print.
- . *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*. Trans. Donaldo Macedo. Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1985. Print.
- Fortier, Mark. *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.

- Foster, Colin. "Confidence and competence with mathematical procedures." *Educational Studies in Mathematics* 91.2 (2016): 271-288. *SpringerLink*. Web. 9 July 2016.
- Gentner, Dedre, and Donald R. Gentner. "Flowing Waters or Teeming Crowds: Mental Models of Electricity." *Mental Models*. 1983. Eds. Dedre Gentner and Albert L. Stevens. New York: Psychology, 2014. 99-130. Print.
- Giroux, Henry A. "Critical Pedagogy in Dark Times." *On Critical Pedagogy*. New York: Continuum, 2011. 3-15. Print.
- . "Introduction." *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*. By Paulo Freire. Granby, MA.: Bergin & Garvey, 1985. Print.
- . "Is There a Role for Critical Pedagogy in Language/Culture Studies? An Interview with Henry A. Giroux." By Manuela Guilherme. *Language and Intercultural Communication* 6.2 (2006): 163-175. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 26 October 2015.
- Golding, Viv. *Learning at the Museum Frontiers: Identity, Race and Power*. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.
- Grossman, Lev. *The Magicians*. New York: Viking Press, 2009. Print.
- . *The Magician King*. New York: Viking Press, 2011. Print.
- . *The Magician's Land*. New York: Viking Press, 2014. Print.
- Gruner, Elisabeth Rose. "Teach the Children: Education and Knowledge in Recent Children's Fantasy." *Children's Literature* 37 (2009): 216-235. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 October 2015.
- Gutiérrez, Peter. "School as the Real Star: Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Millennials." *Screen Education* 55 (2009): 26-31. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 20 January 2016.
- Hand, Elizabeth. "The Uses of Disenchantment." Rev. of *Cheek by Jowl: Essays*, by Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Magician's Book: A Skeptic's Adventures in Narnia*, by Laura Miller, and *The Magicians*, by Lev Grossman. *Fantasy & Science Fiction* Aug./Sept. 2009: n.p. *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. Web. 25 May 2016.
- Hawkins, David. "Messing About in Science." *Science and Children* 2.5 (1965): 5-9. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 June 2016.
- Heilman, Elizabeth E., ed. *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2009. Print.
- Helfenbein, Robert J. and Sydney K. Brown. "Conjuring Curriculum, Conjuring Control: A Reading of Resistance in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*." *Curriculum Inquiry* 38.4 (2008): 499-513. *Wiley Online Library*. Web. 20 January 2016.

- Herrick, Tim. "All-Age Schooling: Alternatives from History." *Reimagining the Purpose of Schools and Educational Organisations*. Ed. Anthony Montgomery and Ian Kehoe. Switzerland: Springer International, 2016. 243-252. Print.
- Himes, Amanda E. "Lev Grossman's *The Magicians*: Narnia under Fire?" *Intégrité: A Faith and Learning Journal* 14.1 (2015): 59-65. *Missouri Baptist University*. Web. 17 March 2016.
- Himes, J.B. "Questioning God(s) of Other Worlds in Lev Grossman's *The Magicians*." *Intégrité: A Faith and Learning Journal* 14.1 (2015): 66-73. *Missouri Baptist University*. Web. 17 March 2016.
- Holt, John. *Freedom and Beyond*. New York: Dutton & Co, 1972. Print.
- . *How Children Fail*. New York: Dell, 1964. Print.
- . *How Children Learn*. New York: Pitman, 1967. Print.
- . *The Underachieving School*. New York: Pitman, 1969. Print.
- Hopkins, Lisa. "Harry Potter and the Acquisition of Knowledge." *Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays*. Ed. Giselle Liza Anatol. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003. 25-34. Print.
- Hume, Kathryn. *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*. London: Methuen, 1984. Print.
- Hunt, Peter and Millicent Lenz. *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction: Ursula Le Guin, Terry Pratchett, Philip Pullman and Others*. London: Continuum, 2001. Print.
- Jaber, Nadia Zakaria. "How I Make My Math Class More Natural: Cognition and Learning." *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences Vol 4.3* (2016): 1-5. Web. 9 July 2016.
- Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Methuen, 1981. Print.
- Kabeer, Naila. "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment." *Development and Change* 30 (1999): 435-464. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 26 October 2015.
- Kahn, Salman. *The One World Schoolhouse: Education Reimagined*. New York: Grand Central, 2012. Print.
- Kapur, Veena. "Teacher Education in the Age of Technology." *Third 21st CAF Conference at Harvard, in Boston, USA. September 2015, Vol. 6, Nr. 1*. 145-155. Web. 9 July 2016.
- Khany, Reza and Hasan Tarlani-Aliabadi. "Studying power relations in an academic setting: Teachers' and students' perceptions of EAP classes in Iran." *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 21 (2016): 72-85. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 9 July 2016.

- Kingsley, Charles. *The Water-Babies, a Fairy Tale for a Land Baby*. London: Macmillan, 1863. Print.
- Kittay, Eva Feder. *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987. Print.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980. Print.
- Le Guin, Ursula. "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie." *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Susan Wood. New York: Putnam's Sons, 1979. 83-96. Print.
- . "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Susan Wood. New York: Putnam's Sons, 1979. 39-45. Print.
- Lengelle, Reinekke and Sjon Ashby. "Writing as soul work: training teachers in a group-based career-narrative approach." *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling* (2016): 1-15. *Taylor & Francis Online*. Web. 9 July 2016.
- Locke, Linda. "Legacy and Adaptation: The Orff Approach in the New Zealand School Setting." *Intersecting Cultures in Music and Dance Education: An Oceanic Perspective*. Ed. Linda Ashley and David Lines. Switzerland: Springer International, 2016. 97-117. Print.
- Maier, Sarah E. "Educating Harry Potter: A Muggle's Perspective on Magic and Knowledge in the Wizard World of J. K. Rowling." *Scholarly Studies in Harry Potter: Applying Academic Methods to a Popular Text*. Ed. Cynthia Whitney Hallet. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2005. 7-28. Print.
- Mandala, Susan. *Language in Science Fiction and Fantasy: The Question of Style*. London: Continuum, 2010. Print.
- Manlove, C.N. *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1983. Print.
- . *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975. Print.
- Manners Smith, Karen. "Harry Potter's Schooldays: J.K. Rowling and the British Boarding School Novel." *Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays*. Ed. Giselle Liza Anatol. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003. 69-87. Print.
- Marshall, Hermine H. "Metaphor as an Instructional Tool in Encouraging Teacher Reflection." *Theory Into Practice* 29.2 (2001): 128-132. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 6 May 2016.
- Mayes-Elma, Ruthann Elizabeth. "A Feminist Literary Criticism Approach to Representations of Women's Agency in Harry Potter." Diss. Miami University, 2003. *OhioLink*. Web. 26 October 2015.

- McAdams, Dan P., Barry K. Hoffman, Elizabeth D. Mansfield and Rodney Day. "Themes of Agency and Communion in Significant Autobiographical Scenes." *Journal of Personality* 64.2 (1996): 339-377. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 26 October 2015.
- McCarthy, Conal. *Museums and Māori: Heritage Professionals, Indigenous Collections, Current Practice*. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.
- McDaniel, Kathryn N. "Harry Potter and the Ghost Teacher: Resurrecting the Lost Art of Lecturing." *The History Teacher* 43.2 (2010): 289-295. *JSTOR*. Web. 18 September 2015.
- McGillis, Roderick. "Learning to Read, Reading to Learn: or Engaging in Critical Pedagogy." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 22.3 (1997): 126-132. *Project Muse*. Web. 20 January 2016.
- McGovern, Margot. "Divine Madness: Identifying, Analysing and Developing the Campus Clique Crime Novel." Diss. Flinders University, 2013. *Trove*. Web. 17 March 2016.
- McNiff, Jean. *You and Your Action Research Project*. 4th ed. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.
- Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan UP, 2008. Print.
- . "Thematic Criticism." *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Eds. Edward James and Mendlesohn. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 125-133. Print.
- Mendlesohn, Farah and Edward James. *A Short History of Fantasy*. London, England: Middlesex UP, 2009. Print.
- Miley, Karla Krogsrud, Michael W. O'Melia, and Brenda L. DuBois. *Generalist Social Work Practice: An Empowering Approach*. 7th ed. New York: Pearson, 2016.
- Moorcock, Michael. *Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1987. Print.
- Morgan, Julia. "Participation, empowerment and capacity building: Exploring young people's perspectives on the services provided to them by a grassroots NGO in sub-Saharan Africa." *Children and Youth Services Review* 65 (2016): 175-182. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 9 July 2016.
- Muchmore, James A. "From Laura Ingalls to Wing Biddlebaum: A Survey of Teacher Identities in Works of Literature." *Issues in Teacher Education* 21.1 (Spring 2012): 5-20. *Gale*. Web. 20 January 2016.
- Natov, Roni. "Harry Potter and the Extraordinariness of the Ordinary." *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*. Ed. Lana Whited. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2002. 125-139. Print.

- Nester, Robbi. "Do You Believe in Magic? The Novels of Lev Grossman." *Hollins Critic* 49.1 (2012): n.p. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 25 May 2016.
- Niemi, Nancy, Julia B. Smith, and Nancy Brown. "The Portrayal of Teachers in Children's Popular Fiction." *Journal of Research in Education* 20.2 (2010): 58-80. *EERA*. Web. 20 January 2016.
- Noyes, Andrew. "Using metaphor in mathematics teacher preparation." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 22 (2006): 898-909. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 6 May 2016.
- O'Keefe, Deborah. *Readers in Wonderland: The Liberating Worlds of Fantasy Fiction From Dorothy to Harry Potter*. New York: Continuum, 2003. Print.
- Olsen, Brad. *Teaching for Success: Developing Your Teacher Identity in Today's Classroom*. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.
- Oltermann, Philip. "No grades, no timetable: Berlin school turns teaching upside down." *The Guardian*. The Guardian, 1 July 2016. Web. 3 July 2016.
- Ortner, Sherry B. *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989. Print.
- . "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37.1 (1995): 173-193. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 March 2016.
- . "Specifying Agency: The Comaroffs and Their Critics." *Interventions* 3.1 (2001): 76-84. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 20 March 2016.
- . "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26.1 (1984): 126-166. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 March 2016.
- . "Toward a Feminist, Minority, Postcolonial, Subaltern, etc., Theory of Practice." *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*. Boston: Beacon, 1996. 1-20. Print.
- Paton Walsh, Jill. "The Art of Realism." *Celebrating Children's Books: Essays on Children's Literature in Honor of Zena Sutherland*. Eds. Betsy Hearne and Marilyn Kaye. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1981. 35-44. Print.
- Pinsent, Pat. "The Education of a Wizard: Harry Potter and His Predecessors." *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*. Ed. Lana Whited. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2002. 27-50. Print.
- Pratchett, Terry. *Equal Rites*. London: Victor Gollancz with Colin Smythe, 1987. Print.
- . *A Hat Full of Sky*. New York: Doubleday, 2004. Print.
- . *I Shall Wear Midnight*. New York: Doubleday, 2010. Print.

---. "Imaginary Worlds, Real Stories." *Folklore* 111 (2000): 159-168. *Scholars Portal*. Web. 5 July 2016.

---. *The Shepherd's Crown*. New York: Doubleday Children's, 2015. Print.

---. *The Wee Free Men*. New York: Doubleday, 2003. Print.

---. *Wintersmith*. New York: Doubleday, 2006. Print.

Prothero, James. "Fantasy, Science Fiction, and the Teaching of Values." *The English Journal* 79.3 (1990): 32-34. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 September 2015.

Pullman, Phillip. *The Amber Spyglass*. New York: Scholastic, 2000. Print.

---. *Northern Lights (The Golden Compass)*. New York: Scholastic Point, 1995. Print.

---. *The Subtle Knife*. New York: Scholastic Point, 1997. Print.

Rabkin, Eric S. *The Fantastic in Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1976. Print.

---, ed. *Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales, and Stories*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979. Print.

Reid, Gavin. *Dyslexia: A Practitioner's Handbook*. 5th ed. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2016. Print.

Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language*. Trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1975. Print.

Ritchie, L. David. *Metaphor: Key Topics in Semantics and Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013. Print.

Rosen, Sonia M. "Harry Potter as Modern Day Youth Activist: What Americans Can Learn from One Young Brit." *Proceedings of Accio 2008: A Harry Potter Conference*. Ed. Phyllis Morris and Diana Patterson. Oxford: Accio UK, 2008. 200-208. Print.

Ross, E. Wayne. "Broadening the Circle of Critical Pedagogy." *Working for Social Justice Inside & Outside the Classroom: A Community of Students, Teachers, Researchers, and Activists*. Ed. Nancy E. McCrary and E. Wayne Ross. New York: Peter Lang, 2015. 209-218. Print.

Rothfuss, Patrick. *The Name of the Wind*. New York: DAW Books, 2007. Print.

---. *The Wise Man's Fear*. New York: DAW Books, 2011. Print.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. London: Bloomsbury, 1998. Print.

---. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. London: Bloomsbury, 2007. Print.

---. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury, 2000. Print.

---. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. London: Bloomsbury, 2005. Print.

---. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury, 2003. Print.

---. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury, 1997. Print.

---. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. London: Bloomsbury, 1999. Print.

Sandner, David. "Theorizing the Fantastic: Editing Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader and the Six Stages of Fantasy Criticism." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 16.4 (2006): 277-301. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 October 2015.

Sen, Amartya. "Well-Being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984." *The Journal of Philosophy* 82.4 (1985): 169-221. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 January 2016.

Shah, Rajendra Kumar. "Instructional Methods for Teaching Social Studies: A Survey of What Primary School Children Like and Dislike about Social Studies Instruction." *International Journal of Advanced Research in Education & Technology* 3.1 (2016): 81-87. Web. 9 July 2016.

Shapiro, Joan Poliner and Jacqueline A. Stefkovich. *Ethical Leadership and Decision Making in Education: Applying Theoretical Perspectives to Complex Dilemmas*. 4th ed. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.

Sharma, Manoj. *Theoretical Foundations of Health Education and Health Promotion*. 3rd ed. Burlington: Jones & Bartlett, 2016. Print.

Sircar, Sanjay. "Children's Fantasy Fiction in English: Early Generic Discriminations and Our Modern Critical Inheritance." *Merveilles & contes* 7.2 (1993): 423-449. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 September 2015.

Skulnick, Rebecca and Jesse Goodman. "The Civic Leadership of *Harry Potter*: Agency, Ritual, and Schooling." *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Elizabeth E. Heilman. New York: Routledge, 2003. 261-277. Print.

Slusser, George E. and Eric S. Rabkin, eds. *Intersections: Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987. Print.

Slusser, George E., Eric S. Rabkin, and Robert Scholes, eds. *Bridges to Fantasy*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1982. Print.

---. *Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983. Print.

Sprague, Joey. *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*. 2nd ed. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. Print.

- Steege, David K. "Harry Potter, Tom Brown, and the British School Story: Lost in Transit?" *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*. Ed. Lana Whited. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2002. 140-156. Print.
- Stypczynski, Brent. "Wolf in Professor's Clothing: J. K. Rowling's Werewolf as Educator." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 20.1 (2009): 57-69. *JSTOR*. Web. 18 September 2015.
- Sullivan, Bernie, et al. *Introduction to Critical Reflection and Action for Teacher Researchers*. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.
- Swinfen, Ann. *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984. Print.
- Tallboys, Graeme K. *Using Museums as an Educational Resource: An Introductory Handbook for Students and Teachers*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.
- Taylor, Daniel C. and Carl E. Taylor. *Just and Lasting Change: When Communities Own Their Futures*. 2nd ed. Baltimore: JHU P, 2016. Print.
- Thompson, Neil. *Anti-Discriminatory Practice: Equality, Diversity and Social Justice*. 6th ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Print.
- Thorne, Sally. *Interpretive Description*. 2008. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard. London: P of Case Western Reserve U, 1973. Print.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-stories." *Tree and Leaf*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964. 11-70. Print.
- Tymn, Marshall B., Kenneth J. Zahorski and Robert H. Boyer. *Fantasy Literature: A Core Collection and Reference Guide*. New York: R. R. Bowker, 1979. Print.
- Vosniadou, Stella. "Contextual and Linguistic Factors in Children's Comprehension of Nonliteral Language." *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 2.1 (1987): 1-11. *Taylor & Francis Online*. Web. 13 May 2016.
- Webb, Caroline. *Fantasy and the Real World in British Children's Literature: The Power of Story*. New York: Routledge, 2014. Print.
- Wenner, Julianne A. and Todd Campbell. "The Theoretical and Empirical Basis of Teacher Leadership: A Review of the Literature." *Review of Educational Research* (2016): 1-38. *SAGE journals*. Web. 9 July 2016.
- Whited, Lana A. "McGonagall's Prophecy Fulfilled: The Harry Potter Critical Library." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 27.3 (2003): 416-425. *Muse*. Web. 8 July 2016.

- Wilkinson, Iain and Arthur Kleinman. *A Passion for Society: How We Think about Human Suffering*. Oakland, CA: U of California P, 2016. Print.
- Williams, L. Kaitlin. ““Change the Story, Change the World”: Gendered Magic and Educational Ideology in Terry Pratchett’s *Discworld*.” MA thesis Appalachian State University, 2015. *UNCG*. Web. 5 July 2016.
- Wong, Einar Christopher. “The Magic of Hogwarts: A Critical Examination of Teachers in *Harry Potter*.” MA thesis University of British Columbia, 2014. Web. *UBC Open Collections*. 20 January 2016.
- Wynne Jones, Diane. *Charmed Life*. London: Macmillan, 1977. Print.
- . *Conrad’s Fate*. New York: Collins, 2005. Print.
- . *The Lives of Christopher Chant*. London: Methuen, 1988. Print.
- . *The Magicians of Caprona*. London: Macmillan, 1980. Print.
- . *Mixed Magics: Four Tales of Chrestomanci*. New York: Collins, 2000. Print.
- . *The Pinhoe Egg*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006. Print.
- . *Witch Week*. London: Macmillan, 1982. Print.
- Yeh, Hsiu-Ying, et al. "Evaluating the effectiveness of a family empowerment program on family function and pulmonary function of children with asthma: A randomized control trial." *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 60 (2016): 133-144. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 9 July 2016.
- Zoller Booth, Margaret and Grace Marie Booth. “What American Schools Can Learn from Hogwarts School Of Witchcraft and Wizardry.” *Phi Delta Kappan* 85.4 (2003): 310-315. *JSTOR*. Web. 18 September 2015.