Challenging the boundaries of academic discourse

Charles Henry Williams

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CHALLENGING THE BOUNDARIES OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Charles Henry Williams Jr.
September 2000
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ABSTRACT

Schools should work to encourage students to embrace difference, engage in critical investigative skills, and value radical open-ness, while providing opportunities to confront and challenge oppressive and constrictive hegemonic tendencies within educational institutions. This paper explores four influential composition theories and pedagogies that extend this argument by acknowledging the existence of hegemony at work in learning spaces and attempting to present strategies for coping and confronting power.

This exploration suggests other ways of helping students resist blind submission to the discourse of the university. The primary objective is to discuss meaningful ways of transforming composition classrooms into counter hegemonic cultural environments where students can critically examine the complications of cultural dynamics and power relations within the communication process.
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CHAPTER ONE

Education should work to engage students in critical activities that transcend binary thinking and challenge them to feel comfortable wrestling with complications as a natural part of living in a diverse world. Such a pedagogy would embrace difference, promote critical investigative skills, and value radical open-ness. In this project, I will be critiquing several composition pedagogies that promote these ideas.

Often educational settings are hindered from achieving these ideas because of a hegemonic relationship between the dominant power structure, education institutions, and students, which works to preclude students from pursuing certain channels of intellectual investigation. I am using the concept of hegemony to define a system of alliances based upon consensual relationships where one class or group exercises control over another by means of coercion and persuasion executed through the work of intellectuals or the establishing of moral codes (Morrow and Torres 251-256). Although hegemony is not instinctively pejorative, it most often works as a form of social domination. Antonio Gramsci, whose work explored the nature of
hegemonic power, indicates that educational and penal institutions are the primary mechanisms for shaping individuals into the kinds of models needed to maintain societal order; one works to construct a normative value system, while the other punishes those that do not comply. More specifically, the role of education within such a society is to relate "hegemonically one stratum with another, thus symbolically co-opting the subordinate classes by integrating them with the dominant hegemonic culture" (254). This form of control is far more thorough and lasting than physical force because it creates the desire within dominated groups to be a part of the dominant power structure or the "dominant hegemonic culture."

Three events in the field of composition illustrate hegemony at work and have helped to perpetuate the existing system of alliances between the dominant power structures, educational institutions, and students (or civil society). The events that I will discuss are (1) the 1969 Open Admissions debate at City University of New York, (2) The Committee on College Composition and Communication's 1974 document "Student Rights to Their Own Language," and (3) the publishing of Mina Shaughnessy's Error and Expectations in 1977. I would like to point out that although these are
very complicated moments in time, my purpose here is not to present an exhaustive analysis of these situations, but to simply address their fundamental role in shaping the direction of composition research. It is my position that although these events were the springboard for more socially progressive writing pedagogies, their initial effect was to support the dominant power structure’s efforts to de-politicize or neutralize education.

The first event, the Open Admissions debate at City University of New York in 1969, was initiated by a group of African American and Latino students for the purpose of opening enrollment to more “working, poor, and minority students” (Schor 214). Around the issue of open enrollment, two camps quickly formed: (1) those opposed to open admissions, fearing that lowering the standards would weaken the institutional reputation and consequently harm those who had legitimately (in terms of admissions qualifications) earned a right to be there, and (2) those who endorsed it as a “poverty interrupter,” viewing it as a chance “to give the poor and working-class people of New York City a chance to get into the mainstream of the city’s economic life...to give them some purchase on what is called the American dream” (Horner 13). According to its early
advocates, including the New York City Board of Higher Education, open admissions was intended to help provide access to higher education for economically disadvantaged ethnic minorities living within low-income communities, which would in turn grant them access to better paying jobs and an improved standard of living.

However, if one steps outside the binary rhetoric and looks closer at the direction of the polemics, it becomes apparent that the liberal perspective may not have been motivated by concerns for under represented communities, but more by fear of social destabilization. The New York City Board of Higher Education Vice Chancellor, Timothy Healy, argued that the number of the poor would rise "without a significant increase in the pools of educated men and women," and that this policy could "short circuit the terrible rhythm of disappointment and rage...[of] inner-city youth...that can create a new race of barbarians" (12). Historically speaking, fear has always been a strong motivating factor for getting people in power to implement inclusive policies. An open admissions policy was in step with a host of social policies in the 60s that promoted opportunities for accommodation and nullified acts of
resistance, therefore helping maintain the equilibrium of power (Marable 167).

As expected, the conservative community was repulsed by this idea of using tax dollars to create opportunities for people of color because this policy appeared to be a quota system that granted enrollment advantages to students who were educationally under prepared. The debates intensified into ridiculous rhetoric that covered a range of social issues and forced people to form alliances with their usual adversaries. But what I find most interesting about these debates are the statistics that indicated the overwhelming majority of people benefiting from open enrollment were not people of color but "white ethnics" such as Irish Americans and Italian Americans, many of whom were from traditionally politically conservative districts (Horner 8-9). However, media reports stereotyped the new students (as well as the protestors) as predominantly angry African Americans and Latinos. Surprisingly, those in favor of an open admissions policy rarely raised this issue.

Many composition theorists who are aligned with progressive and radical pedagogies (e.g. Ira Schor, John Trimbur, and Bruce Horner) view the open enrollment debates
as the birth of basic writing as we know it, because they created the core population. Many of these students were unfamiliar with the universities discursive practices and therefore, needed "remedial" help. And, because composition classrooms were no longer comprised of a monolithic group of students, issues of difference now had to be addressed. It was within these classrooms that a host of issues involving pedagogical practices, writing and learning theory, and didactical issues first surfaced.

The second event occurred in the fall of 1974, when The Committee on College Composition and Communication released a special issue of the CCC entitled "Students' Rights to Their Own Language." Composed by the executive committee of the CCC, it responded to the current discussions on the role linguistic variety played in education. Acknowledging that language issues had always sparked debates within American schools, the committee identified the "social upheavals" of the 60s as the source for the new intensity of the discussion. This committee presented an argument, supported by linguistics and sociological research, which "demonstrated incontrovertibly that many long held and passionately cherished notions about language are misleading at best, and often completely
erroneous” (CCC 1). They argued that these notions existed due to the general lack of access many had to this research and due to the fact that most in the field of English studied literature rather than language and were therefore less enlightened on the complexity of these issues.

This document set out to challenge socio-historical notions of language despite their deep entrenchment within the psyche of the American public. Part of the controversy over this document stemmed from arguments that certain language varieties are viewed as superior by the dominant power structures— the business community and educational institutions—hence, forming hegemony over what was perceived as acceptable academic writing. But the committee called for resisting conformity and striving to emphasize “precise, effective, and appropriate communication in diverse ways” (2). It stated:

We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied the myth that a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group
to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice to humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (2-3)

The document continued to address twenty-five questions in a brief but dense format regarding language theory, development, and acquisition, which were followed by an extensive bibliography.

Although this was perhaps a very honest attempt at inclusion, it helped to confuse important issues and direct our attention away from more critical perspectives. Min Zhan Lu notes,

On the one hand, this “new” understanding can help relieve the back-to-basics right wing pressure on writing teachers convinced that drills on “correct” form cannot improve students’ ability as readers and writers. On the other hand, this understanding allows for a continual separation of the transmission of
"meaning" from issues of differences and power through the imagery of "coding" and "decoding." That is, it enables the committee to argue that issues of diversity are only present in the teaching of "dialectal features." (80)

She contends that such a widely contested political issue as language variety was explained away with only apolitical justifications. The debate worked to reinforce hegemony by oversimplifying issues of difference as scientifically justified and not socially and historically produced. By separating the formation of meaning from the form of the message, English teachers did not have to examine the politics behind some of their values and pedagogical choices, yet retained the power to control making meaning options for students.

The third event that I would like to explore is the release of Mina Shaughnessy's book, Errors and Expectations, in 1977. As noted in the book jacket comments, The Chronicle of Higher Education described this text as "Much more than a guide [it is] a force that can redirect the energies of an entire profession." While many would agree and credit Shaughnessy with being the first to demystify academic writing for students unfamiliar with the
discourse, her work is also responsible for inspiring a backlash of literature that rejected her essentialising. On the one hand, she is celebrated for her student-centered pedagogy; on the other, she is heavily criticized for a pedagogy that does not challenge students, but instead trivializes their degree of sophistication. This ambivalent response to Shaughnessy has emerged because many now see her legacy as neutralizing discussions on the politics of difference, endorsing normative values, and favoring cultural hegemony.

In her work with basic writing students at the City University of New York in the early seventies, Shaughnessy noted that basic writing students "write the way they do, not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes" (5). She was one of the early theorists who suggested studying errors to find logical patterns, arguing that because these errors were not random acts due to carelessness, they offered instructors insight on helping students in avoiding them. Unfortunately, the investigation stopped there, and errors were only critiqued in terms of being a result of interference from a lesser
language or dialect. Such a strategy causes Joseph Harris to conclude that Shaughnessy's work "argues for a new sort of student but not a new sort of intellectual practice" (79). This is in part due to her focus on teaching formal written English. Although she does devote one chapter in her book to concerns "Beyond the Sentence," which offers models of student essay writing, four of the eight chapters—Handwriting and Punctuation, Syntax, Common Errors, and Spelling and Vocabulary—emphasize conventional forms. Harris points out that students are asked to read texts that provide opportunities to contextualize their own experiences and ideas, yet the writing assignments and the structure of the course do not encourage this; instead they ask students to identify main ideas or generate a list of details. In fact, an outline of her course indicates that students never moved past issues of correctness until the fifteenth week of an eighteen-week semester (81).

In many ways Shaughnessy's work only helped to fuel the "national mania for correctness" that the "Students' Rights" debate spawned. Her work was more readily received than Geneva Smitherman's book, Talkin and Testifyin, which came out the same year and was also about embracing language variety. However, Smitherman's texts focused more
on rhetorical effectiveness and invited students to rethink issues of correctness as being culturally constructed.

While this book gained marginal success in academic circles, Shaughnessy’s work went on to be receive rave reviews in a host of liberal journals and magazines such as the Nation and the Atlantic Monthly. E.D Hirsh would claim that she approved of his work because they shared similar views on the supremacy of certain bodies of knowledge. He called it "cultural literacy," while Shaughnessy called it "the language of public transaction" (Lu 115-116).

Let me be clear: Shaughnessy’s text must be heralded for the concerns it raised and the work that it eventually inspired. Robert Lyons says her work resists closure and “looks to the future, emphasizing what needs to be learned and done” (Lyons 106). The list of “Suggested Readings” in the back of her book indicates an awareness of the need for further investigation. Hence, what appear to be limitations could be perceived as points of entry.

However, this text is brutally hegemonic as it embraces an essentialist view of language, which is defined as the treating of a concept or group as unitary, ignoring the inherent diversity of its contents and components (Delgado 240). For Shaughnessy, this would mean that
discursive conventions have little or no effect at all on the essence of meaning. Such a position implies that "if all languages are the product of the same "instrument"—the "human brain"—then all dialects are essentially the same in their deep structure. By implication, "meaning" remains the same because it has its origin in the "biological" rather than social and historical" (Lu 81). This embracing of essentialism produced two results: a host of writing strategies that rely on instruction through the use of heuristics (process theory), and a rationale for spending less classroom time on deep structure issues while emphasizing surface details. To promote the assumption that the production of meaning is inherent within linguistic choices or codes is to deny the existence of cultural dynamics within communication processes. Lu adds:

> Such a view of the relationship between words and meaning does not allow for attention to the possibility that different ways of using words—different discourses—might exercise different constraints on how one "crafts" the meaning "one has in mind." (Lu 108)

A view such as Shaughnessy's does not encourage students to reflect upon their words, the reasons behind their choices,
or the implications of those choices. Rather if word selection is not aligned with written formal English, then it classifies as "error." According to Shaughnessy, from here, students should be instructed in strategies to learn to make the "correct" choices.

Shaughnessy was criticized not only for valuing a pedagogy that depoliticized difference but also for reinforcing normative academic discourse values. When she labels formal written English as "the language of public transaction—educational, civic, and professional and—and the students' home discourse as the language one uses with one's family and friends," she establishes a hierarchy by inflating the perception of academic discourse as universal and as an indispensable tool for social progress (125). Insisting that no variety of English can substitute for the others, Shaughnessy suggests that academic discourse is important for all in society to learn. Lu, perhaps Shaughnessy's sharpest critic to date, responds

This insistence on the nonsubstitutive nature of language implies that academic discourse has been, is, and will inevitably be the language of public transaction. And it may very well lead students to see the function of formal English as a timeless
linguistic law which they must respect, adapt to, and perpetuate rather than as a specific historical circumstance resulting from the historically unequal distribution of social power and as a condition which they must recognize but can also call into question and change. (Lu 114)

To view academic discourse as Shaughnessy suggests limits the desire of instructors and theorists, as well as students, to investigate it. This sort of urging discourages challenges to the boundaries of academic discourse by denying that it is an organic eclectic entity, as are all discourses. Hence, her approach promotes a hegemony that reinforces the notions of a norm, an academic discourse akin to a standardized form of written communication.

If instructors focus chiefly on intense grammatical issues, their students will still produce writing that ignores "the ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing" that define the discourse of the academic community (Bartholomae 4). Because of the iterative nature of academic work (particularly in a relatively new and struggling field), it is essential to critique existing paradigms of thought.
Thus, it was inevitable that Shaughnessy’s work would be re-examined and re-evaluated along with other dominant theoretical positions within the community. But not only was criticism necessary, there was also the need to “forage” into other avenues of intellectual investigation to help ground the field’s philosophical direction (North 102). At this point for composition, poststructuralist theories offered the soundest foundation in learning theories and discourse communities. An example of this move is Patricia Bizzell’s 1985 article, “Cognition, Convention, and Certainty: What We Need to Know About Writing,” a critique of Linda Flower and John R. Hayes’ work on composing processes. Urging researchers in the field to rethink the importance placed on cognitive theory, Bizzell’s call was pivotal in moving composition research away from cognition and essentialist theories and toward discourse theory and ultimately more intense investigations into poststructuralism.

Bizzell’s critique of the Flower and Hayes’ project was one of the first to challenge universal writing strategies and heuristics. She asserted that when instructors claim certain methods as universal, they require students to appropriate a system of communication
strategies (which is always accompanied with a system of valuing) without overtly informing students of what they are doing. Rather, she argued students need to know the social as well as the cognitive factors of writing development and the relationship between the two in order to grasp a community’s discourse strategies, which she defined as each community’s own conventions of speaking, writing, reading, and thinking. These elements make up a discourse and become the characteristics of a discourse community. The university is such a community, which houses many other communities within it. In this essay she explains how

We used to see the “writing problem” as a thinking problem and approached it as if we took our students thinking for granted. We assumed our students came to us with ideas and we helped them put those ideas into words. We taught style, explaining the formal properties of model essays and evaluating students’ products in light of these models. Some students came to us with better ideas than others, but these were simply the brighter and more mature students. All we could do for the duller, more immature students was to
hope that exposure to good models might push them

along the developmental path. (76)

After painting this picture of what writing instruction

used to consist of, she looks specifically at two

components of the Flower and Hayes model (planning and

translating), which perpetuated this way of viewing writing

problems. According to Flower and Hayes, planning is the

part of the process when “the writer generates and

organizes ideas before struggling to put them into words,”

and translating is the succeeding activity of envisioning

those ideas into words or “putting ideas into visible

language” (Flowers and Hayes 373). Bizzell’s argument

rests on questioning cognitive theorists’ views of these

activities as two separate endeavors. She contends that

there is an intimate relationship between how people

conceive ideas and how they put those ideas into words or

“visible thought,” citing Lev Vygotsky, who argues that a

child’s linguistic and cognitive development “is not a

natural, innate form of behavior but is determined be a

historical-cultural process” (85). Rather, Vygotsky argues

the two acts, planning and translating, can’t be separated;

they act in relation to each other by being products of a

social context.
By challenging the scientific approach to writing problems, Bizzell argues that certain writing problems are not evidence of some type of cognitive miscue but rather matters of social construction. Developing a theory based within sociolinguistics, she argues that

Students who struggle to write Standard English need to know beyond the rules of grammar, spelling and so on. They need to know the habitual attitudes of Standard English users toward this preferred form; the linguistic features that most strongly mark group identity; the conventions that can sometimes be ignored. (86)

It is those “habitual attitudes” of the “preferred form” that pose an interesting problem for the relationship between education and society, or more specifically, for ways in which education perpetuates the values and norms of the dominant culture. Bizzell calls this process a “hidden curriculum,” which she defines as “the project of initiating students into a particular world view that gives rise to the daily classroom task without being consciously examined by teachers or students” (99). Often this is what occurs in classrooms where the conventions of academic discourse are not directly addressed but passed off as the
most obvious or best way to structure communication. These values are attached to social values and transferred in an unconscious fashion. Bizzell further contends "we bury the hidden curriculum even deeper by claiming that our choice of material owes nothing to historical circumstances. To do this is to deny the school's function as an agent of cultural hegemony, or the selective valuation and transmission of world views" (99). Cognitive theory denies that these "habitual attitudes" and "preferred norms" are socially and historically constructed, implying that these conventions are the logical conclusions of a rational mind.

These students that schools label as "basic" are thus perceived as such because of the significant distance between their most familiar discourses and academic discourse. In theory, Bizzell's article lifts an awkward burden off students and places it on instructors, asking them to use pedagogies that offer students insight into discourse strategies. In turn, this creates the opportunity to confront a host of inappropriate challenges to students' competency.

In what follows, I will attempt not to work out a complete set of classroom practices that resist hegemony and embrace difference, but to address some current
misconceptions about how power is best challenged and to question the ways power works. The next two chapters will explore four influential composition theories and pedagogies that acknowledge the existence of hegemony at work in learning spaces and attempt to address that power. Although I support their efforts, I will show how these approaches appear to confront issues of power and hegemony, yet fall short of a critique that will help students resist enculturation into the dominant power structure.

Finally, I will suggest more effective ways of introducing students to the discourse of the university while resisting blind submission to it. I will discuss theories that acknowledge the hegemony within educational institutions and offer valuable ways to confront it. Using these theoretical positions, I hope to present a way of teaching composition that does more than value difference for the sake of it, a way that critiques social relations within the context of difference. The attempt, in short, will be to define the conditions for a pedagogy that is modest—i.e., able to recognize the materiality of conflict, privilege, and domination, and able to build conscientious and educated citizens for a genuine democracy, one that includes dissensus as well as consensus.
CHAPTER TWO

Pedagogy of Acculturation

David Bartholomae's 1986 essay, "Inventing the University," sparked a discussion within the composition community of the importance of students appropriating the discourse of the university in order to write with confidence and authority. He argued

Every time a student has to sit down and write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion—

invent the university, that is, at least a branch of it, like History, Anthropology, or Economics, or English. He has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. (4)

This new perspective promoted composition courses that introduced students to the various university discourse practices and strategies. He continued by arguing that most basic writing students "are not so much trapped in a private language as they are shut out from one of the privileged languages of public life, a language they are aware of but cannot control" (9). In other words, he did
not see the problem as an "interfering" or competing discourse, but rather a missing discourse, one that excluded students from the universities ways of knowing.

More specific solutions emerged as he suggested methods to help students write with more authority, helping them to view themselves as "insiders" who have the right to speak on a subject. This could be accomplished by creating assignments that generate a sense of privilege within students:

Much of the written work students do is test-taking, report or summary, work that places them outside the working discourse of the academic community, where they are expected to admire and report on what we do, rather than inside the discourse, where they can do its work and participate in the common enterprise.

(11)

In this essay, he looked at areas where students clashed with academic discourse, arguing that if we want our students to learn academic conventions, then we need to construct assignments that ask them to mirror or imitate academic moves—moves that invite students to produce the kinds of writing done by academics. This would also
involve selecting reading assignments that offer insight into how communities constitute and interpret knowledge.

Bartholomae acknowledged that another option available for teachers wanting to introduce their students to academic discourse "would be to determine just what the community's discourse conventions are, so the conventions can be written out, demystified and taught in classrooms" (12). This could be as simple as directly teaching "the need for connection, generalization, support, audience awareness, a tone of reasonableness, etc" (13). I classify this type of instruction as explicit acculturation because it asks students to conform to the specific conventions identified; it asks students to make specific moves in order to pass classes because these moves represent what institutions (or the instructors) value as good writing. Bartholomae rejects explicit acculturation; he would prefer that instructors identify what students already know about academic discursive conventions at the beginning of a course, locating the gaps and (mis) approximations between what students know and what is valued within the academic community. Then they can select readings and assignments designed to bridge misconceptions. Bartholomae claims this
lack of understanding positions students as perennial “outsiders” to the discourse. He suggests that we examine the essays written by basic writers--their approximations of academic discourse—to determine more clearly where their problems lie. If we look at their writing, and if look at it in the context of other student writing, we can better see the points of discord that arise when students try to write their way into the university. (12)

I applaud this type of pedagogy because it takes student writing seriously; however its cultural ramifications can be problematic.

Bartholomae suggests that a degree of imitation is needed to help students write their way into the university. More thorough evidence of this claim comes from Ways of Reading, a composition textbook constructed by Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky. This is a powerful and thoughtful reader that uses assignment sequencing. However, I would like to look closely at one aspect of a sequence that I think typifies several others within the reader. Working with a selection from Richard Rodriguez’s book, Hunger of Memory, Bartholomae and Petrosky have constructed a writing assignment that ask students to
Take an episode from your life, one that seems in some way similar to one of the episodes in the "Achievement of Desire," and cast it into a shorter version of Rodriguez's essay. Your job here is to look at your experience in Rodriguez's terms, which means thinking the way he does, noticing what he would notice, interpreting details in a similar fashion, using his key terms, seeing through his point of view; it could also mean imitating his style of writing, doing whatever it is you see him doing characteristically while he writes. Imitation, Rodriguez argues, is not necessarily a bad thing; it can in fact, be one of the powerful ways in which a person learns. (586)

What I see as the problem here is the heavy reliance on imitation, which devalues students' preexisting ways of thinking, noticing, and interpreting. To avoid appearing to place Rodriguez on too high a pedestal, the assignment continues,

Note: this assignment can also be read against "Achievement of Desire." Rodriguez insists on the universality of his experience leaving home and community and joining the larger public life. You could highlight the differences between your
experience and his. You should begin by imitating
Rodriguez’s method; you do not have to arrive at his
conclusions. (586-7)

This leaves a way out for students, offering optional
interpretations but not optional ways of interpreting.
Using his method means working within his realm of logic;
this can trap students into arriving at the same
conclusions. (The irony is that in this reading, Rodriguez
is speaking to the ambivalent feelings he had as an
imitator—a student who tries to emulate his teachers’
approaches to knowledge and learning without critique,
simply to be accepted within the academic community.) The
complications intensify when one reads the forcefulness of
the call “to see through his point of view”; that is, to
write from his personal perspective, while taking under
consideration the resentment of many (particularly Mexican
Americans) towards his interpretation of sensitive cultural
issues. This assignment reads as if Richard Rodriguez
travels through classrooms as a neutralized cultural
artifact. I believe that students who are familiar with
the issues he is most associated with (an anti-bilingual
education stance) would find it awkward and arbitrary to
see through his point of view and imitate his style. This
imposes the notion of epistemologies as bloodless abstractions and denies that an individual way of knowing the world has a consequential relationship with a way of living in the world. By teaching students to imitate a preferred discourse within an academic setting, particularly a discourse that closely resembles that of the dominant social group, we certify that discourse's claims of power and dominance.

In "Inventing the University," Bartholomae states "students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were easily and comfortably one with their audience" (4). This evaluation of the learning environment does not consider its cultural implications, which suggests that in the appropriating process, what gets lost are the culturally produced discursive practices that clash with the discursive practices of the university. Therefore, teaching academic discourse as the primary aim of a first year composition course is a normalizing move, one that conditions students to the logic and conventions of the university.

While acknowledging the significance of "Inventing the University" because of its ability to move composition
instructors into a more complex understanding of student errors and its endorsement of a discourse centered pedagogy, I question this essay because it promotes acculturation. Unlike Susan Wall and Nicholas Coles, I refer to Bartholomae’s work here as a pedagogy of acculturation and not accommodation because of his call to induct students into the discourse of the university, a language that is clearly “ours and not theirs.” In their essay, “Reading Basic Writing: A Pedagogy of Accommodation,” the very passages Wall and Coles cite to label this pedagogy with the more benign term “accommodation”—a position of compromise—I see as evidence that this approach requires acculturation: a demand for conformity without a full consideration of the social and cultural consequences. This distinction is important because it is my aim in this essay to critique the degree of “symbolic violence” produced by certain pedagogies and to explore ways to help students as they [re]position and [re]define their relationship with academic discourse.

Whether one defines such a pedagogy as acculturation, or the more benign accommodation, I am arguing that ultimately the primary objective should be to seek a pedagogy that teaches resistance to a false consciousness
about the nature of discursive formations and the role of education, and more specifically, writing instruction. I am arguing in this project for acknowledging the classroom as a site of conflict, as a place of power struggles and clashes between ideas and culture, while embracing contradiction as a means to understand difference without preserving the current dynamics of power.
Pedagogy of Accommodation

A article that attempts to challenge or resist a false consciousness about the nature of discursive formations is Lisa Delpit’s essay “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children,” which argues for explicitly teaching the conventions of academic discourse. To David Bartholomae’s acknowledgement that certain students are “outsiders” to academic discourse due to their lack of familiarity with it, Delpit adds that this lack of familiarity includes a lack of understanding of how this knowledge works to grant or deny privileges. She bases her argument on the belief that “explicit presentation makes learning immeasurably easier” (569). She asserts that an understanding of how power works can provide insight into instances of alienation and miscommunication that often occur in our composition classes as students try to “write the university.”

Specifically she is referring to the “skills” versus “process” debate about teaching students who have a greater distance from the dominant discourse, such as African American and urban students who have a strong relationship with their own cultural or social discourses (567). Delpit sees this type of explicit instruction as valuable because
although the problem is not necessarily inherent in
the method, in some instances adherents of process
approaches to writing create situations in which
students ultimately find themselves held accountable
for knowing a set of rules about which no one has ever
directly informed them. (573)

She is arguing for an overt discussion of the rules of
academic discourse such as "linguistic forms, communicative
strategies, and presentations of self; that is, ways of
talking, ways of writing, ways of dressing, and ways of
interacting" (568). Delpit is very critical of liberal
education philosophies that assume "that to make any rules
or expectations explicit is to act against liberal
principles, to limit the freedom and autonomy of those
subjected to explicitness"; therefore, "when de-emphasizing
power, there is a move toward indirect communication"
(570). This indirect communication applies to process
centered writing pedagogies that do not overtly tell
students how to write, or demonstrate which styles or
strategies are most valued within the academy.

Delpit's criticism of liberal education philosophies
continues:
Many liberal educators hold that the primary goal for education is for children to become autonomous, to develop fully who they are in the classroom setting without having arbitrary, outside standards forced upon them. This is a very reasonable goal for people whose children are already participants in the culture of power and who have already internalized codes.

(571)

She alludes to a reversed symbolic violence in this act of promoting autonomy. Delpit presumes that these "outside standards" do not need to be taught to some children because it is part of their cultural knowledge. But, according to Delpit, the problem arises when instructors use this non-explicit pedagogy with students from different cultures. The latter group is destined to have more problems because of their lack of cultural capital. While attempting to employ inclusionary pedagogical practices, these instructors are actually excluding students by making assumptions about their learning styles and practices. Hence, their efforts to fight educational injustices work to enforce it. She argues that "to provide schooling for everyone's children that reflects liberal, middle class values and aspirations is to ensure the maintenance of the
status quo, to ensure that power remains in the hands of those who already have it." She proceeds to list five premises to justify explicitly teaching academic discourse:

1. Issues of power are enacted in classrooms.

2. There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a culture of power.

3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power.

4. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told the rules of that culture of power makes acquiring power easier.

5. Those who have power are frequently least aware of— or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (568)

For me, the significance of this essay is the frankness with which she exposes the fundamental nature of education: that it is a social institution with the potential to be a center for [re]producing as well as reflecting culture and social norms.

Delpit offers an example of how teachers acknowledge power issues and teach codes by detailing the interactions of a Native American teacher of Athabaskan Indian children
who live in a "small, isolated, rural village of less than two hundred people" (581). To introduce students to aspects of academic discourse that grant privileges in the dominant communities, she "covers half a bulletin board with words or phrases from the students' writing," representing codes from "Village English" and the other half with equivalent statements in Standard English."

Referring to Village English, she tells the students, "That's the way we say things. Doesn't it feel good? Isn't it the absolute best way of getting that idea across?" Then she reminds the students that there are people who judge others by the way they talk or write, and they speak "standard English." The teacher continues,

We listen to the way people talk, not to judge them, but to tell what part of the river they come from. These other people are not like that. They think everybody needs to talk like them. Unlike us, they have a hard time hearing what people say if they don't talk exactly like them. Their way of talking and writing is called "Formal English."

We have to feel a little sorry for them because they have only one way to talk. We're going to learn two ways to say things. Isn't that better? One way will
be our Heritage way. The other will be Formal English. Then, when we go to get jobs, we'll be able to talk like those people who only know and can only really listen to one way. Maybe after we get the jobs we can help them to learn how it feels to have another language, like ours, that feels so good. We'll talk like them when we have to, but we'll always know our way is best. (582)

Although this is not an example from a college composition classroom, it is a detailed example of how Delpit believes the conventions of academic discourse can be taught without the secrecy of power that shrouds notions and beliefs in the supremacy of the dominant discourse. As I applaud this concern for making norms explicit, I cannot avoid critiquing the limitations of such an accommodating stance. While Delpit's primary concern is to make students aware of issues of power enacted in the classroom, it does not appear to offer students strategies to either critique the validity of the norms or resist their impositions. She writes,

I am certain that if we are to truly effect societal change, we cannot do so from the bottom up, but we must push and agitate from the top down. And in the
meantime, we must take responsibility to teach, to provide for students who do not already possess them, the additional codes of power. (581)

I read this passage with the understanding that the reference "bottom up" implies student action and "top down" implies actions performed by teachers or administrators. The issue at stake here is that in the process of providing students, particularly students with distance from the dominant power structure (i.e. minority, urban, and economically challenged students) with the "additional codes of power," teachers encourage them to enter the discourse on the terms of the dominant power. This act of provision includes a validation, which ultimately supports the existence of the codes of power themselves; therefore, this kind of pedagogy not only acknowledges domination but accepts it as well.

However, she does raise concerns about normalizing and how students can be taught empty forms if instructors are not careful. Delpit suggests students be taught the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life, not by being forced to attend hollow, inane, decontextualized subskills, but rather within the context of meaningful
communicative endeavors; that they must be allowed the resource of the teacher's expert knowledge, while being helped to acknowledge their own "expertness" as well; and that even while students are assisted in learning the culture of power, they must also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent.

(585)

This contradiction—on the one hand, learning to work within the established culture of power, and on the other, learning about the arbitrariness of that culture's codes—is perplexing. Yet this is typical of an accommodating stance, which I view as a rationalizing strategy in denial about the detrimental effects of accepting certain hierarchical alliances. Delpit acknowledges that aspects of traditional academic discourse are "arbitrary codes," yet she encourages students to learn them because they are necessary "to participate fully in the mainstream of American life." Therefore, students see themselves as powerless to enact change because change can only occur from the "top down" and not from the "bottom up." In other words, teachers and administrators, not students, must be the agents for change. In their disempowered state,
students are to accept this normalizing process, as
evidence of the way things have to be, just as those
Athabaskan children who "know that their way is better"
must contend with accommodating to the conventions of the
host culture and remain the gracious guest. Mihn Zhan Lu
states that such acts of "accommodation [can] hardly help
students explore, formulate, reflect on, and enact
strategies for coping actively with conflict" (Lu 55). The
issue of conflict becomes vitally important here because it
is the essential nature of all power relationships.

Although both have their limitations, the work
represented here by Bartholomae and Delpit are valuable
because they have ignited a discussion on the complications
students have appropriating the discourse of the
university. They speak of the complexity of developing a
confident and authoritative voice in this environment. My
project will continue to examine pedagogies that attempt to
explore and challenge the boundaries of academic discourse,
ultimately arriving at a writing strategy that takes many
of these issues under consideration and offers students
ways to critically investigate the potentially hegemonic
tendencies of the academy.
CHAPTER THREE

Reactionary Pedagogy

Discussions about confronting power issues in education generally emerge out of liberal education theory. Yet a fundamental problem with liberalism is that it seeks to resolve issues of alienation solely through the granting of equal rights and autonomy. This seems to be the rationale behind much of the logic of multicultural education practices and theories. However, injecting this type of reasoning into pedagogy creates problems. For example, the emphasis on equal rights and autonomy often neglect the politics behind issues of difference. Attempts at equality through objective examinations of cultural dynamics further entrench and perpetuate stereotypes and segregate participants by ignoring the processes that lead to sexism, racism, and the conditions that make for the continued oppression of people (Delgado 145). Efforts to promote autonomy have similar results, except that these also produce an environment that fosters reactionary thinking.

I am using the term autonomy to relate to pedagogies that focus primarily on promoting a degree of sovereignty or independence within students, encouraging them to
develop a sense of self on their own. In this case, I am referring to Afrocentricity as an autonomous epistemology that attempts to work independently of the confines of the Western rhetorical tradition. In *The African Intellectual Heritage*, the foremost scholar on Afrocentricity, Molefi Kete Assante, defines Afrocentricity as the theory of investigating

the African genius and African values created, recreated, reconstructed, and derived from our [Africans throughout the Diaspora] history and experiences in our best interests...It is an uncovering of one’s true self, it is the pinpointing of one’s center, and it is the clarity and focus through which black people must see the world in order to escalate. (viii)

An example of autonomy can be found in Henry Evans’ essay, “An Afrocentric Multicultural Writing Project,” in which he describes a writing course that focuses on a specific culture and identity. This endeavor is intended not only to inform nonmembers of the focal culture that there are other sophisticated communication systems besides Standard English, but also to allow members of that culture an opportunity to reflect on the cultural dynamics of their
relationship with society. In this article, Evans attempts to demonstrate his theory by examining Afrocentricity and the language practices of African Americans in relation to Standard English usage in academic settings. Therefore, the aim of Evans’ writing course is twofold: to assist students in developing an understanding of the situated self within their particular culture’s worldview, and to help make students aware of the relationship between Standard English and their more casual or social discourses.

Evans defines education as “the process of facilitating the acquisition of information, knowledge, and skills development a person receives or experiences for personal growth, intended to ensure the survival and progress of his or her cultural group” (273). From that premise, he argues that education in the United States disproportionately benefits European Americans. Within such a normative structure, all others must learn their place in relation to the dominant culture, which he would argue means learning only about their own culture in relation to European culture. He states:

For example, any paradigmatic shift by theorists of curriculum transformation that moves beyond
contribution approaches or add-ons but does not provide students with access to the classical origins of their cultures' developments becomes truncated, privileging the students' extant access to European American classical cultures and these cultures' systematic development. (274)

Evans, much like Delpit, vividly articulates how attempts at inclusion often fall short and marginalize "students when conceptualizations and curriculum do not offer concrete means for centering the student in his or her culture or means to an enabling and emancipating the situated self" (275). He is using the term "situated self" to refer to an identity constructed within a certain sociohistorical space that is often unaware of its positioning. He discusses how students of color have always had to be multicultural in order to reach any degree of success in a Eurocentric education system. Furthermore, he quotes psychologist James Anderson on the complexity of this matter:

Never are they [white children] asked to be bicultural, bidialectic, or bicognitive. On the other hand, for children of color, biculturality is not a free choice, but a prerequisite for successful
participation and even success. [Children of color] generally are expected to be bicultural, bidialectic, bicognitive; to measure their performance against a Euro-American yardstick; and to maintain the psychic energy to maintain this orientation. At the same time, they are being castigated whenever they attempt to express and validate their indigenous cultural and cognitive styles. Under such conditions cognitive conflict becomes the norm rather than the exception.

(279)

According to Evans, the normalizing of cognitive conflict creates the need for a culturecentric investigative pedagogy to counter the current grand narrative. Such conflictual relationships even exist on the theoretical level; Evans points out that even poststructuralist theories work against the construction of identity for minorities. He argues that just as minority groups are getting an understanding of their histories, cultures, and contributions, new theories have emerged and become popular that work to "decenter" or "deconstruct" these developments, minimizing their significance. The decentering of ethnic identities is occurring while these identities are still in their infancy, before people of
color as a collective can fully comprehend their contributions to the advancement of humanity.

The primary objective of this project is to help students construct knowledge of their situated selves (particularly students of color) because they have been mis-educated about their identity. However, Evans argues for an increased intensity in the education of African American students because of their unique history of oppression and its link to their marginal status in sociopolitical arenas. He adds that this form of education is also particularly important for African Americans because they are conditioned by societal dynamics to perceive their differences as negative or less desirable, while other cultural groups (including other ethnic groups) use their differences to form an understanding of their situation and relation to the dominant culture. He explains:

I argue here that African American students enter the school system with a sense of difference based on color, not on culture or nationality. The Asian American for example enters into the system with a consciousness of difference based on color, culture and nationality. It gives that student a concrete
sense that this is a system very different from his life and therefore orients his stance toward learning.

(277)

He also contends that such a course benefits European American students as well because it refutes the mythic notions of their supremacy, releasing them from the burden of maintaining and manifesting dominance. It is because all students are asked to conform, accommodate, or assimilate in varying degrees that an oppositional pedagogy as his is important and should be seriously discussed and critically considered.

The first order for instructors who accept this challenge, according to Evans, is to free students from racist language. He identifies language as an instrument of liberation, because it has the power to control thought and define or shape a social context. Therefore, within this type of classroom students are offered alternatives to such terms as “African holocaust” in reference to American slavery (“which situates African phenomena in relation to another culture”). “Maafa” is introduced as an appropriate substitute because it is a Yoruba term that “describes the horrific events endured by Africans from captivity to containment in West African coast dungeons, to the Middle
Passage, to the end of the African enslavement in the Americas" (281). Other terms include "African Continental Philosophy" as opposed to "Continental Philosophy"; "Africoid" (not "Negroid," which implies "no land base") as an equivalent to "Caucasoid"; and "endarkening," as a replacement for "enlightening." These vocabulary alterations form the basis for what Evans calls African American Standard English (AASE). Evans defines AASE as an evolving spoken and written language that by necessity, employs the white standard English verb structure and vocabulary, intends its meaning for all communities (including grass roots), and operates primarily in academic arenas, mostly in African and African American scholarly texts and journals. (280)

It works within an African framework by reconstructing vocabularies and embracing a holistic worldview (as opposed to what he defines as the more academically and westernized accepted analytical worldview). His objective here is to identify a discourse that can serve as a bridge between a familiar and a more formal style of communication. He states:

AASE facilitates, and lessens students' resistance to, the switch to an academically acceptable written
standard English by maintaining the philosophical worldview that grounds their original language, black dialect, some form of which even most middle-class African Americans speak. (284)

He argues the AASE can ease some students’ transition to academic discourse and help them “fulfill the requirements of their university-wide final writing exam” (277).

In order to not trivialize this cultural exploration and to represent differences in ways that do not imply inferiority, “teachers must make a conscious effort to seek out and learn from the scholars who have engaged and are engaging in the three R’s of the African American cultural project” (276-7). He recommends scholars such as Maulana Karenga, Molefi Asante, Mark Mattson, and John G. Jackson. I find it interesting that he avoids names like Ben, Van Sertima, and Henrik Clarke—scholars who too purport a degree of Afrocentricity and cultural nationalism but have a less contentious relationship with other theories and theorists within the African American intellectual tradition. Herein lies one of the fundamental problems with Afrocentricity: it helps to perpetuate an ongoing stereotype of black people as monolithic. In its attempt to promote an alternative grand narrative, it values polar
alternatives while rejecting and minimizing other epistemologies within black thought such as Post-Colonialism, Pan Africanism, and Critical Race Theory. It is my position that neither this nor any other culturecentric pedagogy can help students participate in the academic community with a sufficient degree of critical investigative instincts and rhetorical resources to engage diverse (and often hostile) audiences in ways of seeing that embrace difference.

It is not my intent here to question the Afrocentric view of the origin of civilization and the development of human history. However, I would like to argue that such an "appeal to the notion of purity" in Africa's past (which this perspective embraces and is indeed founded upon) is problematic initially because it leads to glorifying all things ancient, establishing a habit of insufficient criticism, and promoting an oppositional stance as the norm. Establishing opposing views necessitates negating the intellectual resolutions and determinations resulting from slavery and colonialism for Africans and descendants of Africans. Afrocentric literature avoids discussing the intellectual and social contributions of Africans and African Americans from the early encounters with Europeans
in the fifteenth century to the present day in order to justify its glorification of the past. This omission ignores issues of language formation as well as significant social theories that have surfaced due to the clashing of the cultures for the last five hundred years (Gilroy 223).

A superficial critique of Standard English, along with trivial substitutions—both acts rooted in reactionary thinking—can not provide a sufficient strategy for students to develop the rhetorical flexibility they need to gain access to the resources Standard English provides. Ultimately, Evans' students still must conform to the conventions of Standard English in order to pass the campus-wide testing project. His students are not armed with strategies to deal with issues of difference and to challenge the status quo, nor are they provided with options upon which to build a resistance to the "other" that Afrocentricity positions itself against.

Afrocentric theorists find themselves in a contradictory position of embracing a traditionalism that emerges out of modernism. The idea of centering is a modernistic tendency because it attempts to claim hold to a fleeting idea and rejects multiple ways of seeing historical, social, and theoretical formations. In
actuality, this is contrary to what Evans defines as an African system of thought, the holistic worldview, which might see things as emerging out of reciprocal or dialectical relations.

It is my perspective that Evans' culturecentric project can be only an alternative way of viewing the world and never a dominant one because it does not offer a progressive stance for coping with difference. Ultimately, an Afrocentric writing project works to support the dominant paradigm because it does not strive for structural change. Unlike Delpit's, Evans' approach to the teaching of writing is devoid of a discussion of power relations and mechanisms. In other words, the objectives of the course are to increase consciousness of the self, while working within the boundaries of academic discourse that may constrict or [re]construct the self against its will.
Ludic Postmodernism

Just as Evans urges a new way of embracing a different system of thought in terms of what is valued in the classroom, Patricia Bizzell offers another alternative in terms of organizing areas of study. In her 1994 essay "'Contact Zones' and English Studies," she states:

I think we need a radically new system to organize English studies, and I propose we develop it in response to the materials with which we are now working. Instead of finagling the new literatures and the new pedagogical and critical approaches into our old categories, we should try to find comprehensive new forms that seem to spring from and respond to the new materials. Instead of asking ourselves for example, "How can I fit Frederick Douglass into my American Renaissance course?" we need to ask, "How should I reconceive my study of literature and composition now that I regard Douglass as an important writer. (736)

Bizzell is adapting a version of Mary Louise Pratt's contact zone to this restructuring of English studies. Pratt defines the contact zone as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in
context of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). This is classroom evaluation of natural multicultural spaces, an environment where, according to Pratt, "all the students in the class...[hear] their culture discussed and objectified in ways that horrified them; all the students [see] their roots traced back to legacies of both glory and shame" (39). In such a "no holds barred" forum, all competing cultures are critically examined and openly discussed.

It is Bizzell's intent to promote a new system of organizing English studies "to make this kind of teaching—and scholarship—not only possible, but normative" (739). I see two primary benefits for making such an approach normative: First, it offers a conceptual rationale for integrating these readings into a course. It is important to include texts such as David Walker, Ho Chi Minh and testimonials from interned Japanese Americans because they are essential in exploring a particular contact zone. Also, it provides an opportunity to look at these texts through the lens of the rhetorical conditions under which they were produced, which requires a closer examination than what may typically be given to a text that falls...
outside the traditional Western canon (738-9). For example, when describing the contact between the Native Americans and Europeans between 1600 and 1800, she emphasizes, "the object would not be to represent what the lives of the diverse European immigrant and Native American groups were really like. Rather, the attempt would be to show how each group represented itself imaginatively in relation to the others" (740). This is a valuing of a text on its own merits and not as an appendage to another, or to use Evans' term, an "add-on." The contact zone approach has the potential to reorganize English studies because it works to challenge traditional categories of literature and composition. It also attacks the polar positions of high and low culture by "treating multiculturalism as a defining feature, that assumed the richest literary treasures could be found in situations in which different histories, lifeways, and languages are trying to communicate and to deal with the unequal distribution among them" (740).

The concept is thoroughly demonstrated in a reader compiled by Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg entitled, *Negotiating Difference: Cultural Case Studies for Composition*. This 963-page reader is a collection of eyewitness accounts, original documents, and public
statements intended to help students "learn to communicate in the overlapping discourse communities" by studying "historical contexts in which cultural conflicts have taken place" (v). Designed for first year and advanced composition courses, it attempts to have students "analyze original materials so that they can understand historical circumstances, positions taken and refuted, audiences addressed, and rhetorical strategies employed" (vii). The readings represent multiple perspectives on six themes or units that relate to historical periods where two cultures clashed:

1. First Contact between Puritans and Native Americans
2. The Debate over Slavery and the Declaration of Independence
3. Defining "Woman's Sphere" in Nineteenth-Century American Society
4. Wealth, Work, and Class Conflict in the Industrial Age
5. Japanese American Internment and the Problem of Cultural Identity
6. Policy and Protest over the Vietnam War

Although this text does not claim to thoroughly exhaust the information on any given theme or unit, Bizzell and Herzberg provide enough resources for students to become
competently informed on a particular contact zone. The focus of the text and course is primarily rhetorical; that is, it focuses quite heavily on examining how arguments are made within certain situations and to certain audiences. The introduction states,

We have designed this book for a course in serious writing and strong reading, a course in rhetoric strongly defined. Rhetoric in its strong definition is a form of action, personal and civic as well as academic. The writing course that adopts this definition asks students to read texts that make public statements about important issues using powerful arguments. It asks students to talk and write their way into these issues, to understand them and to take possession of them, to transform them and engage them in their own lives. (vii-viii)

It is the intent of the text to examine how rhetoric is formed and shaped within situations where power plays a significant role. For example, Bizzell and Herzberg state "we make no claim that Unit Five fully represents the history of Japanese American internment during World War II. We focus, more narrowly, on the ways that writers represent the internment experience in texts directed to a
diverse audience” (ix). Here is an argument for a critical look at how voices within a certain time and space find the ability to be heard when speaking to and from positions of power.

Although I find the scholarship on the contact zone to be very thoughtful and useful, there are limitations to such a strategy that must be addressed because to ignore them is to deny the hegemonic structure the contact zone helps to maintain. Bizzell and Herzberg argue that one of the unique features of this reader is the way it avoids the common pitfalls of many the contemporary “pop culture” readers. For example, they contend, “We think such destructive controversies tend to occur when the course emphasizes students’ writing on contemporary issues alone, out of their own personal resources alone, in a pro/con format. We have tried to avoid all three of these conditions in Negotiating Difference” (Editor’s Notes 5).

The problem with identifying historical contact zones where the powerless speak to the powerful is that to isolate a moment (either rhetorically or chronologically) is to capture only a partial understanding of history. The readings as well as the writing assignments within this project work only to familiarize one with the complexity of
the issues, the rhetorical strategies chosen, and vague discussions on issues of choice in terms of rhetorical strategies. Within this framework, the contextual political realities of the contact zone are fragmented or reduced to parody. The dominant power structure is left intact, and what is disrupted is any attempt to create a transformative perspective on material matters such as oppression and domination (McLaren 198).

In order to negotiate differences across cultural boundaries in such a culturally diverse space as American culture, one must develop a ritual of closely examining the origins of opinions and positions on controversial issues. However, in the Editors' Notes for this reader, Bizzell and Herzberg assert

We do not ask students to develop arguments based solely on their personal resources. Such an approach leads to unsatisfactory writing because it encourages the sort of airing of unsettled views with which most people get through life. On a daily basis, most of us do not closely examine our opinions on controversial issues; it is not intellectually efficient to do so. (6)
One of the most significant and productive strategies of intellectual investigation is critical reflection on one’s personal feelings and beliefs. There can be no thorough investigation without gauging one’s relationship to a matter. To attempt to have a thorough analysis without self-reflection would produce the kind of study that education theorist, Peter McLaren, might classify as ludic: simply playful exercise without pragmatic value. This classification is particularly important when the discussion hinges around domination, where the "pro/con format" preexists because there are material winners and losers. Critique and reflection are necessary for ideas and action to progress. It is quite admirable for instructors to value a diverse reading list. What is even more beneficial is to place texts that are often relegated to the margins at the center of the rhetorical investigative action. What becomes problematic is tightly focusing hotly contested issues within a certain period or within a certain text, while ignoring the ways these issues spill over into our everyday lives. What such rich texts can provide for us in terms of rethinking social relations is immeasurable.
I identify Patricia Bizzell's adaptation of the contact zone demonstrated in the text "Negotiating Differences" as what McLaren calls ludic postmodernism, because although it attempts to reject traditional notions of significant texts, it does so without fully considering the complications of material conditions within the contact zone past or present. McLaren states, "while ludic postmodernism may be applauded for attempting to deconstruct the way power is deployed within cultural settings, it ultimately represents a form of detotalizing micropolicitics in which the contextual in the specificity of difference is set up against the totalizing machineries of domination" (198). I find this a serious concern for the type of learning environment that Bizzell and Herzberg are trying to create. Texts are examined as if emerging out of equal conditions or critiqued as if formed on even platforms. Little is made of how the voices of the protesters must be altered when speaking to power. Despite crafty rhetoric on the part of many of the victimized within these contact zones, in all the cases their rhetoric proved to be no match against the powerful because shades of their victimization still exist today (i.e. racism, sexism, and capital exploitation). Spotlighting such
rhetorical situations can teach students only ineffective rhetorical strategies for confronting power unless it is framed as what not to do when contesting internment, challenging slavery, or protesting military aggression.

For example, each of the six units represents cultural clashes of unequal powers; that is, one group has power over the other (colonizer/colonized, master/servant, etc.), yet there are no examples of how effective rhetoric can promote change. In fact, looking specifically at the example of the unit on slavery, one could easily argue that all the polemics of Africans and former slaves (including Frederick Douglass) had less sway than did the Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (which would not typically qualify as an artifact of that contact zone) or the scores of slave revolts that occurred in the 1800s. My point is that the rhetoric within a contact zone is but a small component of the relationship dynamics. In many cases, it is the least informative and instructional. To focus exclusively on rhetoric is self-deceiving. What would be beneficial when examining a contact zone is to draw connections to lines of reasoning that appear repeatedly throughout human history as people seek to justify and rationalize intolerance and indifference.
Isolating these instances and calling attention to the "usual suspects" by pointing out the common themes among the dominating groups would produce a worthwhile study of hegemonic alliances. Without such a critique, the connections remain disclosed and un-addressed, leaving the potential for such injustices to reoccur. At the very least a multicultural pedagogy must be concerned with authorizing the perpetuation of the kind of single-mindedness that leads to discrimination and inhumanity.

What is needed is a negotiating tool that theorizes multiculturalism and the politics of difference by identifying social components that are complicit in maintaining hegemony and perpetuating inequality. The absence of serious critique of hegemonic relationships is at the core of problem for many liberal education approaches. People who live their lives confronted by the rough exterior of material conditions in general have a more difficult time participating in playful classroom examinations of cultural clashing. In fact, I would argue that it is unfair to invite them into such an arena. For example, it reeks of arrogance to invite Native Americans students to look at rhetorical spaces created by people who forced their ancestors into violent acts of assimilation.
and genocide. Doing so within classroom discussions that try to minimize the link between these historical instances and contemporary issues, as well as outside of a winners and losers framework (or to use Bizzell's and Herzberg's language—pro/con format) is particularly arrogant. Perhaps this is a practical strategy on a campus like Holy Cross College (where Bizzell teaches) that has an 11% combined minority and international student population, although even there the approach invites troubling assumptions.
CHAPTER FOUR

Bizzell and Herzberg declare that "the need to negotiate the differences among cultures is perhaps the most pressing rhetorical challenge in American civic life today" (Negotiating vii). Extending this assertion to educational systems argues that they are responsible for more than making individuals professionally marketable; they also must provide students with the intellectual capabilities to participate in and contribute to the reinventing of democracy. Therefore, discussions of difference that ignore material concerns are merely ludic—aimless play—because they offer nothing to build on. A ludic pedagogy works to deepen the divide within contact zones through the agitation of pointless discussions; ludic pedagogy reinforces hegemonic relations by creating cynical students who become disinterested in critical engagement. Such a pedagogy creates a vacuum for serious and substantive discussions of texts and spaces where differences should be examined, evaluated, and utilized. Without an embracing of difference, existing educational structures work only to maintain a particular form of hegemony that preserves the existing relationships between
the dominant power structure (manifest through liberal
capitalistic values) and civil society (i.e. students).

Although Bizzell has identified an important link
between composition and literature, in order to extend this
line of reasoning and avoid supporting existing hegemonies,
it would be helpful for future research to revisit Mary
Louise Pratt's original work to discover ways that the
pedagogical arts of the contact zone, such as auto
ethnography, transculturation, bilingualism, imaginary
dialogue, and vernacular expression, can help students
become better writers and thinkers as well as identify "a
systematic approach to the all-important concept of
cultural mediation" (595). A more meaningful contact zone
would not only analyze the rhetorical devices used when
cultures "grapple" but would also include explorations of
how ideas are represented within contact zones and how
these representations work. This is akin to Henry Giroux’s
pedagogy of representation, which he defines as

The various ways in which representations are
constructed as a means of comprehending the past
through the present in order to legitimate and secure
a particular view of the future. How students can
come to interrogate the historical, semiotic and
relational dynamics involved in the production of various regimes of representation and their respective politics. (115)

A pedagogy of representation calls for more focus on the construction, production, and distribution of certain artifacts within a contact zone. Such an understanding can help students formulate "ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect" (Pratt 595).

For example, I have already mentioned how Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* could be a significant artifact in discussions about slavery. Stowe’s novel is often heralded for its power in swaying public opinion towards abolition. Yet, one could argue that despite its merits, the novel is laced with stereotypes and oversimplifications, representing and reinforcing the mindset of the time about issues of difference. A text such as this could be used to forge discussions about what constitutes effective rhetoric and the repercussions of certain "effective" representations. Another possibility is to look at the rhetorical devices one chooses when speaking to different degrees of power. As bell hooks notes, "often when the radical voice speaks about
domination we are speaking to those who dominate. Their presence changes the nature and direction of our words" (146). Examples of this can be seen when one compares the rhetorical choices Frederick Douglass made when speaking to whites in the Northern United States versus whites in England. Even looking at coinciding passages of his three autobiographies might offer insight on the relationship between pragmatism and rhetorical selection.

Another possible way to look at a contact zone is to study the socio-historical trajectory of certain artifacts. The confession of Nat Turner offers a wealth of rhetorical instances for analysis. His confession was recorded and published by a hostile audience for profit, but the document could also be read as a social statement about the nature of slave revolts and slave revolt leaders. A more recent artifact that should be considered in relation to this is William Styron’s 1967 novel, The True Confessions of Nat Turner. This text is important because it received a Pulitzer Prize, it sold over two million copies, and Styron is lauded on the book’s jacket by writers such as James Baldwin, Arthur Schlesinger, and publications like The New York Times and The New Republic for producing "the most profound fictional treatment of slavery in our
literature." Another rationale for its inclusion is that the text constructs an even more problematic character than the original document. (It could also be argued that the novel created an audience for literature that represented black male revolutionary types as psychologically unstable and driven by their sexual fantasies. The popularity of Eldridge Cleaver's 1968, *Soul On Ice*—which also sold over two million copies only one year later—could serve as evidence.) This type of critical investigation shows students how representations can shape our perceptions of the past, present, and the future, as well as alter our aesthetic sensibilities.

Problems of culture within the classroom are by no means limited to issues such as conflictual readings and interpretations. Grammatical rules and conventions generate even more opportunities for "grappling" within learning spaces because they are perceived as fundamental and imperative. I advocate engaging students in discussions about the impact of certain errors and their relationship to meaning, matters of style, and rhetorical effectiveness. This implies that what is commonly called "error" is only convention or preference. Attempting to adhere to certain rules and regulations about writing says
more about a writer's preferred audience than a writer's competence. To limit academic writing to certain forms or styles is to limit the presentation of complicated ideas (often for arbitrary purposes) at the risk of suppressing intellectual activity.

Bartholomae and Delpit speak of fixed rules that demand students' adherence. Neither is concerned about the arbitrariness of these rules, nor do they raise questions about critique or resistance. While Evans' culturecentric writing project may appear to be the most radical of the four articles discussed, it offers the least opportunity for critique or resistance because his pedagogy assumes world views can simply be interchanged or substituted. More discussion is needed on how to invite students into the university and create spaces for them to learn the conventions of academic discourse, while simultaneously providing them the faculties to challenge the boundaries of the discourse. To reach these goals, composition instructors need to consider the work of Min-Zhan Lu who, in the process of re-imagining the contributions of Mina Shaughnessy, has presented alternative ways to consider error. Instead of viewing grammatical errors as results of cognitive deficiency or linguistic confusion, she argues
that these issues stem from cultural differences that should be valued and studied. Like Bartholomae's argument in "Inventing the University," Lu sees the choices writers make as important parts of discourse—a controlling system of communicative conventions—and therefore, what may be perceived as error within academic writing circles is a result of clashing discourses that create a contact zone around grammatical issues.

One of the major strengths of Lu's adaptation of the contact zone theory is that its initial act is to contest the either/or frame of mind, which is the belief that unless a writer has "proven her competency in English—i.e., learned to produce "error free" prose—she has not earned the right to experiment with critical thinking or innovative style. Instead, Lu places at the forefront concerns about the needs, rights, and abilities of students "to approximate, negotiate, and revise "official" cultural rules." The objective is to encourage students "to experiment with style as a way of generating meaning in a process of rereading and rewriting" (184). This is achieved by focusing on three areas:

(1) enabling students to hear discursive voices which conflict with and struggle against the voices of
academic authority; (2) urging them to negotiate a position in response to these colliding voices; and (3) asking them to consider their choice of position in the context of sociopolitical power relationships within and among diverse discourse and in the context of their personal life, history, culture, and society.

(173)

It is necessary to select models of professional and student writing that present certain challenges and questions regarding one's perception of what is "good writing." Lu's work uses samples of student writing that contain not only many of the so called "errors" that are easily identifiable and resolvable for students, but also "styles that are more conducive to [her] attempt to help the writer negotiate a new position in relation to the colliding voices active in the scenes of writing" (174). A similar selection process can be used for identifying professional writing that conflicts with students' commonly held ideas on Standard English or academic discourse. For instance, students can be asked to classify and evaluate the rhetorical effectiveness of writers like Ishmael Reed and Patricia Williams, whose variations on grammatical and
structural conventions contribute as much to meaning as any other components of their texts.

One of the key facets that makes this approach unique and unlike Bartholomae, Delpit, and Evans is its awareness of its limitations. On this matter, Lu states:

Although the process of negotiation encourages students to struggle with such unifying forces, it does not and cannot lead them to ignore and forget them. It acknowledges the writer’s right and ability to experiment with innovative ways of deploying codes taught in the classroom. It broadens students’ sense of the range of options and choices facing a writer. But it does not choose for the students. Rather, it leaves them to choose in the context of the history, culture, and society in which they live. (187)

This is not a promotion of any particular method that will grant access to certain privileges, nor is this a rejection of certain styles as vestiges of domination. Such classroom explorations work to provide students with a plethora of tactics to encode and decode complicated ideas.

I argue for transforming composition classrooms into counter hegemonic cultural environments. These are spaces where students can explore cultural dynamics and power.
relations, while they confront and challenge oppressive and constrictive hegemonic tendencies. Such a view invites us to approach the rules that govern academic writing as simply the current conventions that provide the in-between for which variations can be discovered. The objective here is to construct a learning environment that fosters critical investigative skills and embraces difference, making them no longer peripheral intellectual matters. Difference becomes a measurement upon which all things are considered. The achievement of such a position goes beyond placing a value on one's competency with certain texts or ways of reading. It also extends beyond having a certain degree of proficiency with a particular form of language such as Standard English. What becomes the high currency in such an environment is the degree of skillfulness with which one navigates through a range of competing and often conflicting discursive practices.
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