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Open WORDS

*Access
and
English
Studies*

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Table of Contents

- 1** *Editor's Introduction:
Access Places*
John Paul Tassoni
- 4** *How Soon Is Now?: Writing Work, Education,
and Fast Capitalism*
Tony Scott
- 22** *Finding Our Way from Within:
Critical Pedagogy in a Prison Writing Class*
Laura Rogers
- 49** *From Other to Another: Regional Campus
Freshman English in Transition*
**Moira Casey and Karen Cajka
with Stephanie Roach**
- 69** *Queer Disruption in the Rural South:
Institutionality and the Viability of
Queer Composition*
Kim Gunter
- 92** *Saving the Word or Teaching Writing?:
Complicating Binary Critiques of Politicized
Writing Pedagogy*
Gae Lyn Henderson

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Editor's Introduction

Access Places

EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IS WON AND LOST AT A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT SITES IN AND BEYOND classrooms at any given moment. Students' job and family obligations, their primary and secondary school training, their cultural backgrounds (and foregrounds), as well as the operations of bursars, counselors, and financial aid offices, and the functions of various other administrative and governmental units across campuses and across states intersect to shape the environments that students and teachers occupy when they meet to engage English Studies. A primary aim of any English instructor committed to educational access and empowerment, then, is to develop pedagogies (and research and service agendas) that intervene at sites that might otherwise curtail democratic intentions and to enhance functions at sites already committed to facilitating those aims.

In this issue of *Open Words*, particularly, contributors foreground the spatial dimensions of their work. The authors discuss ways places impact their teaching, and they explore means through which pedagogy might, at the same time, impact places. In "How Soon Is Now?" Tony Scott explicates the means by which institutional practices represent colleges as academic no-places, neutral ground on which Horatio Alger-like myths might be promoted. His article complicates this image, articulating the corporate interests that undergird campus life and policy and describing the circumstances of non-traditional constituencies currently attending college in great numbers. In this light, Scott develops a pedagogy that legitimizes students' experiences and helps university space become "a more rightfully occupied space for working, working-class people," a place that helps the present become the subject of education rather than something that needs to be "quickly transcended." Such a concern with contingencies of place persists throughout Laura Roger's attempts to enact a Freirean pedagogy in prison writing classes. In "Finding Our Way from Within," Rogers reports on classroom settings in which movement beyond present circumstance, let alone counter-hegemonic action, is profoundly complicated. Her location problematizes the liberatory aims upon which she grounds her teaching, raising issues in regard to notions of trust and surveillance often overlooked in considerations of Paulo Freire's work and in non-carcer-al settings more generally.

In their movement between two institutional settings, Karen Cajka and Moira Casey, in "From Other to Another," recognize the geographical determinants that impact

their graduate institution's attempts to develop a writing program inclusive of regional campus concerns. Using Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopias as their point of departure, Casey and Cajka report on the relationship between curricular changes at their school's central campus and their effect on the work of graduate students and adjunct faculty at its multiple regional campuses. The essay interrogates ways in which geographical, political, and pedagogical concerns intersect as the two writers describe the school's attempts to "value distance and difference" in its efforts to translate curricular change across its many locations. For Kim Gunter, in "Queer Disruption in the Rural South," such an attempt at translation throws into relief political forces at work beyond her already politically infused GLBTQ writing course. Gunter's narrative account calls attention to institutional contexts that can curtail or facilitate the success of such a course as she traces its development at one location that welcomed its focus and examines the difficulties she has experienced establishing the curriculum at another university. Gunter not only unpacks the intricacies of the resistance she has endured at this latter site, but also identifies the pockets of support she has encountered and theorizes the queer potentials of her persistence in such circumstances.

Together, these pieces and the review article on political pedagogies by Gae Lyn Henderson that concludes this issue advocate for teaching and for scholarship on teaching that is decidedly emplaced. Henderson's critique of scholarship on critical pedagogy rests on the premise that open admissions and other non-traditional students write more effectively when they work with curricula that is rhetorically contextualized within the political realities that structure their worlds. For me, Henderson's piece and others in this issue of *Open Words* lend ballast to John Alberti's argument that "All too often our [field's] discussions of the future of literary studies and pedagogy in higher education are limited by models of college life rooted in enduring but increasingly misleading images that takes the experiences and practices of elite research universities and liberal arts colleges [. . .] as the norm of higher education" (5). Certainly, for those of us who labor daily to provide educational access to constituencies whose concerns get too often elided in the more traditional configurations of college life, the specificities of the contexts in which we work and all the competing interests that course through them are far too integral to ignore. To do so—to ignore where we are—would amount to our teaching amnesiac-like to students identifiable to us only when they accord with the image of those "elite" students already selected to thrive in this undemocratic world in which we live.

John Paul Tassoni

November 2007

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Tony Scott

How Soon Is Now?: Writing Work, Education, and Fast Capitalism

Over the past four years I have gone through numerous jobs and have experienced the good, the bad, and ugly aspects. Learning from what I have come to see has taught me that the workplace is not always as pleasant as what you wish it to be. I have worked at places where I have not been treated as an equal, been sexually harassed, discriminated against, and have had issues with management. Through times of triumph I have learned to pick and choose my battles where, as an employee, I could still have my pride, dignity, and self-esteem.

—“Mariah,” university student and waitress¹

IF HORATIO ALGER'S “RAGGED DICK” WERE WRITTEN TODAY, YOUNG DICK WOULD ALMOST certainly continue to display a strong work-ethic, moxy and boundless optimism on his path to success. However, the fast capitalist Ragged Dick likely wouldn't follow a trajectory in which he learns a trade and then works his way up in a particular business. Now a requisite step on his path to success would likely be a degree at a two-year college or a regional university. Moreover, if Dick is a non-native speaker of English, this path might include a detour at some point to gain adequate fluency. Despite many broad changes in the character and perception of higher education over the last thirty years, it continues to hold a place in the popular mythos as an accessible economic and social equalizer. It is seen as a place somewhat removed from day-to-day economic survival, where deserving people might “catch up.” Film dramas about high school students from under-privileged families, like *Real Women Have Curves*, typically end with the deserving going off to a happily-ever-after at a University. In the television show *America's Home Makeover*, scholarships for children often take their place among the goodies from Sears and Pottery Barn that are given to families that have fallen on hard times. Like the wedding in a Shakespearian comedy, entry into the university is

1. Students quotes used with authors' permissions as part of a reviewed and approved research project.

the happy ending. The economic challenges that still plague many students through their educational trajectories and beyond, along with the deeply emotional experiences of class, are magically shed as students pass through the ivied gates. This image of the university as a path to economic success carries its own powerful metanarrative. It exerts a strong influence on the discursive space of our classrooms and is linked to the literate development of our students. The ways that students feel comfortable constructing themselves in classes; what they talk and write about; the languages they use when they talk about it; and the value systems they feel compelled to adopt in their writing, are shaped by where they think they are and what they think they should be doing there.

The quote at the beginning of the article is from the essay of a student enrolled in an advanced undergraduate writing class at a large urban university. Her class was asked to write an autobiography of their working lives and reflect on their experiences as workers. Like many of my students, at 22, Mariah already had an extensive work history at the wide, insecure bottom of the late capitalist economy, working in a daycare center and in a number of jobs in restaurants and retail. Much of that work had been for national chains. In those jobs, she had been sexually harassed by a manager on one job, asked to wear more revealing clothes on another, and even not paid by an employer who suddenly closed his doors and disappeared. Mariah sees higher education as a chance to eventually move out of these types of jobs, and in the meantime, she has tried to live life as a student and worker in low-status jobs with as much dignity as possible. Her essay is among those collected as part of a broader research project that foregrounds labor as an aspect of postsecondary writing pedagogy. The study uses as its starting point the still under-examined fact that contingent labor still significantly defines the sites of postsecondary writing instruction: teachers of the majority of undergraduate writing classes are contingent workers and the majority of undergraduate students are, themselves, part-time workers. According to a recent National Council of Education Statistics (NCES) study, 80% of all undergraduates work while in school, and 39% work an average of 35 or more hours per week ("The Condition"). For many, school is even on the margins of lives that center primarily around families and work. Among those whom the NCES characterized as "highly non-traditional," the majority (67%) considered themselves "primarily workers" rather than students.² In contrast, only 3% of traditional students self-identified as primarily workers. All non-traditional students were more likely than traditional students to primarily self-identify as workers

2. The NCES categorizes a "traditional" student as one "who earns a high school diploma, enrolls full time immediately after finishing high school, depends on parents for financial support, and either does not work during the school year or works part time" ("Special Analysis"). A nontraditional student has one or more of the following characteristics: delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education the same calendar year the he or she finished high

(“Special Analysis” 29). Like the majority of the highly non-traditional students in the NCES study, my students’ school-related work is juxtaposed, on a daily basis, with significant hours on jobs. Like “Mariah,” these students have developed deeply entrenched, complicated identities as workers, and many see higher education as a way out of current circumstances. Getting this far in their educations has meant overcoming many challenges beyond those presented by coursework. Non-traditional and first generation college students leave college without getting degrees at significantly higher rates than traditional students and those whose parents were college graduates (“The Condition” 14-15). They thrive within, endure, or just eventually give

up on institutions that often do not actively recognize their lives and experiences.

“a broader political economy of potentially contentious meanings, values, and identities”

In this essay, I argue for the importance of fostering recognition of the discourses of liberal economics, workplaces, and higher education as I discuss a model for writing pedagogy that uses labor and institutionality as starting points for writing and research. Within this model, students

write about work and working lives and critically examine the circumstances of their own educations. They examine the terms and significations of fast capitalism and casualized labor—for instance, what it means to be an “associate” at a retail store, a “contract worker” at a cable company, or an “adjunct writing instructor” in an English Department. They write about their lives as working students and they interview others about their work and work histories. They research and share information and insights about topics as varied as outsourcing, welfare-to-work-laws, healthcare access, economically driven diaspora, and immigration laws.

Importantly, however, this pedagogy doesn’t leave its own immediate institutional context unexamined. It actively recognizes that literacy is interwoven with immediate economic and educational imperatives, and it assumes that work inside and outside of the university is a part of a broader political economy of potentially contentious meanings, values, and identities. This pedagogy encourages students to connect the dots that lead from the

school); attends part time for a least part of the academic year; works full time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled; is considered financially independent other than the spouse (usually children, but sometimes others); is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents); or doesn't not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school). Students are considered “minimally nontraditional” if they have only one nontraditional characteristic, “moderately nontraditional” if they have two or three, and “highly nontraditional” if they have four or more.

material terms that shape their lives as students and workers to broad economic trends and the economic politics and discourses that sustain them. Higher education itself relies heavily on casualized labor, and school functions as a system of material and cultural production within, and arguably increasingly explicitly for, fast capitalism. Students, therefore, examine and write about the models of success that can lure many of us into higher education: the evolving relationships between industry and education and the ways that work and educational environments condition social relations through discourse.

I begin with a discussion of the clash between the still solidly upper middle-class aesthetic of higher education and the material lives of the non-traditional, working students that actually constitute the majority of postsecondary students. The following section discusses common, deeply interconnected conceptions of work, meritocracy, and higher education, exploring the contradictions between the bootstrap narrative of success and the harsh terms of the fast capitalist economy within which our students already work. Finally, I share details from a writing course that I have developed to foster an awareness of the discourses of work and education in the contemporary economy.

The Future Perfect: Marketing Narratives of Success

I get through my days knowing that I am earning my college degree and keep in mind that these managers who have the power to tell me what to do today will potentially be working for me after I graduate and obtain a job they could never have with their level of education and lack of integrity.

—“Karen” university student and retail worker

In spite of dramatic changes in the landscape of higher education over the past three decades, a particular ideal, or aesthetic, is still a deeply entrenched part of the popular imaginary, and it continues to shape the public faces of our institutions. My own university's website, for instance, portrays students living and learning within a calm, cloistered environment. Aerial photographs depict the campus as an enclosed space dominated and buffered by green. While the internal space is all new buildings, primarily in a modern architectural style, the surrounding area is forest and athletic fields—visually suggesting a high-tech, intellectual oasis. Students of different races appear in a montage of pictures in various studious and social tableaux. They sit on grass, at benches, in front of computers or in classes; they walk with friends and play intramural sports; they work in labs and go to basketball games. The site doesn't completely obscure the fact that the university is in an urban setting. Pictures of the city's skyline and its professional football stadium are included in the campus tour pho-

tos. Nevertheless, the general impression created by the website, as well as in much of the university's recruiting materials and fundraising publications, is of students living and learning in a pastoral, at least somewhat protected, space. This is space designed to enable bright people to think and work creatively, engaged with the problems of "the real world" but not quite "of" them in an embodied, day-to-day sense.

I do not believe that the university's depiction is dishonest. It is an attractive campus, and this depiction of campus life doubtlessly helps enrollment and fundraising. People expect an institution to put its best foot forward in public presentations. Parents, students, and donors are more likely to feel comfortable with a university that plays on the common conception of what a college campus "should" look like: a calming, familiar blend of contemporary and gothic or perhaps colonial architecture and students who are relaxed but engaged. A modern, urban skyline on the distant horizon in some of the photographs only suggests vibrancy, relevance, cutting-edge technology and the promise of prosperity, the best of both worlds.

The image nevertheless masks much of the daily story of this place and the people who inhabit it. This university is not a protected world separate from "the real world" of work and adulthood. Here, students and faculty are very much of our city and our region, and economic relations of production and consumption and the ideologically loaded discourses that sustain them shape all of our daily lives. Ours is a public, urban university enrolling over 21,000 students situated in a sprawling metropolitan area of over 1.2 million people. Two very busy highways frame the campus and two major interstates intersect less than five minutes away. Most of our students are commuters, and large, concrete parking decks, along with expansive asphalt parking lots, dominate much of the perimeter of campus. Parking lots are ubiquitous because ease of access is important. Hurried students typically travel here by car or bus from jobs, or leave here for jobs when they finish with classes.

John Alberti has lamented that

too often our discussions of the future of literary studies and pedagogy in higher education are limited by models of college life rooted in enduring but increasingly misleading images that take the experiences and practices of elite research universities and liberal arts colleges—more accurately, discursive representations of these experiences and practices that are themselves almost stereotypes—as the norm for higher education. (563)

Alberti points out that the overwhelming majority of students now attend what he calls "working-class" or "second-tier" schools. Not only is there a "a major class division in American higher education," but even the lives of those who attend more elite schools are more economically constrained than popular images of university life would lead us to believe.

While our campus is, to a certain extent, constructed to conform to popular expectations of what a college campus *should* look like, most of our students don't fit the image of the college student from popular media. Neither privileged nor particularly profligate, most don't party their free time away on fraternity row; few enjoy much leisure time or do a semester of study abroad; few have the space in their lives for activist politics; and few take raucous spring break vacations in exotic locations. Primarily first-generation college students from middle, lower-middle, or working-class families, the majority of our students pay part or all of their own way through school with their own paychecks and loans. In addition to being students, for at least part of every week they are waiters, package handlers, fast food workers, telemarketers, front desk clerks, office assistants, landscapers, retail workers, data entry clerks, nannies, baristas, etc. Older students,

“living lives that are
anxious, pinched,
scattered, and already
very ‘real’”

many of them in our evening classes, sometimes hold more professional jobs as computer maintenance technicians, teachers, office managers, secretaries and healthcare workers. In short, they are not preparing to enter the working world; they *already* help to constitute what the Bureau of Labor Statistics finds is the largest and fastest growing job category in the U.S., the “service-industry” sector. Most of the jobs created by the “new” or “information-age” economy are service jobs, and most service-jobs are low-paying—18.7 million of the anticipated 18.9 million new jobs created by 2014 will be in the service sector (“Tomorrow’s Jobs”).³

As with most other large, public universities, the university employs high numbers of adjuncts, who also fit their school work into lives that may include other jobs and classes at other schools. Photographs that accurately depict the daily lives of our students and the majority of our writing faculty might also depict them on gridlocked streets and interstates, searching for spaces in parking lots, or working in cubicles at offices or behind counters at coffee shops—living lives that are anxious, pinched, scattered, and already very “real.”

The hard-edged realities of casualized teaching labor and commuting student service workers clashes with the traditional, dreamy aesthetic of higher education as protected, separate space. Writing from and about the material conditions of their lives requires students to

3. The largest number of new jobs created by 2014 will be in Retail Sales, followed by, in order: Registered Nurses, Postsecondary Teachers, Customer Service Representatives, and Janitors and Cleaners. A report recently released by the Department of Education focuses on increasing the number of graduates with technology skills, but various economic studies suggest that professional-level, high tech jobs are already scarce. The category Computers and Software Engineers is nineteenth on the Department of Labor list.

make a conscious effort to confront, or at least negotiate, the generic identities of university and student pervasive in media and encouraged by the marketed aesthetic of the university. That image is, in many ways, still built into college writing as its default, “neutral” subject position. Meanwhile, unfortunately, the term “nontraditional student” often still seems to carry at least a measure of implicit disparagement. Indeed, in my experience, when colleagues use the term it is sometimes a precursor to the identification of some limitation or inconvenience. The implicit assumption is that “nontraditional” is inferior to “traditional.” New faculty from graduate programs at more exclusive universities are warned that they will have to get accustomed to “the students here” in the same tone that white colonial settlers might once have been warned that they will have to adjust to life in the bush. Students considered particularly adept are sometimes spoken of with a regretful tone and said to be worthy of “someplace better.” This tone implies that at schools that do serve large numbers of traditional students, they do *real* university education, but at less competitive institutions we make do. When students’ lives enter the picture in often inconvenient ways—for instance, with a childcare issue, a transportation issue, or a conflict between a work schedule and an out-of-class activity—this intrudes on what is imagined as the proper work and aesthetic of higher education. Meanwhile, teaching jobs at institutions that do serve large numbers of traditional students are scarce because “traditional” college students are now far from average. According to the NCES, in 1999-2000, only 27% of undergraduates could be correctly classified as “traditional.” Indeed over the past thirty-five years, the entire profile of students has changed considerably. Since 1970, undergraduates have gotten older (39% are now older than 25), and more female (56%, versus 42% in 1970). More students are now part-time (39% versus 28% in 1970), and the overwhelming majority of students now work (“Special Analysis . . .” 25).

I am often struck by this unwieldy, ideologically complex convergence between the idea of the university—a consciously negotiated marketing strategy typically embodied in architecture and promotional materials—and the material lives of most of my students. First-year writing programs continue to be sustained through genericized conceptions of students, academia, and academic discourse. Susan Miller has critiqued the “presexual, preeconomic, prepolitical” juvenilized subject of composition (87). She argues that this generic writing subject—though far from the reality—has provided a kind of stability for composition’s theoretical discourse. The ramification has been a depoliticization of literacy education—because students aren’t yet quite real, there are no real stakes riding on what they write. Writing instruction remains innocuous and detached, and “composition” maintains a solid, if marginal and subordinate, place in curriculums. Writing programs and entire lines of textbooks center on this generic conception of college writers and writing. It is far more difficult to standardize pedagogical approaches that conceive of students as already consequential,

already working in a real economy, and already facing the day-to-day challenges of economic survival. Poverty and economic justice may sometimes be the objects of study, but they are less often studied as critical ongoing factors in the present lives of students—a vital part of their experiences and literate lives. Meanwhile, students will pursue their lives in the future within the same fundamental economic framework that creates the conditions within which so many already currently struggle. Pursuing the ideal of postsecondary education therefore requires a stubborn tunnel vision that somewhat denies, or at least brackets off, many of the harsh realities of work and education in the fast capitalist economy.

“Associates,” “Students,” “Consumers” etc.

We keep working and chasing this unattainable ideal that we have in our minds that work can bring us . . . I understand that work will be stressful and make you unhappy, yet I don't believe that this can happen to me. I am chasing this ideal whether I think I am or not.

—“Paige,” university student and office worker

Many of the important, persistent questions for writing teachers center around the authorial position that our students feel invited to occupy and the subjects that they are encouraged to write. Understanding this positionality requires that students gain awareness of, and their own perspectives on, the discourses that shape their everyday lives, at work and at school. Most contemporary approaches to pedagogy in rhetoric and composition proceed from the assumption that writing is “socio cultural,” that literacy and learning deeply intertwine material, social, and cultural contexts. Given that most of our students do have lives as workers that parallel their lives as students, it follows that we should in some way account for how market and workplace discourses interface with the discourses of higher education. Among the oft-cited characteristics of fast capitalism is that it has further blurred the lines between education and work. Education and the marketplace exhibit more synergy. Higher education is increasingly explicitly marketed as a form of job training, and it is now more generally constructed in consumerist terms. Likewise, management theories promoted in business schools and best-selling books reflect a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between language, identification, and increased loyalty and productivity. In other words, they resonate with an understanding of language and culture that has formally been more exclusive to humanities departments.

This phenomenon has been examined in much research over the past decade. For instance, in the influential *The New Work Order: Behind the Language of New Capitalism*, James Paul Gee, Glynda Hull, and Colin Lankshear describe a broad tendency toward discourse-driv-

en social engineering in fast capitalist business practices. Drawing on research from a training program at a technology firm, they argue that policies and procedures in the contemporary workplace aren't just geared toward managing the behaviors of workers that are directly associated with productivity: they are consciously, unapologetically designed to “indoctrinate”—to change thinking and social habits, even identities. These changes are brought about, in part, through the conscious manipulation of language as an habituated aspect of day-to-day social interaction and as a means of understanding ourselves and the world:

What we are really talking about here is a textual creation of a new Discourse . . . with new social identities: new bosses (now “coaches” and “leaders”), new middle managers (now “team leaders”), new workers (now “associates,” “partners,” “knowledge workers”), and new customers (now also “partners” and “insiders,” who are said to drive the whole process).

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Gee, Hull, and Lankshear go on to characterize this discourse as not only “imperialistic” but colonizing, poised “to take over practices and social identities that are (or were) the terrain of other Discourses connected to churches, communities, universities and governments” (26). The spreading of the discourses and practices of neoliberal economics into higher education has been the subject of much discussion of late. David Noble, for instance, notes the increasingly active presence of corporate brands—Burger King, Coke, Pizza Hut, etc.—on university campuses. Others point to the direct impact of legislative funding changes designed to harness more of the work of higher education for private industry (for instance, Martin, Miyoshi, Slaughter and Leslie). Still others, like Michael Apple, Jill Blackmore, Derek Bok, and David Geoffrey Smith, note the pervasiveness of market discourses within discussions of goals and administrative processes in higher education. This work generally describes how “students” are increasingly construed as “consumers” and education as product within discussions of administration and curricular goals.⁴

4. It should be noted that this neoliberal shift in higher education is not just recognized by those who advocate resistance or point to its shortcomings. A considerable number of books, like Frank Newman, Lara Couturier, and Jamie Scurry's *The Future of Education: Rhetoric, Reality, and the Risks of the Market*, construct this shift as inevitable and either advocate its acceleration, or, in the case of this book, argue for its inevitability and advance strategies for managing it.

As the discourse of the fast capitalist marketplace is increasingly synergized with the discourse of higher education, the boundaries between the “real world” of adulthood and work and the otherworldly state that still characterizes popular conceptions of the university is muddled to say the least. This synergy is not just discursive. The economy relies heavily on part-time, “flexible” and temporary labor, and full- and part-time and “students” supply a significant portion of that labor. Moreover, the economy increasingly relies on higher education for ongoing professional training. According to Stanley Aronowitz, 13% of the American workforce attends some postsecondary institution (28). While the higher average age of students over the past thirty-five years is, in part, explained by the expansion of access to higher education, it is also explained by a labor market that pushes anxious adults back into higher education so they can make themselves more competitive for decent professional jobs. “Lifetime education” may, on the surface, seem desirable for those of us who work in higher education, but large numbers of older, working-age people going back to school is actually among the outcomes of an economic system that leaves much of the American workforce in a state of perpetual insecurity.

Most student-workers spend part of each week working in low-end jobs that can offer little agency, recognition, pay, or even stability. During the other part of the week, students attend classes in institutions that offer the promise of escaping these “dead-end” jobs even as they reinforce the basic cultural and economic logics that create them. In this process, the dead-end job of the present doesn’t come into full focus as the subject of legitimate examination and critique. Rather, it remains on the margins, unvalidated but nevertheless serving as a kind of morality play boogeyman, the impetus for betterment and the cautionary consequence of a lack of ambition and hard work. The implicit goal then is to escape it—to use education to strive within the same economic system that creates large numbers of jobs of the type that so many currently hold and find undesirable—to adapt to a seemingly immutable environment, rather than to critique it and imagine how it might be more just, equitable, and democratic.

Writing Work

Gee, Hull, and Lankshear argue that literacy education should evolve to account for relationships between discourses and social practices within the varied spheres of peoples’ lives: “learners should be viewed as lifelong trajectories through these sites and institutions, as stories with multiple twists and turns . . . As *their* stories are rapidly and radically changing, we need to change *our* stories about skills, learning and knowledge” (6). This is a call for an inevitably problematic and even messy engagement that seeks to create new pedagogies that critique both academic discourses and the discourses of the fast capitalist marketplace.

Among the most salient features of what might broadly be called the “post-process” movement in Rhetoric and Composition are its focus on power, location, and institutional-ity—on spaces of articulation. It “foregrounds the writer’s situatedness in history and in his or her writing practice; and it makes visible the ‘apparatus of the production of authority’ that all writers tend to submerge in their discourse” (Olson 12). Foucauldian, it is not a rejection of authority, but a recognition of how authority derives in particular writing contexts, including within educational settings. Where the writer writes and for whom—i.e. “location”—is, therefore, profoundly important, as are the immediate circumstances of textual production. Bruce Horner envisions writing classes where students and teachers might examine the historical, social, and institutional foundations of rhetorical conventions and what he calls the “social material conditions of process” (35). Other work brings globalization into the frame of analysis, further complicating the conceptions of literacy that inform writing courses at institutions that serve large numbers of non-traditional students. For instance, LuMing Mao examines the complicated “border zones” that form the intersection between Chinese and European American rhetoric. Mao’s own experiences within this borderland inform the ways he approaches literacy in the writing classroom. Mao explores with his students Western and non-Western ways of reading and writing, fostering understanding of, and sophistication with, multiple literacies. Using language as a starting point, this conception of writing pedagogy consciously situates itself in relation to globalization and the discourses of diverse workplaces and, in doing so, resists being centered in any genericized discourse (like “academic writing”). Min-Zhan Lu similarly points to examples that illustrate that English is being used around the globe and is constantly hybridizing, relentlessly changing with individual users in individual contexts. Lu characterizes this hybridization in economic terms, arguing that the needs and values of global “fast” capitalism significantly define the terms of language use and writing pedagogy (43). Even pedagogies informed by multi-culturalism and an awareness of multiple literacies can be subsumed by marketplace prerogatives in often unrecognized ways. Lu, therefore, advocates an interventionist pedagogy for Composition that fosters awareness of “relations of injustice”:

To intervene with the order of Fast Capitalism, it is the responsibility of Composition to work with the belief that English is enlivened—enlightened—by the work of users intent on using it to limn the actual, imagined, and possible lives of all its speakers, readers, and writers, the work of users intent on using English to describe and, thus, control those circumstances of their life designed by all systems and relations of injustice to submerge them” (44).

She argues that we should see writing education as a way of helping students to “compose against the grain” of the dominating and totalizing discourses of fast capitalism (46).

Carl Herndl and Danny A. Bauer advocate what they call a “model of confrontational performance and articulation.” They draw on the theoretical foundations of the Latin American liberation theology movement—which has heterogeneous roots in both Catholicism and Marxism—to describe a rhetoric that doesn’t cater to the assumptions on which exploitive and unjust social structures are founded. It is unabashedly confrontational, as it “seeks to expose the working of hegemony by disrupting common-sense consensus and asserting powerful alternatives to the dominant social formation. It makes apparent what ‘normal’ discourse obscures: the political, ideological, and metaphysical work of discourse” (570). Herndl and Bauer’s rhetorical model discerns the degree to which subjects “come into being” through writing (581). It recognizes that social dynamics are inextricably bound with the processes of naming—a process enacted against the backdrop of, and perhaps in conscious opposition to, the cultural dominant:

When those who had been excluded from the traditional norms of the universal usurp that position and speak as enfranchised subjects, the performative contradiction exposes the exclusionary nature of the conventional norm of universality and broadens the definition, creating a new space and subject position for the previously excluded. (577)

They, therefore, call upon teachers and students to create a new discursive space and subject position—to “come into being” in politically creative and dynamic ways.

I have devised an advanced writing course designed to enable students to write themselves as student workers—with recognition of how economic factors shape discourse, and through it, identities, desires, goals and creative labor. To be clear, this is a writing course. We develop ideas for research and writing; we journal; we workshop and revise drafts; we reflect on our writing; and we develop writing portfolios. However, the class fosters an awareness of how articulation—the ways we “come into being”—are often overtly framed by political economic factors. The class actively seeks to recognize the relationship between the writer, that which is written, and the immediate educational context within which this process is enacted. Writing is conceived as a mode through which the writer reflexively struggles with the meanings and identities assigned within fast capitalist systems of production and education. It therefore approaches history, economics, and politics as both material and “in process,” created and transformable: the effect of past conditions and human actions and the cause of future conditions.

The first half of class is spent discussing, researching, and writing about issues raised in various readings that center around work. The class uses texts that become platforms for discussions of the material present, what it is and how we have gotten here. Readings are intended to help situate “work” as a trope in American culture. We read historical and con-

temporary work from a variety of sources: including excerpts from Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.⁵ Students locate more contemporary views of work from a variety of sources, including editorials, political speeches, and, of course, popular media.

We also do more contemporary readings. We have read David Shipler's *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*, Michael Zweig's *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret*, and Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickled and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. *The Working Poor* has resonated particularly well with students. Shipler relies on intimate profiles and interviews to depict the complex array of factors that contribute to poverty in America—among them, low wages, welfare policies, the cost of healthcare, poor financial decision-making, domestic violence, drug addiction, language and cultural barriers, unequal education, the cost of housing and adolescent sexual abuse, race, and gender. Shipler's book complicates the myth of upward mobility through hard work that continues to play a powerful role in American political discourse. It chronicles the lives of people who are not able to pull themselves out of poverty through work. Interestingly, however, many students see aspects of their own lives in Shipler's stories—the book therefore can't be read with the same detachment and complacency as the works on most literary reading lists.

Finally, we read narratives from *Gig: Americans Talk about their Jobs*. *Gig* is a fast-capitalist update on Studs Terkel's classic *Working*. The book offers narratives spoken by people who work in a wide variety of industries: including a McDonald's crew member, a systems administrator, a Kinko's worker, a truck driver, a model, a web mistress and a professor. This book has been a particularly important teaching tool. Students recognize their own working experiences in these often gritty and complicated narratives. I find that students often seem surprised that they are invited to critically examine their work in a college classroom. I now wonder whether this is indicative of how corporatization sets the tone for contemporary post-secondary education? Students may at least subconsciously conflate the authority of academic faculty and educational institutions with the authority of managers and companies.

Students compile their own work histories, write descriptions of jobs they currently hold or have held, and examine perceptions of work—how these perceptions are formed and how we might rethink them in light of our critical examinations. The professions covered in a single class can be very broad ranging: from textile mill worker and oil changer to insurance lawyer, software developer, and real estate agent. These narratives become rich texts for classes. Through them, we analyze the discourses of work and the material terms they iden-

5. John Alberti's reader, *The Working Life*, published by Pearson Longman in 2004, is a very useful text for this type of class. It offers excerpts from Franklin, Weber, and Adam Smith, as well as work from writers as diverse as Woody Guthrie and Nicholas Negroponte.

tify and often mask—including job titles, job descriptions, specialized jargon of various professions, and the surprisingly common terms that people use to describe the jobs they have held in their working lives—“between jobs,” “shit work,” “dream job,” etc.

During the second half of the class, we turn toward extended group research projects that center on work. Ideas for these research projects often come directly out of the students' work descriptions and interviews. In an interview, one student who works as a telemarketer, for instance, complained that he increasingly calls households at which no one speaks English. He was frustrated because this wastes *his* time. Another front desk clerk at a medical practice whose first language is Spanish complained about the rude comments that patients have made about her accent. Students had very contentious discussions of these interviews, and the contention is very much a part of the politics of our region, which has seen a rapid influx of primarily Hispanic immigrants over the past decade. While some students discussed difficulties with, and resentments about, working with and among those whose native language is Spanish, others conveyed their shock and dismay when they witnessed incidents in which non-native speakers were discriminated against. Discussions about Hispanic immigrants and language provided an opportunity to contextualize immigration in broader economic and political terms. The discussion was fractious and even somewhat disturbing: there was no general, satisfying resolution. It did complicate the overly simplistic assumptions that characterize most popular media treatments of immigration and work. Students researched particular, concrete questions, such as why immigration has been so concentrated in the southeast over the past decade, and how educational and civic institutions might respond to non-English speakers.

Other issues that students have researched in the class include:

- Globalization—treaties, outsourcing, debates concerning, effects on wages and local economies, policies on immigration, the impact of IMF policies on the economies of developing nations, immigration policy.
- Women in the workplace—salary disparities, choices of occupation, advancement, and balancing work and motherhood.
- The labor movement—history, current state of, labor laws, recent and ongoing confrontations.
- Wal-Mart—effects on local economies, labor violations, reliance on public monies and welfare.
- Education—“the achievement gap,” the casualization of teaching labor in higher education, the role marketplace values and needs play in the shaping of curriculum, trends in federal aid for higher education, and the increasing use of contingent teaching labor in higher education.

The factors can also be very specific and personal, and the paths that students take in their thinking are often very surprising. One student wrote about her own experience as a fast food worker and related it to the documentary *Supersize Me*, incorporating some very interesting research on the fast food industry. Her web-based, multimodal project made connections between fast food and fast capitalism, articulating a relationship between poor nutrition, quick calories, and life at the bottom of the economic ladder. A group examined demographics and voting. Students from that group created an interactive web project that presented statistics showing the rate at which voter participation in elections declines with income levels.

Another student, surprised by the under-representation of African Americans among voters, investigated incarceration rates among African American males and recent legislation in a number of states that made it illegal for convicts to vote. A group of students who were all born outside of the United States developed a website focusing on work and immigration. Among that group was a Vietnamese man in his mid-thirties who had started his own small business and a Phillipino woman who, as a child, had been sent to the US to live with relatives to expand her opportunities. Both discussed the difficulties of living and working in the US and maintaining the cultural identities of their native countries. The Vietnamese man wrote about the growing gap between Americanized and non-Americanized generations in his family. He explained the difficulties that many new immigrants face as they adjust to life in the United States and associated a willingness to quickly adapt culturally with the likelihood of relative economic success. The Phillipino woman described the growing independence and confidence she had gained as a worker and student. This has caused friction with certain family members, as she is no longer willing to conform to their expectations for her gender. Her work became an examination of the contrasts between a work discourse within which she believes she is more culturally “American,” and a discourse of home that she believes limits her in ways she finds increasingly unacceptable. Another student provided an overview of state and federal child support laws, and described her own frustrating struggle to collect the child support that the father of her young son owed. Her project became an examination of the relationship between this legal/bureaucratic discourse and the material realities of both parents' working lives.

How Soon in Now?

This question is intended to point to the potential benefits of starting on the immediate material present in writing pedagogy. How soon is now at our own institutions? Questions of location in higher education must inevitably target institutionality and the terms of labor in the classroom and in writing programs. Undergraduate writing programs staffed largely by contingent teachers typically offer students little opportunity to critically examine their own eco-

conomic circumstances and the contexts of their own literacy educations. After all, close examination of the real material “location” of undergraduate writing classes might lead students to recognize both the extent to which many postsecondary institutions now rely on contingent faculty to cut costs, and the lack of real investment many English departments and institutions have in high quality writing education. The “aesthetic” of higher education can quickly dissolve when we examine the terms of education work. Because writing faculty are so often burdened with heavy teaching loads, and have little institutional backing or extensive, advanced training in the field, writing instruction is institutionally predisposed toward generic, politically innocuous pedagogies—pedagogies that derive more from mass-produced textbooks and standard syllabi than from the inquiry and experience of teachers and students

“institutionally
predisposed toward
generic, politically
innocuous pedagogies”

working in particular times and places. Pursuing “location” in writing classes means doing the uncomfortable work of examining the synergy between the use of cheap teaching labor and politically safe writing curriculums—a synergy that is especially apparent at “second-tier” and open-enrollment institutions that serve high numbers of “non-traditional” students and where dis-

ciplinary, cost-cutting managerial measures (such as even heavier reliance on part-time teaching labor) are more readily apparent.

How soon is now for students to write from the material present rather than from the imagined future? How much does the labor they perform right now matter? These questions evoke a healthy, necessary skepticism toward the discourse that frames the project of higher education in fast capitalism. A class certainly should never be a political soapbox, but it also shouldn’t promote the political/economic status quo from behind the false veneer of professional neutrality. It should ask truly open-ended, if uncomfortable questions. The object is to encourage students to engage in ongoing informed struggle with dizzying cultural and material transformations. Writing education should provide a framework for students to complicate their perceptions of their working lives, to explore how their perceptions and labor are situated through contemporary economic and political discourse. It should invite students to legitimize their own (often working-class) experiences and their present lives as student-workers—so that university space becomes a more rightfully occupied space for working, working-class people, and the present becomes the subject of education and writing, rather than merely a temporary episode that is best hidden, intellectually ignored, and quickly transcended.

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Laura Rogers

Finding Our Way from Within: Critical Pedagogy in a Prison Writing Class

OMAR, A TALL YOUNG MAN WHO HAD LOST ONE EYE IN A SHOOTING, HESITATED A MOMENT before he handed me the paper he wanted me to copy for his work-in-progress presentation to the class. There was a background buzz of conversation from the other inmate students as I stood in front of Omar and tried to answer his questions. Outside the window, a corrections officer walked by. Had he noticed the higher than usual noise level? I wanted to truthfully answer Omar's questions, but I also wanted the conversation to end so I could begin class and quiet the class down.

"Who's going to see it besides people in this class?" he asked me. It was not the first time I had been asked that question by an inmate student.

"No one but me, Omar. Why would I show it to anyone else? I'm a teacher, not an officer."

"Yeah, but what if you thought that someone had written something that was against the rules, that was dangerous? What would you do then?" He sat back and waited for my answer.

"I don't know, Omar. I don't have any interest in just 'turning someone in' because he criticized something about the facility or wrote about his experience here. You just have to trust that. If someone was in danger, that might be a different story." I tried to answer honestly. "It might depend on the situation—if I knew someone was in danger, I would have to try to avert the danger. Otherwise, you're just going to have to trust me."

"Can I have all the copies of my papers back when class is over?" Omar asked. "I don't want my story all over the prison."

After I read Omar's work, I could see why. He had written a piece about two inmates who had died because of negligence on the part of the facility; one inmate died because, according to Omar, an officer had not called a nurse when the inmate was in medical distress. Another inmate died in a fight in the kitchen, in plain view of an officer who did not move to stop the conflict. I was surprised at the amount of disclosure in this essay. I wanted Omar to trust that I would keep any writing he did private and that I would never turn stu-

dent writing over to “the police.” Was this really true? Were there situations in which I would—or should—“turn in” inmate writing? Would that put me on the side of the authorities and make it impossible for me to teach?

The complex and troubling questions of trust and surveillance Omar raised for me are just some of the complicated issues I had to struggle with as a teacher of writing in a college correctional facility program when I attempted to implement a critical pedagogy influenced by the ideas of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. I did this, however, without completely understanding Freire’s ideas or the difficulty of enacting them in a correctional facility environment. I told Omar, for example, that he just had to “trust me,” without realizing what a difficult thing I was asking Omar to do in the tense prison environment where trusting or not trusting someone can literally be a matter of life and death. I routinely asked students in my on-campus writing classes to share and publish their work; I had not considered that inmates might understandably not want their work “all over the prison,” especially if that work presented a critique of the correctional facility system. Omar might indeed suffer consequences of his disclosure of the prison’s negligence if his work was discovered by officers during a routine search of his living quarters; he might be harassed by officers or even locked up “in the box” or transferred to another prison. I had asked students to write about the conditions of their lives without considering the ramifications of that request; Freire, according to my knowledge of his work at that time, did not address the fact that “naming the world” might have negative consequences for students in the kind of highly regulated and controlled environment of a correctional facility.

I had not considered, either, that I might encounter student writing that indicated that someone might be in danger. What would I do in that situation? Could I continue to teach and maintain a trusting relationship with inmate students if they knew that I might “turn in” their writing? On the other hand, was I not obligated to warn someone who might be in danger? And just what did I do with the troubling knowledge that inmates were not being provided with adequate medical care or supervision? Would it endanger the college program if I contacted the state Commission on Corrections (a private watchdog agency) and told them about Omar’s claims? I couldn’t even imagine the different levels of authority—the dean of the correctional facility program, the dean of the college, perhaps even the facility and state prison administration—such a move would mean answering to. Because I did not know what to do—and because I feared the consequences of such an action—I did nothing and kept that knowledge to myself.

I expected that by using a critical teaching approach in my prison class that students’ writing would become more complex and more interesting as they attempted to situate the personal within larger cultural and social forces. According to Freire, teachers and students

work together to develop “the capacity for reflection about their world, about their positions in the world, about the encounter of consciousness, about literacy itself” (81). I hoped that the students would be able to not only tell stories about their worlds but to reflect on the conditions of their own existence and in so doing, become subjects, not objects, of their educations.

What I had yet to learn, however, was that these investigations were not without risk for students; some chose to take this risk and others understandably did not. In order to understand some of the difficulties students were struggling with, I needed to see beyond students' texts to the substance of where the work was located, to the prison setting that influenced what and how students wrote as surely as their difficulties with academic prose. I needed to understand the conditions of inmates' lives as well as the peculiar circumstances of their position as college students writing in prison. Instead of focusing on, for example, struggles students were having with particular verb inflections, my attention and energy became centered on trying to understand what it meant for students to try to write as college students in a situation in which one institution, the prison, demanded that students did not disclose or reveal personal information or form relationships of any kind with other human beings. The inmate students already knew about the difficulties involved with writing in prison; I had to learn, for example, about the effect of facility surveillance on inmate writing and how best to respond to that surveillance.

A Code of Ethics

In the fall of 1989, I drove up the long driveway of the brand-new, medium-security facility for the mandatory teacher orientation and followed the signs for visitor parking. I had been teaching for several years in a correctional facility college program run by a local liberal arts college, and I was interested in learning what the new facility and college program held in store. Inmates in three facilities were offered bachelor's or associate's degrees in liberal arts or business. At that time, the students in the college program were eligible for federal as well as state financial aid; most of the inmate students received assistance from the state's Educational Opportunity Program. The college program was an open admissions program in the sense that students' past high school grades or records were not a factor in their admission; many students had received their GED degrees while incarcerated. However, prospective students were interviewed and screened by the college program counselors; inmates with serious psychiatric problems or a history of violent behavior while incarcerated were not admitted to the program.

This facility had just opened months before the beginning of the fall semester, and I was eager to be part of the new college program. Well-tended gardens of impatiens and snapdragons surrounded the large sign that welcomed visitors and inmates alike. The sprawling

cluster of new buildings, utility trucks, dark green prison vans contrasted with the colorful gardens, the blue Catskills in the distance, and the green landscape stretching to the horizon.

The contrast between the beautiful natural surroundings and the well-tended gardens and the ugly apparatus of imprisonment continued as I approached the administration buildings. The colorful flowers, wooden gazebos, and freshly planted grass clashed with the ever-present coils of razor wire, the barracks-like buildings painted an ugly, institutional shade of yellow, and the bags of garbage heaped outside the buildings. A surprising, noisy flock of seagulls screeched overhead and dived down for the scraps of food that littered the new sidewalk.

The orientation was held in an all-purpose room in the administration building. Signs in Spanish and English posted on the front door proclaimed that visitors could not bring in knives, guns, drugs, or anything else defined as contraband. The large, bright main lobby of the building had big windows that looked out on the Catskill landscape, large green plants and comfortable-looking chairs and couches. I walked down a hallway to the room where the orientation was being held. As I settled into my chair, the college counselor stood up in front of the room and began handing out the familiar sheets of volunteer regulations from the Department of Corrections.

“freshly planted grass
clashed with the
ever-present coils of
razor wire”

A pleasant-faced sergeant with curly brown hair read from the sheet to the teachers. Along with information about bathroom passes, attendance records and dismissal times, he warned us about the nature of our relationship with our inmate students; I had heard this information and this warning at every orientation. The sergeant read the information to us in a loud yet friendly voice. The regulations warned us that “While working with inmates on a regular basis, a professional relationship should be maintained. Care should be taken to avoid becoming emotionally involved with inmates, and that you comport yourself in a professional manner” (New York State Department of Corrections: Division of Volunteer Services).

Because I had heard these words of warning many times before, I found my attention drifting. I looked around at the other tired-looking teachers, many of whom appeared as distracted as I felt. The new teachers, however, were listening intently to the sergeant, following along on their sheets of volunteer regulations. The officer sounded a little bored himself, his voice becoming monotone. When the sergeant finished reading from the sheet of rules, the dean of the correctional facility program stood up, passed out another sheet of paper and

then stepped up to the podium. The dean had passed out something called the “Code of Ethics” from the Correctional Education Association.

The first sentence of the “Code of Ethics” stated that “The correctional educator, appreciating the magnitude of responsibility inherent in the teaching process, accepts a unique challenge of providing equal educational opportunities for all and of motivating incarcerated students to realize their individual maximum personal, social and vocational potential.” Under the section titled “Responsibility to the Student,” the Code stated that “The correctional educator is obligated to promote a trusting relationship with each student. . . . Meaningful and relevant learning experiences relative to the ability of each student should be provided.” I was surprised by the Code’s emphasis on the humanity, dignity, and inherent ability of inmates. The “Code of Ethics” seemed to contradict what I had seen of the prison system’s degradation, alienation, and dehumanization of inmates. The differences between the “Volunteer Rules and Regulations” and the “Code of Ethics” pointed to the contradictions inherent in the presence of educational programs in prisons, contradictions which would become apparent to me during my teaching at the medium-security facility.

The Contradictions of Prison Teaching

In her 1992 article “Participatory Literacy Education: AIDS Opens the Doors,” Kathy Boudin, herself an inmate in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, encountered many of the same contradictions and complexities I did in her attempts to implement a Freirean approach in a prison class. Boudin’s approach, one that asked students to become co-investigators into conditions of their lives that had importance to them, invoked for me my own experience of attempting to use a problem-posing approach in a prison classroom. Boudin, a woman in the unique position of being both an inmate and a teacher in the facility she was incarcerated in, describes Freire’s work as “an approach that places literacy acquisition in the context of learners’ daily concerns” (209), a goal that both she and I wanted to accomplish in our teaching. Boudin believed that focusing a prison Adult Basic Education writing class around the issue of AIDS, a new and pressing concern for women inmates at the time, would be an ideal way to approach literacy acquisition in the prison environment. Boudin’s reasons for using a Freirean approach in the classroom echo my own: placing inmates’ lives and experiences at the center of the curriculum meant giving more authority to students and acknowledging that they had expertise in areas I did not.

Boudin’s problem-posing curriculum was very successful; the women in her class wrote and performed a play about AIDS, shared powerful writing around that issue and created an information brochure that was distributed throughout the facility. Even though her curriculum was successful in many ways, Boudin’s work also points to the difficulties and

contradictions inherent in implementing a liberatory approach in prison. For example, even though her work had positive results, the prison administration abruptly withdrew support for Boudin's program even after beginning to plan an expansion of her project. Boudin explains the reason for the withdrawal of support for the program in terms of the contradictory nature of the prison itself. She writes that "Both the support and the withdrawal of the support for the peer education program can only be understood as aspects of the broad contradictions among the primary prison goals of control, punishment and deterrence, and that of rehabilitation" (228). The contradictory nature of the prison environment Boudin notes speaks to the kinds of issues and problems I encountered. Although my class occurred within a different context, and unlike Boudin, I was not an inmate, the class created similar complications; problem-posing pedagogy brought my students and me face-to-face with issues of facility control and surveillance even though this pedagogy was successful in generating powerful, interesting student texts and classroom discussions. Those texts and discussions, however, sometimes contained unsettling material I was not prepared to hear.

Stories I Did Not Want to Hear . . . But Had To

I had ordered for my composition class Columbo, Cullen, and Lisle's then-new anthology *Rereading America*, now a widely used text, because I was interested in the dichotomies many of the readings set up; for example, I thought I could pair Andrew Carnegie's "The Gospel of Wealth" with Kwame Toure's call for a separate black nation and economic system. *Rereading America* also included pieces by such writers as Malcolm X and Richard Rodriguez, who used autobiography not only to tell their stories but to investigate how their identities intersected with social and cultural forces. We would use these readings to explore the question of "what it means to grow up in America," the basis for our reading and writing for the semester. For the first paper, I asked to students to "tell a story about growing up in America as defined by the specifics of who you are in this culture that embodies what you want to tell your readers about what growing up in America meant to you."

I assumed that many students would be writing about their experiences of incarceration and growing up among the disadvantaged of America; I wanted them to bring their stories into our classroom discourse. This class turned out to be a lively group eager to share their writing and discuss the ideas of the texts we read. As students began to write about the conditions of "growing up in America," I began to learn more about them. I heard stories that surprised me, even though, after several years of teaching in prison, they should not have. Physical and emotional abuses were common; almost no inmate had a father living at home. Bishop, one of the few men in class who had grown up with a father, wrote about being locked in a closet by his father for hours on end, then being beaten when he was finally let out. Ray's

mother, a drug addict, forced her small son to shoplift for her in New York department stores. Giovanni's father, when he did come home, came home drunk, beat his children and sent them outside, naked, to spend the night. Young men who grew up surrounded by poverty and violence jokingly told stories of their own violent behavior. Matt Thorne laughed as he told me how he and his friends pushed old refrigerators off rooftops for fun.

"Weren't you afraid someone would get hurt by a falling refrigerator?" I asked him.

"Nah, why would we worry about that?" he replied in a puzzled tone.

I was taken aback by Matt's answer; how could he not worry about hurting—or killing—someone by the falling refrigerator? Even though I had asked for stories of students' lives, I found that I could not always understand the lives of violence, poverty, and deprivation these stories embodied and that the prison setting intensified. These narratives also made me feel helpless. Was the college program helping these young men change their lives or the environments they would return to when they were released from prison?

Prison teachers are not, of course, the only teachers who are confronted with complex and confusing situations invoked by student writing. In his 1998 article, "Ethical Issues Raised by Student Writing" Dan Morgan explores the difficulty of knowing how to respond to difficult issues raised in students' papers. Morgan begins his article with a story about a student who confesses to a murder in a paper he writes for first-year composition. While few teachers outside of correctional facility environments can expect to have their students confess to murder (Morgan himself questions the veracity of the student's claim), teachers in many kinds of institutional settings can relate to Morgan's statement that "we now live in a time when many more college students have 'special needs,' when we see a much higher proportion of students who have led nontraditional lives, a larger number of what I call "broken wing" students (321).

Morgan explores possible responses to writing done by such students. How should teachers respond to student texts that raise legal or ethical questions or writing that even implies that the student may be in danger? Should the teacher treat the paper as a "teachable" moment and help the student write better papers about substance abuse, dangerous family situations or murder? In order to address these questions, Morgan provides guidelines for teachers; he suggests that teachers can, for example, refer students to counseling, stress the importance of audience and purpose to student writers, assign specific topics or even forbid students to write about personal subjects altogether.

All of Morgan's suggestions for dealing with disturbing student papers are helpful and valid for teachers in many settings, including prison. However, the prison setting can intensify or complicate the question of how teachers should respond to these kinds of texts. Even though some inmates' work may be disturbing to read and difficult to respond to, prison

teachers hoping to enact a critical or Freirean pedagogy may find it almost impossible not to have students write about their lives in order to examine those lives and experiences and to contribute their knowledge and expertise to the ongoing conversation of the class. In the prison environment, reporting inmate problems to the authorities, even with the best intentions of helping a student, may seem to the student that the teacher is willingly participating in facility surveillance; the student's writing may become part of knowledge that is used to increase the prison's control over the inmate (and the teacher). Prison teachers, as well as teachers in all settings, need to make difficult and individual decisions based on the student, the consequences of those decisions, and the particular institutional site of composition.

However, even though I did not always feel comfortable with what inmates students had to say, I had asked for these stories; in order to understand the broader social forces at work in the lives of these men and to allow them to understand the forces at work in their own lives, I had to be willing to listen and encourage students to critically examine the conditions of their lives. Freire states that "Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men transform the world" (76). I had to be open to this naming, these "true words," unsettling as the stories and the serious social problems they invoked might be. Although I could never completely understand the lives and worlds of these men, I could listen to their words. Speaking the "true word," however, could have serious consequences in the carceral environment, and indeed, sometimes might not even be possible in an environment where security and control are priorities.

Surveillance

In addition to writing about their lives before their incarceration, some students wrote at length about the conditions of prison life and provided me with glimpses of their lives as inmates; even though there were risks involved in speaking, in telling the truths of their lives, many inmates did choose to speak. Dan, a young man in his early twenties with shaggy blond hair, wrote

I have gained my perspective of the penal system through first hand experience. I am living as an active pacifist, believing what is said to be believed, and living with conditions that are both demoralizing and dehumanizing.

Consequences, most definitely, are a major part of prison life. No matter what, cause, if we as inmates do not conform or comply, punishment is the result. Some of these punishments are through the very behaviors that bring people into prison. Surely the authority of our government doesn't license the exploitation of violence with violence? This is a common practice within the penal system, and can, most times, be avoided. I have witnessed some of these acts, but for the most part,

they are carried out in an isolated area, where there won't be witnesses. Injuries sustained in these beatings are blamed on fights with other inmates. Fatalities are recorded as "escapes."

Prison is more than solely physical captivity. It also captures and anesthetizes human emotion, therefore making it an extremely difficult task for one to feel, which in turn warrants growth. Regression, and the isolation of oneself from all that is real, is the end result of prison.

Dan tried to "tell the truth" of his experience and define who he is as shaped by the circumstances he found himself in. "Telling the truth," however, is not simple when the truth is a critique of a system that has enormous power over inmates. My efforts to have students locate their stories within the social and cultural forces they found themselves in brought me face-to-face with the reality the inmate students were writing in. Although I had always known that student work was potentially under surveillance, it was only when I asked students to investigate the circumstances of their lives that I became aware of the real consequences for inmates. I had not anticipated that my ignorance of the prison environment would cause problems for students.

One evening, Andy raised his hand in the beginning of class. His long hair was just short enough so that he did not have to tie it back as department regulations stated inmates must. He was a small man who seemed to make up for his slight stature with a loud presence in class.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Rogers, but I don't have my paper for tonight."

I was surprised. Andy was a conscientious student; he had never turned in a late paper or homework assignment. It was not unusual for students to turn in assignments late, though; impossibly noisy conditions, guards who made inmates turn their lights off before the required "lights out," and time spent "in the box" were common excuses for missing or late work. Andy, however, had never missed work before.

"What's the matter Andy? Dog eat your homework?" One of the other inmates kidded him in a good-nature way.

"No, man. I was writing my paper in the computer room and the officer on duty came up and looked over my shoulder at what I was writing. He didn't like what he saw, so he took the paper. That's why I don't have my work for tonight."

"What officer was this?" I asked. I was still naive enough to be angry that the officer had imposed on my students' academic freedom and self-expression. I had an idea of what officer was in question; the same officer was always on duty in the school building. I promised to myself that I would call the dean of the program in the morning.

To my surprise, Andy waved away my concern. “No, Mrs. Rogers, forget about it. It’s okay. I’ll have my paper for the next class if that’s okay with you.”

“Andy, you should be able to write what you want for school. The officers shouldn’t be doing this. Let me talk to someone about it.”

“Really, Mrs. Rogers, let it go.”

Clearly Andy was becoming uncomfortable. I let the incident go but still felt angry. Now, years later, I understand the source of Andy’s reluctance; he knew better than I the consequences of revealing what officer had taken his paper. He would be the one to suffer the potential consequences from the prison: time spent “in the box,” a disciplinary ticket, or even transfer to another facility that would most likely not have a college program.

Several weeks later Harry angrily told me in response to a question about what he “really thought” about an issue he had brought up in his paper that “Of course I’m never going to write what I really think. Do you know the kind of trouble you can get in for that?”

I was beginning to learn.

“Did you know, Mrs. Rogers, that last semester I had a teacher who turned me in? I

“he knew better than I the consequences of revealing what officer had taken his paper”

wrote a paper for that course ‘Black and White Relations.’ The teacher thought it was ‘dangerous’ and turned it in. I had to go before the dean, the education director and other superintendents. They put my paper in my file as part of my permanent record.” Harry’s voice got louder and angrier as he talked, his Haitian accent becoming more pronounced. “Why would a teacher teach a

class like that if he don’t want you to write what you think?”

At the time, I had no ready answer for Harry. The other members of the class were looking at me, waiting for my answer.

“You know,” Harry continued, “I know that another student was transferred to another facility, out of the college program, because of a paper he wrote for that same class. Why would they give a class that got people into trouble?”

Embarrassed because at the time I could offer Harry no analysis of the situation, I just said, “I don’t know.”

Harry folded his arms. The conversation was over.

I couldn’t blame Harry for not wanting to write “what he really thought” if it was going to get him into trouble. Harry had pointed out the inherent contradiction in the situa-

tion: Why would the facility offer a college program, offer the class, and then forbid students to write “what they really thought?” Harry had achieved a level of trust with his teacher that allowed him to express his “dangerous” thoughts. That trust itself became dangerous. While constraints are present in all writing situations, for inmate students the stakes are high for violation of those constraints. So much was at stake; because of his dangerous paper, Harry risked being put “in the box” or even being denied release from the parole board. Harry was left with silences and unspeakable experiences.

I began to understand that the aims of prison and school seemed not to be the same. Good students did not necessarily make good inmates and vice versa. According to the prison, inmates should be silent, compliant, and dependent; I wanted students to be questioning, independent, individually responsible, and critical. Students need to feel free to express ideas; the prison, however, expects students to not express their thoughts and feelings. The aims of critical pedagogy—to have students become subjects of their own education through, as Freire says, “restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry” (58)—were antithetical to those of the prison, which enacted an extreme form of what Freire calls “banking” pedagogy, which “regards men as adaptable, manageable human beings” who are supposed to willingly “accept the passive role imposed on them” (60). Still, Harry did have a choice in terms of whether to speak or to remain silent; for his self-protection, he chose silence.

While the goals of the prison and of school seemed to me at the time antithetical, my later reading of the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault helped me understand that the underlying agendas of these institutions may not, in fact, be so different. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* defines the correctional facility system as a manifestation of a network of power distributed throughout society. In this work, Foucault examines the history of the penal system and speculates that while the focus of the contemporary correctional facility system seems to have shifted from the body, the “spectacle” of punishment, to what Foucault calls “the soul” and the use of the prison system to control and categorize those who transgress the law, the prison system still exercises a “technology of the body” over “those punished” (200). Foucault also believes that the “new system” of punishment provides a model of control that extends to the entire society. While Boudin notes the apparent tensions between the aims and goals of school and those of prison, Foucault believes that all prison personnel—even teachers and volunteers—are implicated in the network of power that controls the bodies of prisoners. According to Foucault, school in prison is part of the apparatus of the contemporary prison system. The school writing these students did caused some inmates to collide with the restrictions of the prison environment and raised issues for the students and myself of trust and surveillance. Inmate students' writing became part of what Foucault calls a “mass of documents that capture and fix” (189) inmates in the “normalizing gaze” of the

correctional facility (184). This kind of surveillance had many layers in the school program; Foucault points out the similarities between the control exercised over prisoners as well as students; he states that the “normalizing gaze” of the prison, for example, extends to “those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school” (200).

Although I regularly taught in the prison program, I had taught in the on-campus Educational Opportunity Program as well. I realized that both the prison and the school used writing to “capture and fix” inmates and students. Both on-campus and correctional facility students had to take a writing placement exam that admitted them either to the school’s required first-year composition class or to the remedial, non-credit bearing Writing Program class; the same exam, a holistically scored, timed response to a prompt, was also used as an exit exam from the Writing Program class. Because the inmate students had to take the same exam as the on-campus students, the exam questions posed almost insurmountable difficulties for many of the inmates; the questions asked them to write, for example, about the difficulties of on-campus parking, the problems of juggling work, school, and family life, or how to respond to the problem of unsafe school bus drivers. Most of the inmate students were from New York and had never ridden on a school bus, most had not held regular jobs and attended college at the same time, and most certainly had not had to contend with problems of on-campus parking.

The writing exam functioned as a means of subjecting students—on-campus and inmate students alike—to a system of normalization that judged them as either “normal” or “abnormal” writers and attempted to elicit “knowledge” or “truth” about the writing abilities of those examined. For both on-campus and inmate students, writing became not a means of critically examining their lives or making connections between their lives and larger social issues, but also as the production of an artifact that classified and often punished them. While writing was used to “capture and fix” both on-campus and inmate students, it was difficult to ignore the fact that on-campus administrators seemed to make it almost impossible for the correctional facility students to pass the test. Many students did pass the test although it took multiple attempts and much directive coaching from the Writing Program teachers. Eventually, the college program declared that students in Writing Program were only allowed two opportunities to pass the exit exam; many inmates were therefore forced to drop out of the program. I began to understand that the placement exam was only one of the many ways in which writing became a means of surveillance in the prison (as well as the school) and contributed to what Foucault defines as the “panoptical” environment of the prison.

Foucault describes the panopticon, as envisioned by Jeremy Bentham in the nineteenth century, as a prison in which each inmate, placed in an individual cell, is always visible to an unseen supervisor who is located in a central tower. Foucault writes that “All that

is needed, then, is to place the supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a . . . condemned man . . . By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery . . . the panoptical mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately . . . visibility is a trap “ (295). The power of the panopticon is constant and unseen, producing an interior state of surveillance and paranoia; physical functioning of the prison’s machinery of power, therefore, is almost never needed.

While the medium security prison was not architecturally constructed as a panopticon, (there were no individual, backlit cells, no central tower other than the large guard towers), the constant camera surveillance (corrections officers sat in a room in the central administration building before a wall of cameras showing views of the yard, walkways and other areas of the prison), as well as the presence of corrections officers in all parts of the facility, and the use of writing as a means of surveillance, creates such an environment. Everyone in the prison—inmates, guards, teachers and administrators—is always being observed by an unseen observer despite the existence at the medium security prison of the flowers, gazebos, and graduation ceremonies that could cause one to temporarily forget the purpose of the prison. Surveillance was evident in the watch towers, the wall of surveillance cameras, the officers stationed at the entrances and exits of each building and the identification cards all inmates (as well as all other prison personnel) had to carry and produce upon request. The writing inmates did became part of that surveillance as corrections officers could at any time demand to see their work. Inmates such as Harry felt compelled to censor their work for their own self-protection. The surveillance of self produced by the panoptical environment manifested itself in me through my discomfort and worry over the teacher-student relationship and over my uneasiness, especially in my early years of prison teaching, over what was and was not appropriate to disclose.

While I told students they just had to “trust me,” I knew I could not protect students from facility surveillance. I could not stop officers from searching inmates’ cubes or reading over their shoulders as they sat at computers. I could promise that I would never share their work with “the authorities,” but what would I do if confronted with work that hinted at real, potential danger to someone? In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire states that with a critical teaching approach, “dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialogers is the logical consequence.” Freire goes on to define a trusting relationship by stating that “Trust is contingent on the evidence which one party provides the others of his true, concrete intentions; it cannot exist if that party’s words do not coincide with his actions” (80). While I wanted my students to trust me, I could not promise them that I could shield them from the institution. I would do what I could to protect them and

their work, but I could not promise them safety. Perhaps my attempts at using a Freirean approach would always be limited by the extent to which students individually felt they could trust me.

What I could have done to at least begin to address these difficulties, and what I did do in later years, was to foreground the issues of facility surveillance, trust, and disclosure as part of an on-going classroom discussion. In one class, for example, we brainstormed individually and then as a group the categories of “writing for self,” “writing for school,” and “writing in prison.” I tried to ask students to name their worlds and to define the contradictions of writing for school in prison as a problem that could be questioned; students could begin to ask why the conditions of writing in these three arenas were potentially so different. The questions and difficulties may not have been solved, but inmate writers were able to make informed and conscious decisions about the writing they produced. That writing, however, sometimes produced difficulties not just with the facility’s surveillance of those texts, but with my relationships with the inmate writers.

Disturbing Relationships

I still was not sure how to react to the confusing and sometimes disturbing depths I sometimes found myself in. In order to ask students to write about their worlds, what they were authorities on, I needed to have human relationships with the inmate students. Creating relationships with inmates and crossing boundaries designed to prevent those relationships meant that unsettling information could be disclosed or relationships misunderstood. The correctional facility setting presented a challenge to me in terms of responding to the very few students who transgressed behavioral boundaries. Only one student during all of my years of teaching seemed truly dangerous, and even he did not threaten me. Responding to the student was difficult in a setting where I did not want to identify myself with the “authorities” or with the corrections officers with guns and badges. In another setting I might have responded differently to Dwight.

“Oh my God . . . look at that,” Dwight exclaimed as he unexpectedly took hold of my thin wrist and ran his fingers over the blue veins that seemed, under his gaze, unexpectedly exposed and close to the surface.

“Please get off my desk and take your seat,” I curtly told him as I quickly withdrew my hand. Dwight had come up to the desk to talk to me before class. Within minutes he was sitting on my desk and had seized my wrist, turning it over to examine it. Dwight was a small, slight, man, nineteen or twenty years old. He had a disconcerting habit of endlessly twisting his short dreadlocks around his fingers and spent most of his class time staring out the window. Recently he had taken to leaving his seat during class and sitting on the windowsill. He

did not respond to my requests that he take his seat; it began to seem less troublesome to allow Dwight to sit on the shelf by the window than to keep asking him to take his seat. He rarely participated in class or shared his work in the response sessions. He did share his journal with me, though. Instead of responses to the reading selections, his journal contained long, violent stories of maiming and killing, illustrated by stick figures spewing blood.

"I just like writing Stephen King stories, is all," was his response when I questioned him about the journals. Perhaps he did, but the inappropriateness of his response, the vio-

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lence of the work, and his strange behavior in class caused alarms to sound inside me. I didn't want to ever "turn an inmate in," or get anyone in trouble; I never thought of myself as being on "their" side, the side of the officers and superintendents. I did not consider my students as especially danger-

ous. I never felt threatened by Dwight but wondered how much of a danger he might be to other inmates or even to himself with his disturbing behavior. I resolved to call the college counselor the next day and let him know about Dwight's unsettling behavior.

I was spared the call. Early the next day, the counselor telephoned me.

"I just want to let you know, Laura, that Dwight was transferred out of the facility to a psychiatric facility. That's why he won't be in class. From what I was told, he really is potentially dangerous. I tell you, out of all the inmates I've worked with, he was probably the most disturbing."

Dwight made me confront the unsettling depths and the complexities of teaching in prison. Ramon, although not frightening, also made me confront these discomfoting realities. Ramon, a muscularly built man with a shaved head, asked me on the first night of class, "Where do you teach outside, in a kindergarten class or something?" His question, naïve as it might have been, seemed designed to construct me as someone relatively powerless. Ramon was a good student, a frequent and interesting contributor to class as well as a thoughtful writer. One evening, after answering Ramon's question about a paper after class after all the other students had left, the conversation veered off in an unexpected direction.

"I don't know how it happened," Ramon said. "I broke into the house . . . I didn't mean to . . . I raped her."

I found myself wanting to step away from this large man with weight-lifter arms. I wished the officer would come down the hall and wave Ramon out of the classroom. Ramon had not threatened me; I did not feel like I was in any danger. I took his statement as a confession. Yet, it was a confession I did not particularly want to hear. Ramon had committed a

violent act against a woman; I wondered who she had been. I realized that I rarely thought about the victims of my students' crimes; in fact, I rarely thought about their crimes at all. Ramon's confession brought me face-to-face with the reality that Ramon was a large and powerful man who could—who *had*—violated a woman. I felt relieved when the school officer finally appeared and signaled to Ramon that he should leave the classroom. I would have felt uncomfortable alone in any empty classroom with any male student who confessed to me he had raped someone, but the prison setting intensified the tremendously unsettling situation. As I drove home that night, I thought about how I hoped that no other students would make confessions like Ramon's to me. These were depths I did not want to sound but could not avoid if I wanted to begin to have at least a partial understanding of the conditions of my inmate students' lives.

These uncomfortable depths included the misinterpretation of relationships that seemed to me uncomfortably within the boundaries of prison regulations. Human relationships were so regulated, so fit into boxes of "appropriate" or "not appropriate," so unnatural, that perhaps inmates inevitably would want to transform the highly regulated teacher/student relationship into one approaching a relationship that would occur outside of facility guidelines. Interactions that might have been taken lightly in other settings became large and uncomfortable issues in a setting with such extreme strictures against human relationships; I had been warned, after all, by the Volunteer Regulations to "avoid becoming emotionally involved with inmates." Where was the line, however, between becoming "emotionally involved" and being a caring teacher? The Code of Ethics published by the Correctional Education Association urged teachers to remember that "The correctional educator is obligated to promote a trusting relationship with each student." As a writing teacher trying to enact a critical pedagogy, it seemed to me that forming "trusting relationships" with students was necessary for any teaching or learning to take place. A few highly discomfoting misunderstandings such as the one that occurred with Ed, however, caused me to question myself and my relationships with my students.

Ed, a short man with curly brown hair, said to me one night after class, "You know, a friend of mine once told me that you have to be at least a little bit in love with your English teacher to learn anything about writing."

"Really?" I replied, at a loss for words. "I don't think so."

The words of warning about "close relationships with inmates" I heard at every orientation stuck in my head. What had I done wrong? Had I been overly friendly to Ed? Did I not seem professional enough? Did I not wear the right clothes? How could I be unfriendly and cold to students? I wondered how I should deal with Ed's remark. I imagined that students made flirtatious remarks to teachers in other settings; the prison, with its strict guide-

lines regarding human relationships and the serious consequences enacted for violating those regulations, made responding difficult. Technically, I was required to turn Ed in; I could not bring myself to take that action. Ed was not threatening; he would probably never make a similar remark. The serious consequences for Ed—a ticket, lock-up, or transferal—did not seem to equal his small transgression. However, what if someone found out, somehow, that Ed had made an inappropriate remark to me? Women teachers who did not report such behavior on the part of inmates were accused of complicity and fired.

Although I never felt threatened or in any real danger by any of these men, Dwight's story in particular alerted me to the harm that an inmate such as Dwight might pose to himself or to others. While I considered myself to be on the inmates' "side" and indeed could not imagine teaching and aligning myself with the corrections officers and prison administrators, I had to confront the fact that Dwight was potentially dangerous; he needed help. For me not to alert someone to the fact that Dwight seemed to harbor the potential for violence seemed irresponsible even though I agreed completely with Correctional Education Association's statement that "Confidential information about a student should be divulged only for compelling professional or legal reasons." What would I have done if someone had gotten hurt? What if Dwight had injured himself? I had mixed feelings when I heard that Dwight had been transferred to a psychiatric facility. On the one hand, maybe he would get the help he needed; it seemed questionable, however, that he would receive whatever therapy or treatment he required in the correctional facility setting. What I had read of Freire provided no guidance about what to do in this situation; what if someone's naming the world indicated the potential for violence? If Dwight had been a student of mine in a school setting, for example, I would have been less reluctant to alert someone to Dwight's potential for violence; I (perhaps mistakenly) would have had more faith that Dwight's problems would have been responsibly dealt with. I had little faith that the prison system would help Dwight.

While I never felt that Ramon or Ed posed any threat or danger to myself or anyone else, I found myself momentarily identifying with Ramon's victim even though my position as a white, middle-class teacher gave me a kind of power over Ramon. Ed's essentially harmless confession helped me to begin to understand the complex position of a woman teacher in a system where women who were objects of verbal and physical advances by inmates were routinely held accountable. The highly regulated and unnatural prison environment caused my interactions with Ramon and Ed to be constructed as larger and more disturbing incidents than they really were. Could I have begun to help Ramon and Ed question, define, and problematize their worlds? Could I have encouraged Ramon to write about the rape and investigate the conditions of why it occurred? Could I have helped Ed understand why he thought he was "in love" with a woman he hardly knew? It seems unlikely that this could

have occurred in the carceral setting where writing is routinely subjected to surveillance and teachers are officially warned not to create human relationships with their students. It would have been highly uncomfortable for me—and construed by the prison and perhaps the college program itself as inappropriate—to ask Ramon and Ed to write about their relationships with women.

Surveillance and Control Outside the College Classroom

The issues of surveillance and the regulation of human relationships continue to be pressing questions in the teaching I continued even after the college program was ended. Near the beginning of the 1990 spring semester, inmates and teachers alike began to hear disturbing rumors that because all state and federal funding for prison education was being discontinued, the college program was in its final semester. As spring approached, it became clear that the program would soon be over. Inmates began to stop attending classes; teachers tried in vain to convince them of the worth of finishing the semester. By the end of the semester, only a few students remained in the program. There had been much public opposition to the program; people always asked me about how I could justify a “free” college education to prison inmates when they could not afford to send their own law-abiding sons and daughters to college. Most of the people opposed to prison higher education failed to realize that inmates qualified for state and federal aid on a financial basis just as they failed to realize that inmates who attended a college program had much lower recidivism rates than those who did not.

When the college program ended, I had, however, the opportunity to begin a voluntary writing workshop. Prison writing workshops have been in existence for many years, and the work of inmate writers has been collected in such anthologies of work as Joseph Bruchac’s *The Light From Another Country*, Belle Gale Chevigney’s *Doing Time*, and Bruce Franklin’s comprehensive *Prison Writing in America*. Over the eight years the workshop has been in existence, issues of surveillance continue to be pressing issue for writers; several members of the group, for example, have had their work confiscated. At least one group member was “in the box” as a result of writing that the administration felt was inappropriately critical of the prison system. Just two months ago, one member of our workshop came to the group and told us that officers had taken all of his notebooks and poems. “They don’t know that I got it all up here,” he said, pointing to his head. “They can’t take it away.”

He did not stop his writing and continued to attend the group until he was sent home on parole. The man who had been locked up for his work did not stop writing, either, and continued to be a prolific member of the group until he suddenly died of a heart attack while

playing basketball three weeks before being sent home. The members of the writing group are well aware of the potential dangers of writing in prison; that, however, does not stop them from writing. "That's the way it is," one group member told me one night after a discussion of facility surveillance of inmate writing, "One minute you're writing a poem, and the next minute they're slapping handcuffs on you." These claims are perhaps a little exaggerated; in the ten years the workshop has been in existence, officers have confiscated only three inmates' poems. Yet, the facility makes clear that literacy is potentially threatening; for example, every time we publish an anthology of the group's work, the administration asks us to remove at least one "inappropriate" poem. That request, though, does not stop inmates from submitting poems or publishing the book; the group has had many discussions about surveillance and its consequences. Inmates continue to write what they want in private but are well aware that any text intended for publication in our anthology, for example, is going to be scrutinized by the media review board and the administration. Inmate writers take it upon themselves to name the world, examine its contradictions and become subjects of their self-sponsored education; despite the potential consequences, many choose to be what Freire defines as "men engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human" even within the restrictions of the carceral system (52).

It may very well be that teaching in prison creates a situation that invokes the kind of restrictions and outright danger Freire faced as he taught Brazilian peasants not only to read and write, but to engage in what Henry Giroux calls in his introduction to Freire and Macedo's *Literacy: Teaching the Word and Teaching the World* "a necessary foundation for cultural action for freedom" (7). Although my initial reading of Freire's work was confined to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, my later reading of *Pedagogy of Hope* helped me understand that Freire's critical pedagogy originated in a situation where both he and his students were in peril; Freire was ultimately exiled from his native Brazil, only returning many years later. According to Ana Maria Araújo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, in their Introduction to *The Freire Reader*, both Freire and his students were identified by the dominant political party at the time as a "threat" (20). Brazil's military government terminated Freire's literacy program, The National Literacy Project, in 1964. Ana Maria Araújo Freire says in her notes to *Pedagogy of Hope* that "For many of Freire's associates, then, as for himself, the choice was prison or torture, or exile" (223). Earlier, I had naively thought that Freire had not considered that a critical pedagogy might endanger all of its participants; my later reading of *Pedagogy of Hope* helped me see that Freire was all too well acquainted with the fact that "naming the world" put all involved in danger. That fact, however, did not stop Freire from his widespread efforts to promote critical literacy.

Enactment of critical pedagogy in the carceral setting carries with it certain risks; in

some facilities, it may not even be possible. Kathy Boudin, for example, was not allowed to continue her problem-posing curriculum in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. Although already in prison and not under the threat of death, the students in my writing workshop take real risks by participating in the group. By its continued surveillance of inmate writing, it is clear that the prison considers the existence of the writing workshop as a threat; the continuance of the group is never guaranteed. Although I am not faced with the kind of real danger Freire and his fellow educators were (although I do risk not being able to continue with the workshop), the members of the group know that they face the threat of sanctions if the facility determines that their writing transgresses boundaries. Still, the group members continue to write; the students in the college program, except for one or two, who, like Harry, chose not to speak, also continued to write and investigate their worlds.

Critical Pedagogy in Prison?

Kathy Boudin's attempts to use a Freirean pedagogy in her prison class point to the difficulties inherent in trying to implement a problem-posing approach in a prison writing class; even though this pedagogy facilitates powerful, interesting student texts, it brings teachers and students alike face-to-face with issues of facility control and surveillance. Perhaps because she was an inmate herself when she taught her class, and also perhaps because she was a woman teaching in a woman's prison, Boudin did not seem to face the same issues of trust, disclosures of unsettling personal information and misunderstood personal relationships I faced with my class of male inmates.

I was able to directly confront some of these issues during a semester when I taught a section of advanced composition in the college program's summer session. The inmates in this class were overwhelmingly capable, motivated, and talented students; most of them would have been successful students on many college campuses. I had chosen David Bartholomae's *Ways of Reading* as the text for the course; during the semester, we read the selection from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* on "banking" education that Bartholomae had included. One student, Lazaro, became intensely interested in Freire's ideas and wrote at length about how they applied both to his impoverished childhood in Columbia and to his life as an inmate. During one class discussion of Freire's work, Lazaro raised his hand.

"But Mrs. Rogers," he said, "We can't really have this kind of teaching here. Freire calls for revolution, for change of the oppressive situation. We're not going to do that."

I had to agree that we were not; I was not going to incite my students to armed riot or to stage a hunger strike or a refusal to go out to recreation in the yard in protest, for example. I would be endangering not only my position but the existence of the entire college program. True Freirean practice calls for the two elements of reflection and action; because we could not—or

chose not to—take the kind of action that might cause changes in the correctional facility system, perhaps I was not truly enacting a problem-posing pedagogy. Theoretically the students could take action, could riot. After all, the Attica prison riots—at a cost of human life—resulted in some significant changes in the prison system such as increased access to educational programs and activities such as writing workshops. We were not going to take that kind of action.

Henry Giroux points out in “Literacy and the Pedagogy of Political Empowerment,” his introduction to *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, that “teachers cannot assume the role of critical intellectuals dedicated to a pedagogy of literacy and voice unless the proper ideological and material conditions exist to support that role” (26). These conditions certainly do not exist in the panoptical environment of the prison; there is probably no institution less devoted to helping teachers achieve a “pedagogy of literacy and voice” than prison. Real change in the prison system is not going to happen as a result of students’ writing and critical reflection. However, even though the conditions necessary to create such a pedagogy do not exist, prison teachers can still reflect and theorize about their work, the conditions and restraints under which they teach, and can support students through real dialogue in their efforts to attain meaningful growth.

Even within limitations, the inmates in my class did seem to benefit from a pedagogy based on Freire’s principles. While Kathy Boudin’s program based on liberatory pedagogy was ultimately cancelled by the facility, the students in her classes benefited tremendously from her approach; they learned about a subject very important to them, became experts on the subject of AIDS, and shared that knowledge with their peers. Students in my classes often wrote powerful, interesting pieces about subjects that they were authorities on; uncomfortable as those pieces and those stories may have been for me at times, they were important for students to write and for me to listen to as we began the process of co-investigating the world. Complicated issues of trust, surveillance, and regulations of human relationships made those co-investigations difficult or even impossible. The fact that students both in the college program and in the voluntary writing workshop continue to tell their stories and investigate the conditions of their worlds points to the importance of the continuing process of becoming more fully human in their quest to, as Freire would say, “liberate themselves” (20). Even if that liberation cannot be complete—students remained inmates, after all—many students, like Dan, made important gains in understanding the conditions of their lives even though they could not really take action to change them. In his introduction, Giroux notes the importance of a pedagogy in which “teachers and students” can “recover their own voices so they can retell their own histories.” Giroux goes on to say, however, that such a pedagogy needs to move beyond “a pedagogy of voice that suggests all stories are innocent” to one that connects students’ stories to larger cultural and political issues as well as to “the interest and principles that structure them” (15).

Even though I tried to help students connect their stories to the “principles that structure them,” as I look back, I can now envision how I might have responded to Lazaro’s doubts about the applicability of Freire in our prison setting; I could have opened a door to an important discussion about the troubling issues of trust and surveillance that underscore all prison teaching. Without acknowledging the particularities of place, Lazaro and I could not begin to have a dialogue about how to learn and teach in prison. Lazaro raised important questions, and by not answering them, I perhaps unwittingly participated in his oppression. The students whose stories made me uncomfortable were also trying to communicate something important to me; the prison’s unnatural regulation of human relationships made it difficult for me to hear what they were trying to say. Dwight’s violent drawings might have been a plea for help; Ramon’s need to tell his story to me may have been an important first step in his trying to understand his own actions. Foregrounding the overwhelming impact of the correctional facility setting could have helped all of us communicate.

While the prison environment offers unique and often harsh constraints for both students and teachers, all teachers and students must work within some institutional limitations. As Dan Morgan points out, increasingly, given the nature of our lives and of contemporary society, teachers must pay attention to “the complicated and thoroughly nontraditional lives led by most of our students, regardless of age or background,” and “to issues of trust and responsibilities” that may push the boundaries of those limitations (324). While access to prison education has declined in many instances in the past few years, increased opportunities for access to literacy for many other students previously excluded from higher education increase the chances that the students sitting in our classrooms may have difficult, complex, and painful lives. Attempting to implement a critical pedagogy in prison has heightened my awareness of the constraints all teachers and students operate under as well as they try to problematize issues raised by those complicated lives and to difficult issues of trust, ethics, and power that most teachers are not exempt from. I took a risk in asking prison students to trust me and write about risky subjects while knowing that there was no way I could ultimately protect them from facility surveillance. We all ask students to trust us when we ask them to write, particularly when we ask them to consider the difficult conditions of their lives. Perhaps we need to consider the consequences

“the prison’s unnatural regulation of human relationships made it difficult for me to hear what they were trying to say”

of that trust and to think about ways of responding to the complex issues raised in our students' writing.

While the prison environment restricts and oppresses, acknowledgement of those restrictions and of the students' expertise on the conditions of living in prison can begin a dialogue in which, as Freire says, "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (67). My experience of teaching writing in prison while attempting to implement a critical pedagogy helped me grow as an educator; I came to a fuller realization of the importance of writing and critical reflection in students' lives. While some students, like Harry, understandably chose not to take risks and not to speak, other students like Omar, Dan, and Andy chose to speak and investigate the conditions of their lives in spite of those risks. In his article, "Composition and a Prison Community of Writers," Gregory Shafer says about his experience of teaching in prison that "Being part of this unique experience reawakened me to the role I play in allowing students to find liberation in their language"; he reminds his readers that "It is a lesson that should be remembered by all who teach composition" (81). It is a lesson that I hope I have been able to apply to my teaching "outside" of prison; I hope I have been able to help all students find the importance in writing and investigating the conditions of their lives that my prison students were able to find.

Freire says, in his introduction to *Pedagogy of Hope*, that "One of the tasks of a progressive educator . . . is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. After all, without hope, there is little we can do" (9). Surely the inmate students in my classes and workshops, many of them young men facing long sentences for drug-related crimes, feel the pressing need for "opportunities for hope." Although the writing they do in their college classes and workshops cannot shorten their sentences or alleviate harsh prison conditions and restrictions, perhaps it offered them a chance to escape the de-humanizing prison conditions and engage in a process of humanization. While most of us do not teach in prison, we might have many students who might benefit from opportunities to both articulate their stories and to connect those stories to larger social issues. Freirean pedagogy in prison can raise many uncomfortable issues and may need to operate under certain restrictions; however, careful consideration of the conditions surrounding the site of any teaching can help both students and teachers, as they listen to each other, become more fully human.

Afterword

Boudin's work is only part of a growing body of literature addressing teaching in prison. This literature has provided me with the inspiration to look closely at my own experience as a prison writing teacher and has helped me think about that experience in different ways.

An example of the increased attention paid to teaching writing in prison and to prison writing is the Winter 2004 issue of *Reflections: A Journal of Service Learning*, guest edited by Tobi Jacobi and Patricia E. O' Connor; this special issue is devoted to "Prison Literacies, Narratives and Community Connections." In her Foreword, Tobi Jacobi notes that while much writing about teaching in prison describes the "material challenges" of correctional facility teaching, her goal in compiling the special issue was to make visible the "complexities of 'how it is' for prison writers and teachers" and to investigate the difficulty "of negotiating student and teacher agency in prisons, spaces shaped by many stakeholders with disparate goals and interests" (2). To that end, Jacobi and O'Connor include diverse material in their collection: stories, essays, poems, and artwork by inmates, articles about creative writing and drama workshops, prison graffiti, and book reviews. Several articles, such as Tom Kerr's "Between Ivy and Razor Wire: A Case of Correctional Correspondence," describe service learning collaborations between universities and correctional facilities (Kerr further details the effects of this correspondence on the women inmates participating in his article "Incorporeal Transformations: The Power of Audience for Women Writing in Prison," in *Writing on the Edge*). Jacobi's Foreword offers an overview of contexts for prison literacies, and O'Connor's Afterward discusses compelling issues raised by the texts included in the volume and ends with a call to readers to "work together with the incarcerated to devise pathways to productive lives and re-claimed communities" (207). Jacobi and O'Connor also provide readers with an extensive bibliography of print, electronic and film resources as well as a compilation of prison book projects in various states.

While the special issue of *Reflections* is an important resource, there is other work available that addresses both the material conditions of teaching in prison as well as examinations of specific pedagogical approaches. Almost all of this literature, including my own account, attempts to define the distinct nature of teaching in the prison environment and to provide the reader with some sense of what this environment is like. Some of these texts (my own, again, included) are concerned with finding a suitable pedagogy for teaching in prison and are often personal accounts of this experience that also provide a description of the unique setting for teachers and readers who have never taught "inside" as well as reflection on the problems, contradictions, and difficulties experienced in such a setting.

Judith Tannenbaums's rich and complex *Disguised as a Poem: My Years Teaching Poetry at San Quentin*, for example, is an intensely personal account of the difficulties and rewards of teaching a state-funded workshop. Anne Folwell Stanford's "More Than Just Words: Women's Poetry and Resistance at Cook County Jail," both provides an account of her experience teaching women inmates as well as a reading of the women's writing as construction of self and as an act of resistance. Frances Biscoglio, in "In the Beginning Was the

Word: Teaching Pre-College English in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility,” also notes, in detailed diary format, the difficulties of teaching writing in prison as well as the important gains made by some students despite the restrictions and difficulties of the correctional facility environment.

Several writers address the success or failure of a particular pedagogical approach to teaching in prison. Louise Z. Smith, for example, in her article “Ethics and Writing: Teaching in Prison,” foregrounds ethical issues prison writing teachers can expect to face, ranging from choice of texts to how to respond to the complex interpersonal dynamics of the prison classroom, and uses those concerns to shape a curriculum. Andrea Loewenstein outlines a teaching approach grounded in her women students’ compelling need to express themselves. While Loewenstein does not define her approach as critical or liberatory, she believes that “Teaching writing from the inside out is no life solution for women who are imprisoned and oppressed in so many ways. But it is one way of taking back a little of their lost power and of regaining a sense that one exists” (48). Gregory Shafer, in “Composition and a Prison Community of Writers,” describes how he adapted his first-year writing course to the needs of the women inmates he was teaching, focusing on his students’ “need to answer grating questions about who they were and what they should do to feel a sense of happiness.” Although he does not explicitly name his pedagogical approach as a critical one, Shafer refers to Henry Giroux’s call for “instructors to foster the kind of learning context that will allow for personal expressions and investigation,” and notes that teachers should strive to help students achieve “an active critical consciousness” (76).

All of this work offers prison educators or those interested in learning more about the conditions of teaching writing in prison much information about what Jacobi calls the “material challenges” of teaching writing in prison (1), whether that teaching is in Adult Basic Education classes, voluntary creative writing workshops, or in college courses. In addition to detailing these difficulties, all of these researchers address the need identified by Tobi Jacobi to reach beyond the challenge of describing the material conditions of teaching in prison to address the complex interplay between teacher, student, and the prison setting. This work has been valuable to me in terms of providing me with a better understanding of teaching in the carceral environment as well as the difficulties and successes other prison writing teachers have experienced. Stanford, Loewenstein, and Shafer explore pedagogical approaches that implicitly or explicitly define both their teaching and their students’ writing as political activity and have been helpful to me in investigating my own similar approach. However, their interests are not strictly in exploring the possibilities or limitations of such an approach in a correctional facility setting. Their work, along with Kathy Boudin’s important exploration of

a critical approach in the classes she taught at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, however, provides an important basis for a more detailed examination of the potential and limitations of a critical teaching approach in a prison setting.

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Moira Casey and Karen Cajka
with Stephanie Roach

From Other to Another: Regional Campus Freshman English in Transition

The ideal Freshman English Program that we are working toward is one in which quality writing instruction—that is, instruction that centers academic writing on inquiry, that appeals to student curiosity and intellectual ambition, and that enriches the intellectual life of instructors as well—permeates the whole University system.

—Tom Recchio, UConn Director of Freshman English

One policy, document, program does not fit everywhere and everyone.

—Becky Caouette, UConn Co-Assistant Director of
Freshman English

IN HIS ESSAY ON “HETEROTOPIAS,” MICHEL FOUCAULT PROPOSES THAT THE INTERESTING aspect of the various sites within a society lies in “the set of relations by which a given space can be defined” (“Of Other”). To describe a site, then, for Foucault, also involves describing the other sites to which it relates and the nature of these relationships. For many years, a description of the sites at which the composition work at the University of Connecticut (UConn) occurred would most likely have excluded the program’s relationships to its regional sites—to the spaces where composition work occurred at the regional campuses. Like other flagship state universities where some of us, faculty and particularly graduate students, do composition work, UConn educates the majority of its undergraduate and graduate students at a residential main campus located far from its state’s urban centers. Yet a significant number of the University’s students are being educated at the regional campuses, smaller spaces that work to offer the same University education to students in other, primarily urban, areas of the state. Although each regional campus, or what the University calls its “other major

instructional sites" ("NEASC"), is developing its own four-year academic specialty area (Marine Sciences in Avery Point, Business in Stamford, Urban Studies in the Tri-Campus consortium of Hartford, Waterbury and Torrington), they exist primarily as two-year commuter campuses, serving traditional-aged students intending to complete their degrees at the main campus at Storrs as well as adult returning students completing their degrees through the Bachelor of General Studies Program. In providing "local access" to University offerings and "act[ing] in common for the benefit of the entire University" (Becher), the regional campuses of UConn are fulfilling part of the mission that the Strategic Planning Task Force on Regional Campuses articulated in 1997 and that the Board of Trustees endorsed as a ten-year goal of the University. At the time the regional mission was endorsed, the director of the Torrington campus hoped the statement showed "all campuses can become full service education centers and not just adjuncts in far-off places" (Becher). Five years later, the UConn Freshman English program faced the fact that it had fallen short of this goal in terms of supporting writing instruction at the regional campuses. We (Moira and Karen) worked as writing program administrators at UConn's regional campuses; we witnessed and participated in an attempt to reframe the nature of Storrs' relationship to the "far-off" places where UConn Freshman English was taught.

Moira served as the Composition Coordinator at UConn's Waterbury campus in 2002-03, while in 2003-04 Karen served as the Tri-Campus Freshman English Coordinator, based in Waterbury and was responsible for that campus along with those in Hartford and Torrington. When first approached about the position of Composition Coordinator, Moira was looking forward to her final year of graduate study in the UConn English Department, and the idea of gaining practical experience in writing program administration sounded great—she would expand her work experience and apply much of what she had learned working as a graduate assistant and composition teacher at the Storrs campus. Karen experienced a similar entry into her role as Tri-Campus Freshman English Coordinator; although hers was a full-time, one-year lectureship, she too had come straight from the graduate program at Storrs and was set to defend her own dissertation during the fall 2003 semester. Thus, we both inhabited dual roles, as Writing Program Administrators and as English doctoral candidates, as products of main campus composition pedagogical training and as representatives of regional campus priorities.

To better understand her new job, Moira first asked why Waterbury might need a "Composition Coordinator" at all. Her conversations with Waterbury composition faculty and administrators revealed that they needed more guidance and support than they had received from the Storrs Freshman English Office. Some instructors habitually gave students A's on essays not too far evolved from "What I did on my Summer Vacation." Students, many who

had begged to be over-enrolled (as the Waterbury registrar confirmed), packed these sections. Other instructors failed nearly every student, and *their* students filed complaint after complaint. Moira witnessed some of these students showing up in tears at the campus writing center, questioning whether they could ever meet their instructors' apparently impossible demands. Such teachers were, of course, the extremes; yet so great was the psychological impact of their methods that for other faculty, administrators, and even students, they came to stand as "typical" English teachers. In fact, most instructors held more reasonable expectations and strove to give students their best efforts. Yet if any teachers—good or bad, devoted or indifferent—had questions or wanted institutional feedback about their syllabi, assignments, policies, or practices, they could get it only from the Storrs office. Few, however, ever asked.

In one sense, this was fortunate; as Stephanie Roach (Assistant Director of Freshman English at Storrs, 1997-2003), attests, the UConn Freshman English Program, with its hundreds of instructors teaching thousands of students on the regional and main campuses as well as over fifty Cooperative Program high schools across the state, proved too unwieldy for just one Director (with little course release) and one graduate Assistant Director to effectively administer. But the silence that grew between Storrs and the regional campuses signaled a serious problem: too many instructors worked without any pedagogical support or sense of connection with the Storrs office. Simply put, Storrs failed in its responsibility to articulate and negotiate the principles and practices of the program with the sites engaged in its work. Stephanie found herself confronting two nagging questions: "Could an office as small as ours responsibly administer a program so large?" and "Was I the right person to advise from the 'outside' those inside each and every location?" Our spatially sprawling program needed stronger communication to ensure its integrity.

Thus, as coordinators, we strove to communicate the values of the Storrs writing program to the regional campus instructors and to help them make curricular changes sensitive to the needs of the regional student bodies but at the same time more uniform with the teaching at other UConn campuses. Moira, initiating this effort, did not view this process as an aggressive or dramatic one. Although she did want to enforce certain policies that she believed could only improve the instructional environment (such as forbidding over-enrollment), Moira did not want to force everyone at Waterbury to teach in the same way or to teach in the same way that faculty at Storrs were teaching (of course, the ways in which Freshman English courses are taught in a program as large as the one at Storrs vary enormously). Moira collected sample syllabi and assignments which she placed in files for instructors to consult, got the Writing Center up and running (serving as the sole Writing Center tutor as well), reminded instructors of important academic dates, and met with Tom Rec-

chio, Director of the UConn Freshman English program, and the other regional composition coordinators on a monthly basis to discuss issues facing the regional campuses.

During the two successive years we spent at the regional campuses, the entire UConn Freshman English program was undergoing a dramatic transition involving new course descriptions, different credit requirements, and an increased effort on the part of Tom Recchio and the Storrs Freshman English office to connect the various sites where composition instruction took place across the UConn campuses. Our efforts constituted early contributions to a larger and continuing process of programmatic changes to UConn Freshman English; now, after experiencing mental and physical distance from our original experience, we perceive just how great an impact those changes had upon the sites of composition in which they worked. Although in what follows we touch on ways we saw these changes affecting some of the faculty, staff, and students throughout UConn's campuses, we, of necessity, focus specifically on our own experiences, philosophies, and perspectives as writing program administrators involved in such changes. We certainly hope that, in opening up an examination of the nature of the relationships between the regional and main campuses at one university, we encourage others holding different positions in other institutions to add their voices to further enhance, and likely complicate, the discussion.

Navigating Programmatic Geographies, Material and Imagined

In 1989, when Tom Recchio became Director of Freshman English (FE), he initiated the first real discussion of how academic work, and specifically composition work, was accomplished across all UConn campuses. Over the years that would follow, the number of graduate students and full-time faculty working within the administration of the FE program would increase significantly, as would the exploration of the relationships among the various sites and spaces in which the work—administrative and teaching—of the program is performed. When, beginning in 2001, Tom instituted significant curricular changes to the FE program, the relationships of these sites suddenly became highlighted for everyone involved.

Prior to the curricular changes, freshmen at UConn took a sequence of two 3-credit courses, the first of which (English 105) focused on writing in response to demanding, interdisciplinary non-fiction and the second of which (English 109) focused on writing in response to so-called “imaginative” literature. The program maintained a clearly articulated philosophy, but instructors enjoyed great freedom in selecting texts and designing assignments to meet the program goals. While courses at the regional campuses were taught almost exclusively by adjunct instructors, courses at the main campus were taught primarily by Graduate Teaching Assistants. For many years Tom had felt that the TA teaching load was untenable.

The university defined a full TA assignment as twenty hours of work per week, and most departments met this requirement by placing graduate students in large lecture courses as graders and recitation leaders. However, the English department (with very few writing faculty) expected its TAs to meet the full instructional responsibilities for two sections of twenty students each, every semester. English TAs who wanted to be responsible instructors and students found it difficult to balance the demands of good writing instruction with their advisors' demands to privilege research over teaching.

While the TA workload raised questions about the effectiveness of the writing program at Storrs, Tom was assessing the effectiveness of the two-course curriculum itself. Teachers seemed to be spending many hours grading, yet the curriculum did not seem to be advancing the work of writing in the way that Tom desired. On every campus, ENG 109 had evolved into an "Introduction to Literature" course with less attention to writing instruction. Also, the link between 105 and 109 started to become less apparent; patterns of course registration revealed students deferring 109, not taking the second course until later in their academic careers, long past its intended utility as an introductory writing course. To address these issues, Tom determined that UConn needed to redesign the curriculum to increase both the quality and quantity of instruction in the FE courses. He designed two four-credit courses, each capped at 20 students and incorporating one hour of conference time per week; students could choose either English 110 (with non-fiction readings) or English 111 (with readings from literature) thus beginning their college careers with a single intensive Writing Seminar designed to prepare them for the writing assignments they would face over the next four years. Although the required FE credits would now be reduced by two (from the two-course, six credit sequence to one four-credit course), students in the new, workshop-like courses would get, through an emphasis on individual and group conferencing during each paper cycle, more individualized attention and thus a more intensive writing experience. Instructors still selected specific readings and designed their own assignments, but the new philosophy of the curriculum signaled a significant shift in both the concept and practice of strong writing instruction in the FE program.

The new courses emphasized complexity and rigor in thinking and writing. According to the course descriptions, students first and foremost must attain the "ability to write critical essays that demonstrate a thoughtful engagement with complex readings of some length that reflect points of view on material new for the students" (Recchio, "English"). Sequenced writing assignments "encourage extended and sustained inquiry" while revision moves students from "open-ended exploration to clarity of point of view and sustained complex coherence." Concentrated interaction with instructors and other students encourages a connection with real readers, and helps students come to a more nuanced and thorough

understanding of the nature and meaning of writing. The 110 textbook preferred by the Storrs FE office and required for first-semester graduate instructors exemplifies the pedagogy: *Ways of Reading*, Bartholomae and Petrosky's challenging anthology, offers highly complex, often theoretic, academic readings.

The intensity of the new curriculum allowed Tom to advocate successfully for mandatory reductions in TA teaching load at Storrs. At the same time, implementing the new

“reified a parallel sense of intellectual distance, of “otherness” from the main campus”

curriculum on all campuses necessitated a serious reconsideration of staffing and instructional practices throughout the program. As a result, the differing needs of the regional campuses became sharply visible to main campus. In their efforts to strengthen the composition program at UConn, those working within the program confronted, as those there now still negotiate,

the differing student bodies and instructional environments on the regional and main campuses, and more significantly, the psychological distance that had grown up between Storrs and the other sites.

These spatial issues which both propelled and inhibited the evolution of the Freshman English program on the regional campuses are, to employ composition theorist Nedra Reynolds' terms, “material”—the geographical distances separating the campuses and the work spaces allocated to WPAs, as well as “imagined”—the perceived power relations of WPAs and faculty, and the “intellectual hierarchy” University policies create in the student body (13). Interestingly, Reynolds' assertion that “[c]omposition needs to develop ways to study space differently that might close the gap between imagined geographies and material conditions for writing, between the spaces and practices” echoes criticisms made nearly fifty years earlier (30), in the first study of the post-World War II boom in the founding of regional campuses, and their relationships to main campuses. In a 1952 article tellingly titled, “Stepchild of the College Campus,” Clayton M. Schindler determined that, despite the fact that at regional campuses “commendable academic work is being done” while maintaining “a sound, low-cost way of minimizing economic barriers to the attainment of higher education,” considerable gaps existed which undermined “the legitimacy of the claim . . . that these divisions are ‘integral parts of their entire college or university organizations’” (192). Though he obviously does not use Reynolds' terminology, Schindler's analysis demonstrated that the geographical distance from main to regional campus reified a parallel sense of intellectual distance, of “otherness” from the main campus. He called for changes “to combat the indif-

ference of the [main] campus administrative and instructional staff to the program of the [regional] division” and, more importantly, “to correct the opinion of the [main] campus administrative and instructional staffs that the [regional] work is inferior” (194). Even when surveys demonstrated that regional campus students who moved to the main campus “equaled or surpassed their contemporaries who started at the parent institution . . . the proper administrative authorities ignored the results of these surveys, they did not utilize them effectively in informing their staffs, or the staff members themselves chose to ignore the evidence” (194). Finally, employing a striking image of simultaneous closure of both the “material” and “imaginary” gaps, Schindler optimistically “hope[s] that time and conscious effort will bring these ‘stepchildren’ into the bosom of the family” (228).

In the half-century after this article appeared, the University of Connecticut as an institution seems to have done little to fulfill Schindler’s hope prior to Tom Recchio’s arrival. The overall University policies and goals directly and indirectly created an imaginary space inhabited by students and some faculty which reinforced the “otherness” of regional campus academics, including composition, thus complicating the initial efforts of the Freshman English program to bridge both the material and imagined spaces of the six campuses.

Imagined Geographies: Confronting Hierarchies

A significant hierarchy we confronted during the transitional moment from ENG 105 and 109 to ENG 110/111 was the assumption that the regional campuses and their students were academically inferior to the main campus. For, despite claims that “University standards for admission and student achievement are uniform for all campuses” (Undergraduate Catalog 2004-5), admissions data from the Office of Institutional Research reveal that at least half of the first-year students admitted to regional campuses have been deemed unqualified for admission to the main campus at Storrs and, instead, were accepted to a regional campus to which they never directly applied.¹ These statistics reveal an “unofficial” admissions practice in direct contradiction to the University’s stated policy, a fact which regional campus fresh-

1. The ratio of applications to admissions at regional campuses is 195%. To illustrate: in the years 2000-3, 3,702 students applied directly to the regional campuses, while 7,247 students were offered admission—the additional admissions supplied by students who had originally applied to Storrs. Even assuming that every student who applied directly to the regional campuses was accepted (certainly not the case), fully half of each entering freshman class consists of students “rejected” from Storrs and “sent down” to a regional. SAT scores for Storrs-admits are 13% higher than those of regional admits, and mean class-rankings are 24% higher (SAT: Storrs 1149, Regionals 1015; Class Ranks: Storrs 78, regionals 63). Most disturbingly, 6-year graduation rates are 68% higher for Storrs-admits than for regional-admits (the 1999 six-year graduation rate was 72% for Storrs-admits and 42% for regional admits; the average is 69% vs. 41% over the past five years). All data is cited from the University of Connecticut’s Office of Institutional Research reports, freely available on the UConn website (www.uconn.edu).

men quickly discern. For example, Karen's students in her Basic Writing classes at Waterbury spoke quite openly of having been "rejected" by the Storrs campus and "sent down" to Waterbury instead. For some of her students, this process reinforced a sense that they lacked academic ability, while others took it as a challenge to prove that Storrs had made a mistake. And sadly, showing how far this idea of inferiority had permeated regional campus identity, the students also believed that because Karen had taught for many years at Storrs before coming to Waterbury, they were taking a "real" class with her, something that made them both proud (thus annoying their friends in other Basic Writing sections) and nervous.

Many regional campus faculty have internalized a similar sense of their students as "less than," and the cover of the University's publicly-stated policy over its private admissions practice makes this problematic mental space difficult to eradicate. In fact, no one seems to know in what way, precisely, the regional campus students were found wanting, as current graduate co-assistant director of the Freshman English program Becky Caouette demonstrates in her attempt to define the problem: "Sometimes students who apply to Storrs are sent to regional campuses for the first two years. Whatever the reason for this—it might be test scores—regional campuses oftentimes are considered the place where less intelligent UConn students go." Her fellow co-assistant director, Frank Napolitano concurs, citing the phrasing commonly used by both Storrs and regional campus students: "many students on the regional campuses are said to have 'flunked out' of the Storrs campus."

This results in a troubling belief among faculty that the courses they teach must be made less rigorous for the regional campus student body. Certainly the Storrs curriculum can succeed with regional campus students, even if some are, in fact, less prepared as readers and writers (compared to their Storrs counterparts) to undertake college writing instruction. Regional students can learn to read texts as complex as those endorsed by Storrs and respond to assignments that encourage them first to respond thoughtfully to the readings and later to construct coherent, thesis-driven academic essays on topics related to the readings. But we did not often find such instruction on the regional campuses. Moira discovered that some of the Waterbury instructors (not all, we should note) felt that their student population couldn't handle the rigors of the Storrs FE pedagogy. Moira disagreed—she didn't want Waterbury students to receive a watered-down FE experience. Ironically, those faculty who offer less demanding courses, and thus strengthen this demeaning perception of regional campuses, do so with the best intentions of helping their students feel better about themselves and their academic abilities. They want their students to succeed in composition courses, and so, we found that many instructors assigned readings and essay topics that they felt sure their students could handle successfully. Although we agree that confidence building can be important for some student writ-

ers, we believe students' confidence can still be built by challenging them to succeed with complex reading and writing assignments.

Interestingly, the classroom spaces of the regional campuses often exacerbate the "less-than" bias. While the Storrs campus boasts many new buildings and high-tech classrooms, spatial signals of "serious" learning, the regional campuses can feel like (and some, in fact, once were) high schools. Further, the very "regionalness" of regional campuses ensures that every student takes classes with numerous former high school classmates. Taking classes with one's high school buddies may help to create community within the classroom, but it can also help reinforce the imagined notion that attending a regional campus is less like attending college than it is like extending high school—what we might term the "13th grade" stereotype. Unsurprisingly, when physical environments seem not to have undergone significant change, it can be hard for students to make or maintain the intellectual change necessary for college-level work. Coupled with the University-created and faculty-perpetuated "less than" image, these factors militate strongly against one lone program's attempts to move its curriculum from "other" to "another."

Despite, or rather, because of, this negative image, we did, and do stand behind the Freshman English program's efforts to offer all UConn freshmen the guidance and challenge to succeed with their writing. We believe that our daily practices in the classroom can account for that underpreparation (as opposed to instituting fundamental pedagogical differences). Certain elements fundamental to the FE program—an emphasis on revision, student-centered classrooms, one-on-one conferences about student papers, just to name a few—we hoped to see incorporated into every FE class at Waterbury. We believe that regional campus students can and should be exposed to a similarly challenging writing pedagogy to which main campus students are exposed. Regional students may in fact be less prepared, but faculty who learn to reject the negative image can help them meet the challenge.

Imagined Geographies: Support versus Surveillance

For virtually their entire existence, UConn's regional campuses operated as separate fiefdoms, maintaining loose ties with the main campus at Storrs but propagating their own methods and identities. The Freshman English program is the first academic entity to undertake a serious and sustained effort toward curricular consistency across all campuses. But what one person sees as reinforcement another sees as imperialism. We felt that our roles were ones of reinforcement, but we knew that our presence on the regional campuses, and our attempts to enforce certain policies (such as the enrollment cap or the need for instructor/student conferencing) might be viewed as imperialist. Becky Caouette points out that "for years, these faculty and regional FE programs functioned without administrative

support from knowledgeable composition coordinators, and so the presence of someone from the 'central' campus suddenly showing up rocked a few boats, I think." The regional campus, its administrators and faculty, had become accustomed to acting autonomously; and thus a new WPA, installed by the powers that be at Storrs, often was viewed with some suspicion as a foreigner imbued with a strange authority.

The adjunct instructional staff understood this new presence of full-time WPAs at regional campuses as both support and surveillance. The regional WPA was forced to establish a seemingly conflicted "mental space" in which to convey her desire to respect the unique identities and needs of the particular regional campus, while simultaneously ensuring the coherence of the FE program to curricular goals; to assure instructors of their value, while simultaneously establishing her authority over their continued employment. Stephanie Roach, assistant to the director during this period of change, notes that "the program office was finding ways to do more responsibly what we wanted to do all along: support all teachers and students working in the program. But this gesture of solidarity and real commitment to local conditions was read by some as a regime change, simply a new and meddling administrative layer."

Stephanie's phrase "regime change" is particularly apt, as Karen at one point found herself labeled a "jack-booted Nazi" by the friend (a faculty member in a department other than English) of a long-term instructor who, after two years of intensive professional development support, remained unwilling or unable to adapt her composition course to the new curriculum and was removed from the FE faculty. Yet others, including non-English faculty teaching Writing Intensive courses, regularly sought her advice. Moira experienced this often frustrating duality as well. Some instructors viewed her as a means of support for their teaching. Upon her arrival at Waterbury, these instructors expressed their desire for more assistance with and feedback for their assignments, policies, and teaching practices. They willingly shared syllabi with Moira and even invited her to observe their classes. Others viewed her as a new and unfamiliar boss, and expressed apprehension about Moira's role.

The administration, however, seemed to feel differently. Early on, Moira sat down with the Waterbury registrar to discuss FE policies not in place there, particularly the requirement that instructors not over-enroll students into their courses. Such a policy, the WPAs felt, supported the instructors, allowing them to say no to students, to keep class sizes small, and thus be able to respond appropriately to each individual student's writing. The new curriculum, we also felt, might be even more vulnerable to problems caused by over-enrollment; students needed intense, individualized attention in their single semester of composition since they could not count on a second semester to continue their writing instruction. When Moira raised this issue, she referred to the "Freshman English Program" and its policies. The

registrar replied that she had never heard UConn-Waterbury's FE courses referred to as part of a program, and that she had never heard of the over-enrollment policy. Yet she was very pleased by the use of the term "program" to include the composition work being done at Waterbury, and she seemed grateful for both the policies and the authorities who would enforce them. Both of us found that the regional campus administrators felt the presence of a representative from Storrs to be useful and supportive. Still, many instructors bristled at the thought of Storrs imposing a rule, no matter how much to their ultimate benefit, from the top down. There was, as yet, no shared "mental space" in which faculty and WPA might meet, no sense of a unified Freshman English "program" concerned with the welfare of all its constituents, students, faculty, and administrators alike.

Constructing such a mental space among the regional campus faculty, administration, and WPAs requires both time and trust. "When walking into a new place, you don't know them, they don't know you, and in a new position where there is no history for what you are asked to do (and more especially if you are temporary without the chance of building a history), where does the trust come from?" asks Stephanie. "Navigating this kind of space, coming in from the outside isn't impossible, but it isn't easy." One solution which evolved on the UConn regional campuses is the appointment of a campus-specific "Composition Coordinator," typically a member of the adjunct faculty who possesses "institutional memory" to assist the (tenured or tenure-track) Tri-Campus Freshman English Coordinator. In a sense, the Composition Coordinators occupy a unique position which allows them to engage in what Howard Tinberg calls "border talk." Tinberg, in discussing the new language needed by community college educators to validate the scholarship of teaching and learning, uses the concept of border talk to mean "a language that has currency across the divides between disciplines and institutions" (xi). Although regional campuses of large state institutions function differently than community colleges, successful border talk nevertheless can bridge the divides between the different populations (of both instructors and students) within the same institution but located in different geographical locations. At UConn, the Composition Coordinators also teach a course or two and/or work in the writing center and so they perceive both the goals of the program as articulated by Storrs *as well as* the immediate goals of the student population they serve; in Tinberg's terms, they serve as "translators" at UConn's "borders." For example, one student at Waterbury found himself failing his FE class and told Karen that this proved his suspicion that really he wasn't "college material." However, after working in the Writing Center with Sam Robinson, the Composition Coordinator at the time, the student finally confided that following family tradition he had attended the local technical high school and thus felt at a disadvantage compared to the other students. Sam talked with him about the average Waterbury student's background and preparation, and helped the stu-

dent develop the confidence to retake the FE course successfully the following semester. Sam, in his position as a kind of border translator, understands both the Waterbury student population characteristics *and* the very real demands of the larger UConn FE program. In this particular case, his ability to “translate” for the student helped this particular student rethink his initial perception of himself as different and therefore inadequate.

Ultimately, the WPA must construct, maintain, and invite regional campus faculty to meet in the “mental space” of a unified Freshman English program. WPA work consists mostly of forming relationships—with student and teachers as well as other administrators and campuses—and helping others form working relationships with colleagues, students, administrators and so on. The presence of regional WPAs facilitates the formation of relationships that unify a program. The FE and Composition Coordinators generate two-way communication—the regional WPAs bring communication from Storrs to their location but also, importantly, provide the main campus with ideas, response, and critique from the regional campuses. This critical feedback ensures that local concerns are addressed beyond the regional campus, strengthening the program as a whole. In turn, a stronger program means better support and advocacy for local conditions. Stephanie argues that “one responsibility of regional WPAs is helping to educate their local populations about the positive returns that come from cooperation,” and we would emphasize the importance of such a responsibility in order for regional campus WPAs to create a mental space in which connections amongst all the campuses are evident to all and perceived as symmetric, useful, positive. Perhaps because we ourselves worked so hard to achieve this, we agree with Tom Recchio in seeing a Freshman English program which “develops policies that respond to the specific needs of the student population on each campus. [What makes this work is] the quality of the personal relationships of everyone involved. There seems to me to be trust and openness.”

Material Spaces: Compression

Just as the mental spaces of a program and its material spaces such as classrooms affect the performance of composition work, the physical spaces from which composition programs are administered affect the function of the administration and can, potentially, affect the work of composition as well. When Stephanie first became the FE Assistant Director in 1997, the program inhabited an 8-foot-square faculty office; her predecessor even shared this tiny space with two other graduate students. So the small space designated as the Freshman English office wasn’t even wholly dedicated to Freshman English. Stephanie began, then, to increase the imagined geography of the office, in part by arguing that the FE office needed to be perceived as a public space that would invite composition instructors to enter, and not as a private office that might discourage access. Tom Recchio agreed; the two other graduate

students moved out, and a couple of years later, when the English Department moved to a newly-renovated building, the FE Program settled into an office nearly three times the size of the original.

Stephanie also articulates an existing sense of metaphorical distance between the administrative office, such as it was, and the physically distant classrooms where FE classes took place. She says that when she began her work in the late 1990s, “the program didn’t seem to be located anywhere.” As with most large, rurally located universities, buildings housing classrooms appropriate for FE activities could be quite distant from the English Department. This meant that the “program,” such as it was, fragmented into individual courses and didn’t appear to be connected to a larger program.

Significantly, when faced with the problem of administering a composition program with virtually no physical spatial presence, Stephanie worked hard to create and publicize an identifiable center—a “Freshman English Office.” She felt this to be important because “if a teacher doesn’t understand the curriculum, has nowhere to turn with questions, feels outside the system enough to subvert its principles, then students are not learning at the level the university desires.” As a graduate student and composition instructor during this period, what Moira felt reaffirms Stephanie’s hypothesis. Although she wouldn’t say she felt “outside” the system—and certainly not enough so that she would subvert its principles—after she completed the required teaching course for new graduate assistants, she felt entirely on her own. To her the UConn FE pedagogy seemed fixed rather than evolving; once Tom had communicated the principles, TAs would simply move on to deploy them without additional reflection on or revision of the pedagogy. Of course, in reality, that pedagogy did evolve—Moira tried different textbooks (moving away from and later back to the department’s preferred text, *Ways of Reading*) and different classroom methods, but she did so largely independently, without the sense of a community in which teaching ideas and activities could be tested or critiqued. Although a spatial center was not all that she craved during these years, it seems interesting to note that when Stephanie began developing and publicizing the FE office as a public space, a stronger and more active community of teachers emerged even just within the Storrs campus. Brown bag workshops and teaching discussions started up, and suddenly people at all levels of graduate status started to share their teaching endeavors on a regular basis. A program office that could be considered the center of the operation emerged, and a community began to build around it.

Yet, once such a center has been established, recognized, and populated, it is possible to question the necessity of its powerful centrality for the entire UConn system. A typical metaphor, used in the corporate as well as academic worlds, for the relationship between “headquarters” and other offices describes the human body: for UConn, Storrs would function

as the “heart” supporting its regional “limbs.” But centering Storrs presents problems. Storrs sits not at the geographic center of the UConn system, but rather in the northeastern corner of the state, not far from Hartford and Avery Point but a substantial distance from Stamford, Torrington, and Waterbury. Although metaphorically and administratively, Storrs is “central” to the program, focusing on its centrality inhibits discussions of regional differences or the possibility of regional autonomy. For example, Becky admits that while Storrs benefits from greater “manpower and resources,” she finds herself “beginning to resist the idea that a series of regional campuses must have a ‘heart.’” Stephanie, too, wishes to avoid “an exclusively Storrs-centric view.” In the past, because of a concentration of material and human resources in Storrs, UConn FE admittedly exhibited a Storrs identity. Thus, more space devoted to FE offices on the regional campuses will, in our opinions, enhance the decentralizing of the program, change the way in which composition work gets done, and thereby shape and make visible a *university* identity for Freshman English.

The first regional campus FE office was created at Waterbury in 2003 (interestingly, of a size smaller than the original 8x8 office at Storrs). Moira, as Waterbury Freshman English Coordinator, and after her Karen, as Tri-Campus Coordinator (based in Waterbury), both strove to develop this office into an active space in which the administration of the program as well as much of its theory, conversation, and practice could happen. In any organization the type and location of office space signifies status, so regional WPAs without offices, with shared offices, or with offices located far away from other faculty or staff can be seen as unimportant; further, the spatial erasure or distancing can undermine their effectiveness by impeding access to faculty, staff, and students. Becky says that she would “like to see each campus not necessarily have a Storrs-like FE office, but something useful in terms of resources—a range of textbooks to browse, a collection of colleague’s assignments, syllabi, and sample student papers.” Such resources make it possible to “adapt courses to meet the needs of different campuses and staff while still maintaining the same level of standards and expectations.” The office space itself, as well as the resources collected within it, can help the regional campus programs address the differing needs of their diverse populations in ways consonant with the pedagogy and practices of the FE program as a whole. Syllabi files, for example, can provide instructors with examples of *both* Storrs syllabi and those created by their fellow regional campus instructors.

Material Spaces: Sprawl

Prior to the recent changes in the administration of the program on the regional campuses, geographical distances seemed to present nearly insurmountable obstacles. For one, the geographical distances between the six campuses functioned to prevent administrators from

traveling among the campuses and communicating. For example, while the Hartford campus lies just over 30 miles from Storrs, the Waterbury campus is nearly 60 miles away, and the Stamford campus over 100 miles distant from the main campus. The geographical challenges have, in the past, been exacerbated by a lack of financial support for travel among the regional campuses. Tom Recchio notes that until recently, “there have been almost no resources to pursue regional campus initiatives (for the first ten years of my job my discretionary budget was \$0.00!).” As a result, the regional campuses largely operated on their own; in Stephanie’s words, “Some locations came to lead an existence so separate from the program office [at Storrs] that ties between the two were almost imperceptible. . . . in our various spaces we were all simply operating in what seemed like comfortable silence.”

Through the implementation of the curricular and administrative changes, Storrs exerted a central authority: the changes emanated from Storrs, Tom as the director worked at Storrs, and even the regional campus coordinators arrived fresh from Storrs. A co-director of the FE program, Sarah Winter was also hired at and located in Storrs in 2002. Yet Becky, like most of the WPAs involved at the time, expresses reluctance about perpetuating “a stigma that the Storrs campus is elitist.” While imposing overall programmatic change, the main campus WPAs came to reconsider their authority and to see a need for altering the Storrs-centric identity of the program.

Becky served as a regional campus facilitator during the transition to the new, one-course, four-credit FE requirement. This experience revealed to her that, as our prior examples have illustrated, many of the faculty at the regional campuses sometimes resentfully (and accurately) perceive the Storrs office to be the “dictator and the regional campuses must follow orders.” Although this type of relationship is, to use another spatial metaphor, far from the truth, the belief in its existence must emphatically be countered by FE administrators. To that end, Becky traveled to the regional campuses, spoke with the faculty, and generally made herself “available to answer questions, discuss logistics, and incorporate regional campus suggestions into the FE evolving policies.” FE administrators from Storrs working on regional campuses begin to understand the situation of the regional faculty and the regional sites in which they work. As a result, those graduates who served as regional WPAs express reluctance to elevate Storrs above the other campuses.

Interestingly, the early practice of employing graduate students as WPAs on the regional campuses may have (despite the best intentions of the Storrs office) exacerbated the problems in the inter-campus relations, and, rather than helping to decentralize Storrs, might actually have served to *recentralize* Storrs. TAs may appear to be young and inexperienced, especially to regional campus adjuncts teaching at their campus for perhaps ten or even twenty years: “One of the biggest issues is resentment, for lack of a better word from some of

the more experienced members of the regional campuses,” notes Becky, “when a new WPA, originally and often a TA [from Storrs], gets plunked down in the middle of their campus and is suddenly ‘in charge’ of the composition program.” Why do this, then? Why install TAs as WPAs at the regional campuses when doing so will likely cause resentment? The answers speak to the marginalization of composition within the academy and within English departments. Full-time English Department faculty members, already marginalized by their regional campus status, can be reluctant to sink further in the hierarchy by taking on composition, even in an administrative role.

“providing the means
to ‘de-other’ the
regional campus
composition programs”

Typically, English faculty at the UConn regional campuses do not teach composition as part of their regular teaching load, are not generally trained as compositionists, and thus would not make likely WPA candidates. Additionally, the FE Director could fairly easily assign a TA to a regional campus, without having to request a new faculty line or adjunct salary. Working within a system frequently reluctant to allocate faculty and/or financial resources to composition work, Tom initialized the process of connecting the regional campus programs using the resources already at his disposal.

But these recentralizing Storrs-incursions ultimately proved necessary in providing the means to “de-other” the regional campus composition programs, and to eventually garner additional resources. As Stephanie characterizes it, the FE program “did the right thing (changing the curriculum) for, initially, the wrong reasons (considering benefits to TAs but not other instructors) and with the wrong communication style (top down). Yet, thanks to the advocacy of the regional WPAs, a new, more effective model for FE program operations ultimately resulted.” The regional WPAs who work in the spaces of the regional campuses with the regional faculty, visibly and powerfully connect their work to the main campus. Tom Recchio asserts that while “the presence of transitional WPAs where there have been none before creates anxieties among adjunct faculty, generates resistance in some cases, and presents challenges to the administrative status quo” those WPAs who moved from Storrs to “the UConn regional campuses have been profoundly successful in their work as evidenced by the substantial commitment of resources that have followed in their wake.” This substantial commitment of resources has included, notably, the creation of a full-time tenure-track position of Tri-Campus FE Coordinator, a compositionist who administrates the FE programs at the Hartford, Torrington, and Waterbury campuses. A full-time member of the English faculty at Torrington took on the position of Director of FE at UConn’s Stamford campus. These full-time, tenure-track or tenured faculty

members possess more real (and perceived) authority than we ever possessed, and thus these appointments help balance the administrative centrality of Storrs.

Other Becoming Another

The imagined geographies and material spaces in which the University of Connecticut Freshman English program exists may contain obstacles, but also contain the means for lessening those obstacles in the quest to move from “other” to “another.” One way to reframe the relationship among the main and regional campuses is to think in terms of “coherence”—not the literal meaning of sticking together, but the idea of congruence and consistency. Before she left Connecticut for the University of Michigan, Flint, in 2003, Stephanie saw serious strides being made toward “coherence rather than carbon copies” on the regional campuses and realized that “reaching absolute coherence . . . is far less important than the work we all do to get somewhere together.” Phrases such as “carbon copies” and “absolute coherence” seem to echo the kind of time-space compression of which theorist Nedra Reynolds is skeptical; Stephanie is skeptical as well, and so she foregrounds the metaphor of the journey, or movement between spaces—the “work we all do to get somewhere together”—over the metaphors that would describe the destination, or ideal space. Becky echoes Stephanie’s conviction, pointing out that “now we have voices that let us know what the concerns are at the regional campuses” and that this confluence of voices now comprises the UConn FE program. This results not in an identical program at each site, but rather in a mutual learning process, and a contact zone in which various voices can be expressed, validated, and responded to.

Yet, working at regional campuses created in us an understanding of the ways in which “otherness” can be more deeply, and persistently, felt in those geographically distant spaces. From their inherently privileged positions on the main campus, Storrs FE administrators can hold different perceptions about what elements constitute a coherent program, as well as when such a program has been attained, than will those who spend their time in the other spaces. The differences in the make-up of the instructorate at the main campus and regionals also perpetuate this sense of otherness. At the main campus, graduate teaching assistants, who participate in an intensive, week-long training in UConn’s specific FE curriculum and goals prior to entering the classroom, as well as in a weekly seminar during the first semester of teaching, teach nearly all of the composition courses. At the regional campuses, however, composition courses rest in the hands of adjuncts with widely varying backgrounds and experience, whose education about the curriculum and goals of the UConn FE program has not been nearly as complete or systematic. Efforts to alleviate this disparity, in the form of workshops held at the regional campuses, are welcomed by many of the adjunct instructors, and such responses encourage the FE administration. Becky comments that “the

excitement I see in both Storrs and regional campus instructors when we do workshops, and the questions they ask, lead me to believe they are more in need of support, collegiality, and the chance to talk things out and the encouragement to try new things than anything else.”

The Sites of UConn Freshman English

Foucault asserts that “we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.” As we suggest at the beginning of this article, the previous neglect of the regional campus Freshman English instruction at UConn might have led to a perception that UConn Freshman English was reducible to one site or that the main campus Freshman English program could be superimposed on the other sites. Like Foucault’s “heterotopia,” a kind of “counter-site” in which other sites “are simultaneously represented [and] contested” regional campuses may both represent and contest the university as it functions on the main campus. The changes in UConn’s program, curricular and administrative, have inspired a discussion (to which we intend this article to contribute) about how UConn’s regional campuses both represent and contest the main campus’s Freshman English program.

Viewing the UConn Freshman English program as a set of sites defined by their interrelationships highlights the practical and theoretical issues confronted by the various campuses. The practical issues involve work conditions such as salary, benefits, and instructor time investment. Tom Recchio expresses a keen awareness that “different work conditions” encountered by Storrs and regional campus FE instructors perpetuate the “otherness” of regional campus composition work: “At Storrs, TAs are required to work 20 hours per week for their full TA appointment [which] includes full tuition waiver, medical insurance, and a salary of between \$16,000 and \$20,000 per academic year to teach one section of twenty students per semester” while adjuncts earn only “around \$4,500 per course with no benefits.” Adjuncts, then, must teach at least two courses per semester to earn a salary comparable to what graduate students earn for teaching only one, thus “WPAs cannot expect from adjuncts the same time commitment that TAs at Storrs are able to make.” Realistic about the interaction of material conditions and pedagogical goals as UConn strives for a more coherent FE program, Tom asserts that “the next step in improving composition instruction on the regional campuses, then, concerns improving the work conditions of adjunct instructors.” The UConn Department of English is moving in that direction, supporting union efforts for long term contracts and increased pay, and offering stipends to adjuncts who participate in faculty development workshops. The very fact that working conditions are evolving and being discussed demonstrates that a dialogue about UConn FE now includes all of the sites at which UConn FE work gets done. Policies in development must now account for both the unique needs and shared goals of multiple sites.

Despite the material challenges, spatial distance need not result in radical pedagogical

cal difference. It is possible to create coherence, but the task involves a great deal of long-term vision as well as small steps toward that vision. Sometimes, as with UConn's installation of TAs as WPAs at the regional campuses, these steps may recentralize the main campus before a long-term vision of decentralization (if desirable) can be achieved. Such a project must also involve creating a sense of community among the instructors who teach within university writing programs. These programs need to undertake an honest assessment of their overall culture, imagined and material, and the nature of the relationships among the campuses. They need to decide whether they would like their freshman composition program to become an integrated whole, or whether they would prefer separate, targeted composition programs at each campus. Regardless of the outcome of such a decision, WPAs must be mindful of two primary concerns. Tom Recchio succinctly defines these as, "Communication, communication, communication in a program defined clearly in relation to principled goals and teaching practices, and resources, resources, resources targeted in flexible ways from campus to campus to support that work."

UConn's process of transitioning its regional campus Freshman English programs from "other" to "another" has illuminated the conflicts between and within the university's material spaces and imagined geographies. These conflicts, rooted in the origins of the regional campus system and virtually unchallenged for decades, will not be resolved by the work of compositionists or English departments alone. However, the process of curricular change in the FE program has made us more cognizant of the power that both material spaces and imagined geographies exert over those who work within them. We have learned to heed Nedra Reynolds' admonition to "attend to neglected places, in their material rather than their imaginary forms" (30), to learn not to elide, but rather to value distance and difference wherever we accomplish the important work of composition.

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Kim Gunter

Queer Disruption in the Rural South: Institutionality and the Viability of Queer Composition

I MAKE MY LIVING WITH WORDS, MY OWN AND OTHERS'. MOST SIMPLY STATED, MY WORK includes (as a teacher) helping college students to write more effectively, (as a WPA) keeping our composition program afloat, and (as a scholar) writing up the research that I conduct within my classrooms. It's a job description that sounds pretty mundane on first glance. However, when I remind myself that the students who sit in my classrooms were often never supposed to be there, that the academic prose that many think those students should write often contains little meaning for and little reflection of those students, that visions of just what writing programs should be often conflict in violent and impactful ways, and that my own scholarship challenges what often strikes me as a homophobic academic status quo, the job description begins to reflect its more harried reality.

I'm haunted by a question from the 1977 MLA convention, a question since archived in Audre Lorde's anthology of essays and speeches *Sister Outsider*. Back in Chicago, Lorde, describing herself "a Black woman warrior poet doing my work," asked her listeners then (and me now, all these years later) are we doing ours? (41). Am I doing my work? Minimally, are my students leaving my classrooms better writers? Is our composition program up and running with students accruing their general education credits? Moreover, do my classrooms provide a place for marginalized students, who often do not see themselves reflected in academia, to carve out a room of their own in the ivory tower? Do I push for the revision of what is, *still*, a non-prefixed "academic writing" (prose that might more aptly be tagged a white-, male-, heterosexist-, traditionally abled-Standard English) so that students need not abandon, in June Jordan's words, their own "community intelligence"? (59). Am I enacting that vision not only in my own classrooms but also furthering it in our FYC program, on our campus, and in the professional field of composition?

I try. Weak as it is, that's my answer. And, reflecting the see-saw between banality and controversy that my professional life seems daily to ride, one way that I try is through the single-themed composition course, a pedagogy that, perhaps naively, until arriving on my current campus, never struck me as radical.

I hit upon teaching composition courses that focus on single themes (especially the traditional Composition II, academic-arguments-with-research course) when I was still in graduate school. I had one of those teaching epiphanies that come 'round not nearly often enough. I was making copies. As I stood there, scorching my retinas and breaking the backs of the bound periodicals I'd checked out of the graduate library, I listened to two fellow graduate students, draped over chairs in the lounge and haranguing about their students' writing. Pointing to his latest batch of essays, one mocked his students' thesis sentences: "Cloning is like genetics, yet they are also different' or 'No one but God should have the power to clone!" he hooted, stabbing student essays with an index finger. I didn't so much judge the derision these TAs felt for their students' writing. I mean, we all have bad days. But suddenly it hit me: if I had three weeks to learn the facts about cloning, to become familiar with the literature surrounding the subject, to learn the personalities within the national and international debates, to place the polemic within my own ethics, and to produce an essay delivering some pearl of insight, I'd write a shitty paper, too. And it'd be likely that my next paper on euthanasia or genetically engineered food or some such topic wouldn't be much better.

The question for me, then, became, how can I, through my course design, my writing tasks, my reading assignments, and the like, encourage student writers to write good academic prose, not stereotypical student essays? The answer that emerged was that I should ask my students to mimic as closely as possible the meta-process of writing that I knew most academics to use. It seemed to me that the process of most academics' scholarship included attention to a single, narrowed subject over time; discussion of that subject with colleagues; understanding of the research, both past and current, devoted to that subject; the coming to one's own position within the larger debate; and composition of multiple documents on that same subject, documents that are informed by other knowledgeable colleagues' opinions of one's writing. Single-themed courses, especially when they also employ writing groups, provide one viable means for effecting such immersion into academic writing. Students write more complex, intricate essays and take up more complex, critically informed arguments because they have had the time to do expanded research, to digest what they've read, to place themselves in the discourse, to hear dissent in the classroom discussion, to be challenged by knowledgeable readers during workshops, and to write both repeated drafts but also numerous essays on the same subject matter.

Moreover, single-themed courses can be aimed at particular students to generate even fuller experiences of FYC classes. Sometimes, it's simply a matter of interest: students from all sorts of different socio-cultural niches might enroll in a composition

course that advertises hip hop culture as its semester theme. Other times, given themed courses can be targeted toward particular campus groups: criminal justice majors might be more interested than the average freshman in taking a composition class that is concentrating on prison reform. Perhaps most powerfully, students who recognize themselves as members of identity-based communities might be particularly drawn to courses that foreground those subject positions. For instance, A. Suresh Canagarajah has noted how his classroom became a “safe house” where his African-American students celebrated their solidarity, particularly through their linguistic choices (174). Harriet Malinowitz has written of how gay and lesbian students in her gay writing courses found their own subject positions and the societal pigeonholing of them as worthy of academic investigation. Offering such courses to students who are traditionally marginalized within academia can work, yes, toward the valuing of diversity on given campuses. However, what’s even more salient for us in composition is that such courses can also open up academic writing to students who are often alienated from it and, in so doing, can work to change academic writing itself.

Such a conviction led me, while still a graduate student, to propose, develop, publicize, and teach “Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer Identities and Rhetorics,” the University of Illinois’ first-ever GLBTQ writing course. The class was housed, as all composition classes were, in Illinois’ Rhetoric program, but it was also co-sponsored by Illinois’ Women’s Studies and Unit One programs.¹ Therefore, while it was largely, though not only, self-identified GLBTQ student writers who registered for this course, these students represented many different facets of the university. Junior and senior Women’s Studies students, for instance, sat beside Unit One freshmen who sat beside traditional college freshmen who were simply completing their FYC requirement who sat beside students who had dual-enrolled in the class (completing extra readings and more complex assignments, thus receiving upper-division English credit). All of these students, though, showed impassioned engagement with the course’s subject matter, with me as their queer teacher, and with one another (engagement that was all the more satisfying considering that many of these students *were* simply fulfilling a general education writing requirement, the very site where motivating students is often challenging).

Students’ commitment to the course, though, wasn’t always expressed politely, in part because the course opposed not just heteronormativity but *homonormativity* as well. Owing to my own allegiance to queer theory and my insistence on queering the classroom,

1. Unit One is a University of Illinois program designed to achieve a small college atmosphere in a huge institution by offering students the opportunity to reside and take courses in the same building. The program is aimed at college freshmen and sophomores.

this composition course inspired not a seamless utopia for GLBTQ students but a contested space. I designed the class activities, the readings, and the writing tasks around the notion of queering identity. Thus, my students and I traced the distinct *differences* expressed by GLBTQ writers and thinkers, and the course's structure invited student-led discussion of and writing on these differences. Students' participation subsequently reflected just as much divergence

“not a seamless utopia
for GLBTQ students but
a contested space”

as the course readings (a stark contrast to the uniform debates on “gay and lesbian topics” in so many composition classes²). This environment allowed GLBTQ students to transfigure their writing, to form academic voices that mimed neither heterosexual objectivity nor stereotypical GLBTQ

positions. In so doing, in the model of, say, Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps*, academic writing itself was altered in our class as single essays saw students' “personal experiences” sit beside cultural analyses, which bookended literature reviews, which backed up against campus anecdotes, all equally essential and valid in making students' academic arguments.

Unwittingly, on a day-to-day basis, as I traipse from classroom to classroom, my most immediate concerns regarding composition probably center more on my latest batch of essays or my students' grades than on meta-criticism of academic culture—I likely log more worry-time focusing on Jose's five-page, single-paragraph essay or on Tynisha's fear of first person than I do on overthrowing hegemonic textbooks or religious allegiance to the Toulmin model. However, my students' reactions to that GLBTQ writing course suggest my priorities may be out of whack as perhaps what was ultimately the most important result of that class was not just the nods toward the reconfiguration of what's allowable in students' academic prose but the transformation of academia itself for marginalized students. At semester's end, we all receive the occasional notes and e-mails from students who've enjoyed our classes, but at this course's completion, I received more such notes—tucked into my department mail box, slid under my office door, stapled to a final essay—than I had ever before. Many of these students spoke of the stark contrast in which our GLBTQ writing course stood in comparison to the rest of their educations. One student summed up many peers' feelings when he wrote,

2. For a fuller discussion of the problems inherent in “gay and lesbian marriage” and “gays in the military” types of debates, particularly as they emanate from the use of composition textbooks and readers, see my essay “Gay Topics, GLBTQ Students, and the Queering of Composition,” forthcoming in Jonathan Alexander and Michelle Gibson's *Queer Compositions*. See also Sarah Sloan's “Invisible Diversity: Gay and Lesbian Students Writing Our Way into the Academy” for a discussion of the precarious position of GLBTQ students in classrooms that discuss these so-called gay topics without first establishing a safe space for GLBTQ students.

"I found a voice, not just in class, but a voice that finally connects with academia on some level that I have never been able to achieve. . . . The feeling of finally being able to identify with academic literature that has been engaging and provocative has provided a source of relief from the grind of consistently feeling disconnected from . . . a so-called 'general education'" (Tony³).

My allegiance lies with these GLBTQ students. I share their anger at the homophobia I see daily on college campuses. Moreover, I project my younger self onto my GLBTQ students and want to reach out to them, to offer a hand up to them, a hand I wish had been extended to my 18-year-old self. For that matter, I make my academic living off these students. While I believe that GLBTQ-themed writing courses targeted toward GLBTQ students can offer important alternative and liberatory spaces for these students, my publication, promotion, and tenure trace back to these folks. I have, then, all kinds of conflating investments in offering single-themed FYC courses to GLBTQ student populations.

Student responses, taken with my own experiences of having taught these classes, for some time said to me that not only were these single-themed courses empowering for some students but that the curriculum of single-themed composition courses was, to some extent, transferable. While my pedagogy is ever evolving and the single-themed mechanism is ever being revised, students at various universities (from a large, midwestern flagship institution to a regional southwestern college experiencing exponential growth to a small technological university in the Appalachian foothills), propelled by, for instance, the challenging dissensus they encountered in class, have time and again responded well to these single-themed courses, often improving their writing seemingly unknowingly or even despite themselves. To leave it at that, however, would mean ignoring place and the complications that can come along with it. If my themed courses had been accepted by various institutions scattered across the country and had even been lauded at some, if the courses had been largely appreciated by students and prized by some colleagues, if suddenly these courses did not work at a given institution, I had to ask, why? What blocks transferability where it was not blocked before? More specifically, why is a course of similar design rewarded at one institution but hobbled at another?

These questions began floating about soon after I decided to offer a new version of that GLBTQ writing class. Now at a new university, I'd already taught a few capital punishment-themed Composition II courses with much success (local papers had covered my and my students' trip to North Carolina's Central Prison and its death house). Moreover, as WPA, I'd talked frequently with my new colleagues about single-themed courses, even inviting sev-

3. "Tony" is a pseudonym, as are all the names I use to refer to students.

eral of my students from a prior semester to attend one of our composition faculty meetings so that they could describe their experiences therein, and four different faculty members had since then taught themed-FYC classes (on subjects as various as environmental justice to the Lewis and Clark expedition). So, perhaps due to the encouragement of CCCC's Progressive SIGs and Caucuses Coalition for "writing teachers . . . to take on research, pedagogy, and service projects that promote commitment to peace, justice, and human dignity—even when hazarding the ire of deans, chairs, editors, and hiring and review committees," I wondered what it would be like to offer a GLBTQ composition class on my current campus.

I assumed that there would be some differences.

During my first week here in southeastern North Carolina, still bumping into cardboard boxes and searching for the silverware, a new colleague shared with me the local Chamber of Commerce's (unintentionally ironic) campaign slogan: "100 miles from everywhere." The mountains in one direction, the beach in the other, urban metropolises to the north and to the west, I live in the rural south where church steeples replace skyscrapers and tobacco rows replace sidewalks. When out-of-state friends call me now and I'm not home, they leave messages, teasing, "You must be at Golden Corral," one of only two chain restaurants in our town.

My long-distance friends can tease, but my neighbors struggle. Census figures prove what the eye easily observes of the county that houses our university. A per capita income of just over \$13,000, a poverty rate of over 22% (not surprisingly, higher for children and the elderly), less than 12% of the population with a Bachelor's degree (that's less than *half* of the national average), and over 35% of county residents without a high school diploma (and that's more than *twice* the national average), sometimes it seems as though all that our county is rich in is burned-out buildings, vacant warehouses, and storefront churches (U.S. Census). When the manufacturing base left the southeastern U.S. (there are no Chuck Taylor Converse sneakers made in America anymore—the last U.S. plant that made them sits empty, twenty minutes from my house), what was left behind were women who at fifty years old were waiting tables for the first time in their lives and first generation college freshmen who were trying to pick a major that would allow them to improve the lives of themselves and their families without relocating from the area (a nearly impossible goal). And while our students' racial diversity makes our campus one of the most varied in the nation, one thing most of our students have in common (be they 18-year-old high school grads from the county seat or 48-year-old laid-off machine operators from three counties over) is financial hardship.

Thing is, I understand how my students feel. Myself a first-generation college student, my parents worked twenty-five years in middle Tennessee's garment factories, only to

be left with no pension, no retirement, not even a savings account, when those garment industries set sail for Haiti and China. My folks now work the nightshift at Wal-Mart and tell anyone who'll listen that it's the best job they've ever known.

There are a lot of things that I like about my new home—I like that I can drive down to the Piggly Wiggly and pay all my utility bills in one swoop. I like the fact that the local librarian knows that I'm the one who always orders interlibrary loan books. And I relish knowing that the best food to be had within a fifty-mile radius comes from Miss Callie Mae's, a gas station so far in the middle of nowhere that a regular pretty much has to take you the first time—directions just won't help all that much.

However, while my blue-collar roots and my southern sensibilities are fed by this little hole in the wall, the place has ended up re-lesbianizing me. Yep, I grew up with men with farmers' tans and with women who canned homemade sweet pickles, but I also live with my long-time partner and subscribe to *The Advocate*. The dissonance is, for the most part, something I like. In this place, though, at this institution, the dissonance can be deafening.

Rumblings about my queer self arose on my current campus even before I got here. There were blustery, dire admonitions against my hire delivered to senior administrators. The contract negotiations struck me as suspiciously rigid and cool. A mayday phone call from a future lesbian colleague that reminded me of those old AA commercials ("I'm-Jane-Doe-and-I'm-a-lesbian") came crackling and hyphenated over the wires. Loose-jawed, "Who'd a' thunk?" pinballing through my mind, the hiring experience was surreal. It was a job I accepted partially because I did want to work with students whose socioeconomic and regional backgrounds reminded me of my own, but the thing is, my experiences continue to be surreal. Just a few weeks ago, a senior colleague pulled me into her office, a brassy, tenured, New York transplant who is just what this department needs, mysteriously telling me to tread carefully, that our campus is where other campuses were fifteen or twenty years ago. Grateful for the mentoring (which I am increasingly aware of needing), still, I knew she wasn't sharing such warnings with the goateed medievalist whose wife just had a baby.

I don't know if my current university is where other schools were twenty years ago—I waffle between thinking that's an impossible generalization and thinking it's obviously true—but, either way, our institution is changing. For one thing, our university's enrollment has increased 64% in only five years. As what our state system labels a "growth enrollment institution," not surprisingly, our campus faces easily imagined tensions, and a continuum develops, *discomfort* on one end and *excitement* on the other, to describe all of this change. Originally a normal college, the university has mutated from a small, rural school where a tableau of long-time, tenured faculty educated a mostly local, largely working-class, racially diverse group of students. Now, our campus' capital projects can barely keep up with its

growth, and the university has begun vigorous recruitment of students from around the state and the nation and, in some cases, from around the globe.

Due to the swell of enrollees (both locals and those from outside the area), lots of new faculty, many young and many with new Ph.D.'s, have arrived on our campus. In fact, three-quarters of our faculty fall into one of two categories: 14% of our faculty have been here for more than fifteen years while over 59% of our faculty have been here five years or less. It would be too simple a matter to say that a division erupts that falls solely along seniority or age lines, but it would also be remiss to deny that some of that sort of division ends up existing. Particularly salient, it is, of course, senior colleagues (the very colleagues who *sometimes* employ tenets that many new hires might consider bygone—dicta like “We should be in the office five days a week so that our students have access to us” and “Ph.D.'s and subject area expertise matter less than having good teachers in the classroom”) who are the chairs of tenure and promotion committees and of departments. The excitement on our campus, then, can be palpable, but so can the angst, and most everyone, at least at some point, is unhappy about all of this change because (a) it's coming too fast or (b) it's not coming fast enough.

Our department reflects the growing pains of our larger university. When I arrived for my campus visit, anyone and everyone, including my department chair and my hiring committee, told me that this department was looking for a “visionary” to come in and overhaul its composition program. *Visionary*. The word peppered my visit the way church spires peppered the landscape. I've since come to wonder what some meant by the term. Certainly some saw that change was needed and sought it. The fact that, in only a year and a half, we've adopted new outcome statements for FYC, we've overhauled our portfolio system, and we've radically altered our placement process and that we've done these things with nearly unanimous accord demonstrates that the majority of the composition faculty was ready for change. But that opposing minority has been there, and sometimes, they sure seem loud. And powerful. And stealthy, for I am often caught unaware when facing their disapproval. For instance, I didn't expect controversy over what struck me as pretty moderate matters—it never occurred to me that some faculty would want to re-institute a common exit exam that students had to pass in order to complete FYC instead of allowing students to compile portfolios; I never thought that encouraging composition faculty to pick their own textbooks would be considered seditious; and it was never even a blip on my radar that teaching *any* single-themed composition class would be radical.

But radical it was—maybe not according to a great number of objectors but according to at least a single important one: my chair. I didn't anticipate the resistance. After all, before being hired, I'd forthrightly marketed myself as someone who structures nearly all of her composition courses around single themes. Moreover, when I had the previous semes-

ter marched thirty FYC students who'd been studying capital punishment off to the state's death house, the course evaluations (not to mention many campus colleagues' responses) were overwhelmingly positive. Furthermore, when other composition faculty began experimenting with their own themed courses and reporting their own successes, it seemed clear to me that single-themed writing courses were just one of many viable ways to teach FYC at our institution.

Upon first mention of the GLBTQ writing course, however, my chair balked. I had broached the class to him only as a courtesy, knowing that, in attempting to aim the course at our campus' GLBTQ-identified students, I would need to advertise it aggressively and that there might be fallout. I hadn't expected him to withhold permission for the course. I hadn't even known I should ask for it.

"It's not the subject matter" were the first words out of his mouth that I remember, followed by "It might be a problem." My hackles rose.

Under what was ostensibly a sincere if, in my view, misguided halo of "pro-student" philosophy, my chair set upon *all* single-themed courses. He worried that our average freshman would become bored studying the same topic all semester. He also worried that students who were disinterested in some topics might mistakenly register for or even be forced to enroll in FYC sections that focused on those very subjects. The WPA in me kicked in as I explained that no student on our campus *has* to take a single-themed FYC course as these courses constitute well under 10% of the total FYC classes we offer each semester. Moreover, the themes of all of these courses are advertised (more on that later) so that students can select or avoid these. For that matter, should a student unwittingly end up in a themed course, dropping and adding is always an option that first week of classes. Finally, whether particular themes make the "average college freshman" any less interested than he or she would have been in his or her required, general education composition class is doubtful, particularly on our own campus where such courses have garnered positive evaluations.

Next, he cited authority. Faculty couldn't simply decide to offer a single-themed FYC course. I should, he instructed, get approval for such courses by submitting a proposal for them to our department's Composition Committee, a committee that, as WPA, I chair. It's worth noting that my chair never went so far as to center himself overtly as the ultimate authority on composition in our department, but he did continually decenter my position. Now, as the WPA, I don't think of our FYC program as my own personal fiefdom. However, I do have a problem with seeking approval for a pedagogical initiative from a committee whose majority is 70% staffed by non-compositionist, non-tenure-track lecturers, many of whom received MATs from our own department—a committee make-up that the chair himself

decides and whose members' job stability, given lecturers' tenuous position in any department, almost entirely depends on a good relationship with that chair, a man who, in this case, is also my colleagues' former professor. I didn't say any of that. Instead, I offered, "But this 'approval' will be retroactive? We've already been offering such courses?" Unmoved, he cautioned that my proposal for single-themed FYC courses would eventually have to wind its way through our campus' Curriculum Committee. "Understand that this will take a while to institute," he counseled, suggesting I put off teaching the new incarnation of my GLBTQ writing class for a *couple of years*.

I tried explaining that I wasn't advocating systemic curricular change of the FYC program, that I was simply promoting faculty development, encouraging our colleagues to experiment with new approaches in their writing courses. Maybe next year I'd advocate conference-based courses, maybe the following a service learning course. And thus began a dialogue in which he and I could have defined one another's words but could not fathom the other's message. He kept advocating committee approval; I kept arguing that there was no change to our composition courses per se. He kept warning that we couldn't just do whatever we wanted in our composition classes; I kept protesting that it wasn't like I was asking FYC students to dissect frogs. He invoked uniformity; I said surely not at the cost of innovation. Ultimately, I did take his directives to the Composition Committee, and that Committee "sided" with me, deciding that single-themed courses are, like portfolio-based classes or collaborative writing courses, just one of many feasible ways to teach FYC.

By then, though, a pattern between chair and WPA had begun. Any new development in the composition program about which the chair learned⁴ earned a meeting or an e-mail. In said contact, the chair issued varying degrees of admonition. WPA, now calling up her raising, went "southern female," slapping sugar and smiling, saying things like, "Hmm, I hadn't thought of that" or "Thank you for that suggestion" or "I'll definitely look into that." After exiting the meeting and gargling with Listerine, the WPA then did what she wanted. The chair, trying to be politic in his wariness, had couched his directives ("I think you might want to wait on . . ." or "we need to rethink . . ."), all the while hearing himself say, "Do not do this now." But, in his politic language, she had heard loopholes ("Well, he never said I *couldn't* . . .") and promptly did what she wanted.

In this case, while my chair didn't offer support for the GLBTQ class, he didn't forbid it, so, I just called the registrar myself (normally the chair's prerogative). I told her that we

4. And I would like to say here "any innovative or revolutionary development in the composition program," but it was by that time clear that, given the time and place where I was now planted, I'd lost my ability to discern the radical from the merely different.

were going to offer a small number of themed-FYC classes⁵ and asked if there'd be any problem in getting blurbs indicating which course sections these were and what their foci would be inserted into our electronic registration system. Normally hesitant to customize the electronic system for anyone ("if we do it for you, we'll have to do it..."), she readily agreed, and I told her that I'd send my own blurb over ASAP and instruct the two other theme-based instructors to do the same.

I immediately set about drafting the blurb to end all blurbs. It spoke of gay culture and lesbian writers, activist texts and emic perspectives, student-centered classrooms and anterior spaces. I wish I could quote it here, but in a rare fit of optimism, I deleted it. I'd typed it up, sent it to the registrar, and never heard another word. For once, no fallout—no follow-up "ahem" e-mail, no "we've got a problem" voice mail. Before defragmenting my hard drive, "No need for this to take up RAM anymore," I'd thought, and deleted the description. "Everything's copasetic." Finally.

Or not.

Days before spring registration was to begin, something told me to double-check our on-line registration system, just to be sure. Clicking on department, then on course number, scrolling down to instructor, there it was, my blurb, edited to say the least: it read only, "Content Varies." I suddenly understood why Chuck Jones drew steam coming from Wile E. Coyote's ears. I thought of picking up my head and carrying it with me to the registrar's office so that I could stand there, head in hand, and just shriek. Instead, for once prudent, I called to my administrative assistant: "Miss Rachel [I'm sticking with pseudonyms but keeping the title by which nearly everyone in our department signals both affection and respect for Rachel], could you please call someone over in the registrar's office. . . ."

Thus began a series of tag-team conversations. Rachel: "They said the blurb was too long, given the electronic registration system's character-limit." Irate Me: "Well, why didn't they *call*! No, never mind. What is the character limit?" Another phone call and Rachel's reply: "They don't *know* what the character limit is." Smoldering But Pragmatic Me: "Fine. Tell them to put in 'GLBT Writing Course,'" thinking, "*That* ought to fit within their character limit." A phone call and Rachel's wary

"thought of picking up
my head and carrying
it with me to the
registrar's office"

5. I was not the only faculty member who planned on offering a single-themed composition course that spring. Following a meeting of the writing faculty in which I promoted this approach, two tenured professors decided to offer their own themed classes, one the Lewis and Clark class, the other focused on race and ethnicity.

update: “The registrar says that she doesn’t know what ‘GLBT’ means.” Indefatigable Me to Rachel, realizing that neither must Rachel have understood the acronym, else she would have explained it to the registrar: “It means ‘Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered!’”⁶ A Composed Rachel: “Well, the registrar says that *she* doesn’t know what it means and that the *students* won’t know what it means either.” Actually, that’s a good point, I’d thought to myself—I could imagine that young, just-coming-out GLBTQ students on this campus might *not* know what “GLBT” meant, and neither might straight homophobes—who knew who might end up inadvertently (not) enrolled in the class. Resigned Me: “Just tell her to put ‘Gay Writing Class.’” Here, suddenly and inexplicably, Rachel waxed what seem to be sympathetic: “Oh nooo.” It was an exhausting time. I didn’t know what Rachel meant, and, curiosity beaten down by fatigue, at that moment, I just didn’t care. I repeated: “*Tell* her to put ‘Gay Writing Class’ in the system.” It took over a week, and registration was well underway, but ultimately, that’s just what the registrar did.

Days later, a colleague dropped by to see me but stood chatting with Rachel first, engaged in an almost parodic dialogue, just outside my open office door. I listened as the two volleyed about my right to exist. “They have a right to live just like anybody else,” Rachel proclaimed, her voice rising noticeably above its usual hum. “I know, but some people don’t think homosexuality’s right,” my colleague gently lobbed to her. Rachel replied, “They’re human beings, just like you and me.” It was a little like watching community theater. Later, the two of us alone, my colleague said, “You know she was saying all that for you, don’t you? That’s why I just stood there and let her talk.” I had known that. It was Rachel’s way of offering encouragement and support while leaving our professional relationship and maybe my pride intact. Thing is, her communication *about* me *in the vicinity of* me was to reveal how so many on campus began to communicate *to* me. I seldom had a face-to-face conversation, positive or negative, with anyone about my upcoming queered writing course, about the Illinois course from which it derived, about my research, about GLBTQ studies in general. Instead, I began to hear about *myself* and *my* course (though it was a self and a course I barely recognized) in various and sundry venues.

Examples?

- Rachel e-mailed me regarding an odd, hand-delivered missive from our Student Government Association President. According to Rachel, on a half-torn piece of

6. Yes, by this time, at least in my public discourse on this campus, I’d dropped the “Q.” I’m not proud of that, but explanatory conversations started to suffocate me: “I’m offering this GLBTQ writing class.” “GLBTQ?” “Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer.” “Queer? They say that nowadays?” And, mired in terminology, discussion of the class itself, the more immediately important issue, would never happen. Thus, *GLBT*. And, for that matter, it’s not as if that acronym was non-controversial. (Sigh.)

notebook paper, scrawled in blue ballpoint, was a note, like the ones my friends and I used to pass in Mrs. Arnold's high school physics class, this one voicing "some concerns about the course you will be teaching in Spring 2005." Among the concerns was "How is this [class] going to benefit students?" (I wondered if the Algebra faculty were getting the same queries.) Our SGA President left her e-mail address and asked that I forward this information to her immediately.

- An older student dropped by my office. A junior now, she'd already completed her first-year composition sequence and wanted to know if she could enroll in my course for upper-division credit. Casually, she mentioned, "Yeah, a lot of the members of the Ten Percent Society⁷ have been acting stupid, saying things like," and here, in a sneering voice, she aped, "'Do you have to prove you're *gay* to take the class?'"
- "Have you seen *The Pine Needle*?" my partner, on campus for her psychology class, asked, passing me a copy of the school's newspaper. "Why do the gays and lesbians get a special English class? . . . Are they better students than the heterosexuals? Do I have to become gay to get special treatment and one-on-one individual classes customized just for my lifestyle?" (Pruitt 10). So railed one Ernest Pruitt. "[T]he homosexuals were [sic] trying to segregate themselves from the . . . school. . . . [M]ost heterosexual people would not feel comfortable in a class targeted toward gays and lesbians. . . . [I]t is a slap in the face that they get special treatment to take a certain class," he continued (10).

Not one of these questioning or complaining students ever spoke directly to me.

In response to the first scenario, I asked Rachel to contact the SGA President and to tell her that, if she had questions about the GLBT writing course, she was welcome to make an appointment to come by and speak to me. She did make the appointment. She did not show. Later, in the minutes of the SGA meetings that are posted on our university's web site, I read that a student government member "updated us on the Gay/Lesbian English class. This class is open to everyone; however, you do need the permission of the professor to take the class in fear that some student may just sign up for the class to cause problems" ("Minutes"). While that summation was mostly correct, I've no idea how the SGA came by this information as not a single representative ever spoke to me.

Regarding scenario number two, by the time this student stopped in and reported the Ten Percent Society's buzz, I had already e-mailed that organization several times,

7. The Ten Percent Society is a student-run organization that aims to serve students who are members of any minority community on our campus. It is our university's only organization that is outwardly inclusive of GLBTQ students. In the past, its membership has generally topped out at no more than ten or fifteen students.

informing them about my class and seeking their support. I never received a single reply, and none of the students who eventually registered for the GLBTQ writing class was a member of that group.

The third scenario was a more disturbing one for me due to its public nature. Pruitt's letter to the campus newspaper's editor was filled with misinformation, and had he or the paper itself asked me to comment on his allegations, I could have easily countered them. I could have noted that GLBTQ students *do* take "regular classes" at our university. (If, as the American Psychological Association estimates, nearly 20% of college students are GLBTQ-identified (Robison 55)—on our campus, that would mean nearly 900 students—obviously, all of these students were not enrolling in my Comp. II class.) I might have pointed out that heterosexual students were (and always had been) welcome to register for the class (and they, in fact, did). I could have questioned the assumption that "most heterosexual people would not feel comfortable in a class targeted toward gays and lesbians," refusing to believe that "heterosexual" is a synonym for "homophobic." I could have asked Pruitt to consider how GLBTQ students might feel in a classroom that is, even if unconsciously, "targeted toward" straight students. I could have highlighted Pruitt's ignorance of gay and lesbian studies programs that flourish nationwide, citing the 21 different North Carolina colleges and universities that offer GLBTQ coursework (Younger).

Perhaps most importantly, though, I might have deconstructed his references to segregation. To compare GLBTQ people's efforts to have their cultures and experiences reflected in college curricula with racist overseers' attempts to squelch the opportunities for and humanity of African-Americans by imposing a segregated system revealed to me a misunderstanding, not just of GLBTQ life and politics but of American history. Moreover, at a time when, according to national studies, nearly a quarter of all first-year students *admit* to harassing gay men (Robison 55); when less than half of GLBTQ members of Greek societies ever come out within those organizations (Case 69); when 60% of GLBTQ students do not feel safe being open about their sexual orientation during their classes (Renn 232); when nearly 11% of students have heard faculty make disparaging remarks or jokes about GLBTQ people (Renn 232); and *when 53% of GLBTQ students have censored their academic speech and writing in order to avoid discrimination* (Renn 232), I hardly think one GLBTQ-themed composition section, open to all who are interested and required of no one, represents a tidal wave of change. I wish that it did.

I said none of this.

See, the thing is, there are no heroes in this story. I rationalized, "It's a student newspaper. It really ought to be a forum for *student* opinion, not that of faculty." So my own letter to the editor, in response to Pruitt's, remained on my hard drive.

But, the truth is, I was beginning to feel not only angry or dismayed or frustrated. I was beginning to feel scared. For it wasn't just faceless students who were grumbling about the course. It was colleagues, too. From varied corners of the campus, from every level of the campus hierarchy, comments ricocheted. Deans and university lawyers and vice chancellors all began to question the course. And while it's true that I can only surmise what was said in their e-mails that boomeranged across the campus green or in their phone calls that hissed along the wires, the reason that I am left to surmise at all is at least as important to me as what was said, for, like our students, none of these colleagues ever spoke directly to me about this GLBTQ writing class. Instead, most spoke to my *department chair*, sending messages about the course to me through him.

There was no more dramatic a moment than when I received an e-mail from my chair indicating that he needed to see me "pronto." Only hours later, confounded, I found myself staring across his desk, stacked high with reams of white course handouts and white interdepartmental memos—but dotted by one triangle-pink flier.

You see, when it had become clear that our electronic registration system would not include the "gay writing class" tag until well after registration had begun, I'd printed up some thirty or thirty-five fliers that described the course and had posted them, mostly in the humanities building but a few elsewhere on campus. It was one of those fliers that my chair sat holding. He'd taken one down, and he tapped it as he clicked off the administrators who had "expressed concern" about the course.

Seeming to follow Pruitt's lead, some of our university's administrators worried over the potential legal repercussions that these fliers might invite. Pointing to the flier's bulleted list of course features, they questioned my choice to note that the class had been "designed for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students interested in writing about, researching, and discussing issues relevant to the GLBT community." According to our administration, my chair admonished, I *had* to admit heterosexual students into this course. Whatsmore, I had to admit *homophobic students* as well.

I wasn't quite sure where to begin my response. During the time period that I had proposed and then publicized the first incarnation of this course (and thus had dialogued with the directors of Illinois' Women's Studies Program, Unit One, Rhetoric Program, and Registrar's Office—with the entire campus community, as far as that goes, via university listservs), the rights of the *homophobic* had never come up. I was stymied.

The simplest thing to do would have been to note that heterosexual students were, by that time, already registered for the course. Several of my former Comp. I students (in this case, straight ones) wanted to take my Composition II class, and I'd already signed enrollment slips for them. (Whether or not they were homophobic, I couldn't attest.) Or, I might

have clarified that, though I could see how the flier could be misread, I'd never intended to disallow or even discourage the enrollment of straight students. I had meant only that this course would be taught from the first-person plural perspective, where "gays" didn't exist somewhere in the ether but in this very classroom.

However, neither the fact that heterosexual students were already enrolled nor the fact that the flier was being misconstrued was the point. At least not to me. It was the principle of the thing.

First, to paper the campus with fliers that advertised an upcoming course was commonplace. Furthermore, it was hard to imagine that administrators would have balked at the idea of our American Indian Studies program marketing itself to the Lumbee and Cherokee students on our campus.⁸ Would administrators really have been surprised to learn that most of the students who enroll in my own department's African-American literature course are African-American themselves? How many male students on our campus had chosen to enroll in our new Gender Studies minor? This is to say, to me, it was bizarre to consider it unusual or risky to advertise any class the subject matter of which focused on a societal minority to members of that minority. After all, such would likely be the largest and most committed, though certainly not the sole, audience for such a course, and even if that were not the case, this population would still bring unique and, albeit diverse, emic perspectives to the academic table. However, we are a racially diverse campus with a majority of female students, and those segments of our student population can be represented by figures from Institutional Research. Moreover, damnation doesn't automatically accompany race and gender. But, with a smaller, largely invisible, and frequently condemned-to-eternal-hellfire segment of our student population, our GLBTQ students, well. . . .

What would happen, I wondered, if I chose to ignore the class' by then already diverse enrollment and the routine nature of the publicity for the class? What if, instead of sharing information or reasoning that would likely allay the administration's fears, I chose instead to embrace the revolutionary aspects of the class? How, I speculated, would some of my colleagues (those focused on the rights of the *homophobic* if not the rights of the *homosexual*) react if I, for example, argued that GLBTQ students needed, harking back to Canagarah, a "safe house"? How might my colleagues respond if I noted that, on a campus far from

8. Our university was the first normal college in the nation designed specifically for Native Americans, and the commitment to our Native American students is, rightly, still strong here. And in fact, when I, the following year, taught a theme-based Composition II class on contemporary Native American issues and advertised the class with a very similar flier, there was, not surprisingly, no erroneous outcry about the legal repercussions of excluding white students.

having a safe zone movement,⁹ one room, designated a safe classroom for some 150 minutes a week, might mean a whole lot? That it might, as Kristin A. Renn directs all faculty to do, at least hamper the victimization of or even support and encourage our GLBTQ students? (236-7). What if I pushed the argument for a separatist space even further? What if I invoked Luce Irigaray, for instance, who has argued, “for women to undertake tactical strikes, to keep themselves apart from men long enough to learn *to defend their desire, especially through speech*”? (33; emphasis added). I wouldn’t be arguing, after all, for a members-only clubhouse (a concept already extremist on our campus) but for societal insurrection.

As I sat staring across my chair’s desk, though, the words of that tenured New Yorker resounded in my mind: “we are where other schools were fifteen or twenty years ago.” Fear crystallized in my gut. Fifteen or twenty years ago? We are where, say, Syracuse was in 1991, when fraternity members of Alpha Chi Rho printed up T-shirts that depicted a gay man lying prostrate and unconscious beneath a spiked club held by a “crow,” the edict to “Club Faggots, Not Seals,” justified by the ethic of “Homophobic and Proud of It,” stamped on the shirts? (Silverman and Kulkus). We are where Brown was in 1987 when some of its football players spat on Asian-American female students, calling them “Oriental faggots”? (Cockburn). We are where East Tennessee State University was in 1986, when a gay male student, “caught” having oral sex with another man, was coerced into a confession by campus police who then turned that man’s confession over to the local district attorney who garnered a five-year prison term for the ETSU student and justified the virulence of his prosecution by saying, “I am concerned about it [homosexuality] in this community. In the light of the apparent ease of which I have observed many of these people to engage in homosexual encounters . . . they are endangering everyone by spreading AIDS”? (Miller 284). We are where the University of Oregon was in 1992, admitting in a *self-report* that “the university environment is neither consistently safe for, nor tolerant of, nor academically inclusive of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals”? (qtd. in Watkins 271). We are where, in a 1991 *USA Today* nationwide survey, several universities confessed to being, that is, where “sexual orientation accounted for most acts of intolerance on their campuses” (Watkins 269)—where (in 1989) some 1,329 *reported* homophobic episodes occurred? (Watkins 268). If our campus *is* where those campuses *were*, “What have I gotten myself into?” I sat (nauseated and) wondering.

So again I admit: there are no heroes in this story. I am certainly not one. What I *am* is an untenured, assistant professor. In my heart, I suspect that it was not the prose on those

9. “The safe zone concept is simple; the college community identifies, educates, and supports campus members who are concerned about the well-being of LGBT students. When a person volunteers to be a safe zone contact, he or she is pronouncing nothing about personal sexuality but is instead underscoring an interest in the college’s LGBT population” (Hothem and Keene 364).

fliers that gave rise to concerns. I think the *existence* of the fliers was the dilemma because the existence of the fliers pointed to the existence of GLBTQ students, GLBTQ faculty, and GLBTQ curricula. And here, in this place, I could substitute “extraterrestrial” for “GLBTQ” and

“running on a cocktail
of naivete, passion,
arrogance, mission, and
righteous indignation”

get no more strident a reaction or askew a glance *from some*. However, I said none of that. Instead, I submitted, to the will of my chair, to the will of some members of my administration. I'd been running on a cocktail of naivete, passion, arrogance, mission, and righteous indignation for months. Now, that cocktail was watered down by something as unadorned as job security. In an

ironic backtracking, I walked the campus, taking down my own fliers. There wasn't much work to do. Most of the fliers had already been ripped down anyway.

The thing is, if there are no heroes, as much as I hate to concede it, there are likewise no villains. If I'm no Superman, my chair is no Lex Luthor. On the one hand, he serves an increasingly young, increasingly diverse faculty that is more and more steeped in its own disciplinaries and pedagogies, sometimes in direct opposition to his own epistemology. On the other hand, he answers to a similarly metamorphosing administration that itself answers to an involved, largely local, largely traditional Board of Trustees, a Board that only recently pushed for Parent/Professor Conferences, federal privacy laws and the fact that a good many of our students are nontraditional adult learners be damned.¹⁰ And there my chair sits, a chimera, part faculty member, part administrator, bridging the widening chasm of changes on this campus. I don't envy him.

I know, as a writer, that I need to conclude this essay, but conclusions keep eluding me. Why? Well, for one thing, there's still so much that you don't know. I haven't told you about the stonewalling of the dual enrollment option for juniors and seniors interested in taking the GLBTQ writing class. I haven't told you about the request from local television that I give an interview about the course. I haven't told you of one colleague's word of warning that I watch over my own and my students' safety. In trying to get this class offered, there was incident after incident. It's hard, then, not to be exhaustive. The isolation that I can feel here tempts me to run after you, tugging at your coattails, adding, “No, no, that's not all. You're not gonna believe what happened next.”

But this conclusion is hard to write not only because I'm abridging this story. It's hard

10. See student journalist Scott Ammons' series of articles in our university's student newspaper for more information regarding this eventually defeated (by the faculty senate) initiative.

to write because conclusions, by their very nature, should provide some pearl, right? They're supposed to say to readers, "Here, take this for your troubles." But, the truth is, I'm not sure what I think the last word is on my efforts to effect, here, in this place, this LGBTQ writing course.

My first stab at writing this conclusion saw me declare that my work is thwarted here. As proof, I found myself quoting from my own research journal. Despairing, one entry reads, "I have come to believe that this work is impossible in this place. My efforts may make others' work possible in the future but . . . right now, in this place, this work can't be done."

Anymore, I'm not so sure of that. After all, *I am enacting* queered composition scholarship and queered composition pedagogy here, ever how contested the work may be. In some ways, the disturbance that the work induces on this campus may even be what is most worthwhile about it. I'm beginning to prize the institutional response as a sign of the work's effectiveness. If nothing else, it is a disruption of, if not a homophobic, at least a heterosexist norm. The debate—from the upper echelons of the campus' administration to the editorial column of the campus' student newspaper—proves to me that a discussion about LGBTQ students' place at this university was needed. That conversation is happening now, even if it does remain to be seen in what ways it will be productive.

I am finding, then, that, here, where it has been a struggle just to scratch out a niche wherein I can do my work, my scholarship is always already praxis, and in exciting ways. Many of us hope that our scholarship will make a difference—in our field, on our campuses, in the lives of our students. In this place, long before research is written up, before it's read by peers or heard at a conference, my work is already realizing those aims, at least somewhat. Maybe, ever how glacially slowly, it helps to pull our campus toward a more progressive space.

The trick is to figure out how to continue the work without getting depleted, fired, or both. The nuggets of support that fell my way during the promotion of this class (the Multicultural Center director e-mailing encouragement; the Gender Studies director volunteering to help post fliers; the registrar jotting, "Thank you for responding to special populations within our university community. I see transcripts from other schools with Gay and Lesbian titles. I understand you are taking some heat. . . . Hang in there") were not too far short of life preservers for me. And the students who e-mailed (as one, for instance, did anonymously, saying, "I've never heard gay stuff discussed positively before") motivated me beyond measure.

Still, it was a lonely, alienating business, and the lack of support does quell the work. But how does one invite support? How does a queer colleague ask straight peers¹¹ to care enough, first, to educate themselves about the peripheral position and then to work to centralize it? I felt that even my closest departmental allies never really understood the fear and the

11. Or a female colleague ask male ones or a Latina ask white counterparts . . .

institutional marginalization and the professional risk I experienced, and that I may still face. And that makes me think that somewhere in here ought to be a call for more gay and lesbian studies programs or GLBTQ academic concentrations or at least more alliance between GLBTQ scholars and their (straight? compositionist?) allies so that individual queer professors (especially untenured ones) don't have to fight these battles in forlorn, hazardous isolation.

Moreover, we must make manifest facets of academia that often remain implicit. There is programmatic vision and administrative leadership. If, for instance, a given department values diversity, our mission statement must not only affirm so, but departmental plans ought to define it and identify how we plan to evince it, in our faculty and in our curricula. Moreover, both faculty and particularly administrators ought to ensure that their contact with one another does not occur only when faculty feel as if they have been summoned to the principal's office. But there are also the composite values of given departments and the institutional clout of given players, both of which confounded me in my new workplace. As academics, so much of our training is overt: we are raised up in blatantly social-epistemic graduate programs, for instance, or align ourselves with openly Marxist theorists. But there's another kind of training, the Every Day, that hones expectations in often unconscious ways. Studying in an English department like Illinois's, for instance, whose faculty chose to write and sign departmental position statements *against* the university's Chief Illiniwek mascot and *for* graduate student unionization in many ways trained me to expect overt political action at the department level. Furthermore, working at multiple universities where WPAs were plainly recognized not only as scholars in their fields but also experts on their campuses taught me to expect a similar regard. Learning, though, that leftist political action and powerful WPAs were not the tradition in my current department went a long way toward making me more appreciative of where I've come from and more savvy as to where I am.

Double-gestures have become a habit: on the one hand, I think that GLBTQ compositionists have to decipher whether our work is feasible at a given institution. I'm not talking about determining whether our work is *welcome* but if it is *possible*. Because I, upon my arrival at this institution, sought to continue my queered research, resistance to themed courses generally and especially to my GLBTQ one felt not like some irksome, thick-headed puzzle to sort out. It felt like a personal threat. It felt as if conservative forces were attempting to obstruct my scholarship (whether they meant to or not, whether they even *cared* or not). Moreover, given that resistance didn't heighten until the GLBTQ course was proposed and promoted (after all, there were no reprimands about the Lewis and Clark themed FYC class), it felt as if not just the class nor even my research but my career, my life, my right to exist on the campus was being challenged. On the other hand, here I am, and here I'm thinking of staying. I am committed to centralizing GLBTQ students in university curricula, par-

ticularly in FYC programs, partially because that's how I make my academic living and partially because I think it is a matter of justice. Just having a conversation about doing so, on this campus, is, I believe, valuable, if also tumultuous and intimidating. Anything more (like the fact that the class will, despite the controversy, be offered) is concrete progress. The material effects of my scholarship can, then, here, have directly tangible and beneficial consequences. And part of the reason I'm doing this work, be it both painful and rewarding, is, after all, to effect those changes. It's tough going to work and some days feeling not only like the resident lesbian but the resident *alien*. But I do feel alive as a working scholar/teacher. The work is important somehow, maybe more so than it was at Illinois, where it sat among not just queer theory classes but drag shows held at the Illini Union.

I do write with trepidation. I worry that the reflections that I record here will label me a whistleblower or a purveyor of "revenge journalism" or that this very publication will worsen my own condition. But milieu is important—it colors the work and, perhaps, squelches too much of it.

All this and there is still the course to teach. And that brings a whole slew of new questions. How will colleagues respond to the film series that I plan as part of the course, to the guest speakers who arrive on our campus, to the fieldtrips for which I'll request funding? Moreover, if I have already faced challenges, what have *my students* lived through—in dorm hallways and in campus cafeterias, in gym locker rooms and fraternity houses? How will their experiences enter into our classroom? There is still so much to come.

The first death threat arrived recently. Well, not a death threat as much as an ugly (here in the South, that means "impolite") request. Rachel had stepped out to lunch, closing the door to her outer office behind her. When I slumped out of my own office, heading down to our copy room, I noticed that one of those old fliers, wrinkled and stained, had been slid under her door and lay there on the floor. Picking it up and turning it over, I found that it bore, "Fagots [sic] go away!" I'm on my way today to our local printers, to have it laminated. I've scrawled a giant, capitalized "NO!" across the bottom in red permanent marker. It should make a nice addition to my office door.

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Saving the World or Teaching Writing?: Complicating Binary Critiques of Politicized Writing Pedagogy

The Function of Theory in Composition Studies. Raúl Sánchez, Albany: SUNY, 2005. 123 pp.

Defending Access: A Critique of Standards in Higher Education. Tom Fox. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999. 122 pp.

Changing the Subject in English Class: Discourse and the Constructions of Desire. Marshall Alcorn. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2002. 151 pp.

IT IS GENERALLY AGREED THAT EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION REQUIRES SYSTEMIC adaptation to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Open-admissions students, in particular, may require help negotiating reading and writing requirements if they are to be successful in college. Students can also benefit by learning about the politicized nature of literacy requirements because, according to William Sedlacek, one predictor of academic success is whether students understand how political forces structure both the educational system and the larger society. In his thorough 2004 study on noncognitive assessment in higher education, Sedlacek concludes that the “research has consistently shown that students of color who understand racism and are prepared to deal with it perform better academically and are more likely to adjust to a predominantly White school than those who do not” (43). He further suggests that studying other “isms,” such as sexism and ageism, may help women and other groups be educationally prepared to negotiate the vagaries of discriminatory systems and learn to turn “obstacles” to their advantage (44).

In composition studies, politicized pedagogies address these pressing needs by helping students critique and negotiate power structures through rigorous writing and research. Yet critics within the field, such as Thomas Rickert, warn that pedagogies that explicitly challenge societal power “can nevertheless produce new forms of power and privilege that in turn produce new resistances; further alienate already cynical students; and (re)produce the possibility of violence” (291).¹ In addition, voices outside the academy continue to assail open-

1. The violence Rickert warns against is a psychic oedipalization that occurs in societal contexts of authority, such as schooling. Rickert suggests a “post-pedagogy” that gives control over writing to students and reorients their subjectivity to a post-oedipal mode of possibility, drawing on work by Gilles Deleuze and Slavoj Žižek.

access education and politicized pedagogies with a number of problematic claims that demand response. The most commonly-heard refrain, continually reinvented by conservatives, is that of declining standards. This trend, popularized years ago by Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, continues to influence educational policy in the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind program—only one of many efforts to reinstitute the assumed superiority of traditional literacy standards. Further, critics worry that the emphases of multicultural education are misplaced; such pedagogies simply go too far, as Diane Ravitch bemoans: “Demands for ‘culturally relevant’ studies, for ethnostudies of all kinds, will open the classroom to unending battles over whose version is taught, who gets credit for what, and which ethno-interpretation is appropriate” (86). In a similar vein, Lynn Cheney argues that in addition to studying civic and global problems, students should garner “a true understanding of past and present” with patriotic education, carefully studying the ways America works—“what we have done well—very well, indeed” (par. 13).

Writing teachers should be aware of three books that address these complex issues, although in radically different ways. First, Raúl Sánchez critiques politicized writing instruction in his 2005 *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies*, arguing that ideological approaches inappropriately make writing a mere means to a end. While we've heard similar complaints leveled against compositionists' attempts to “save the world,” Sánchez's assault is a theoretically sophisticated one that critical pedagogues should consider. Tom Fox's 1999 *Defending Access: A Critique of Standards in Higher Education* sheds light on issues Sánchez (and other critics) raise. The strength of Fox's study, in addition to his defense of open access against conservative calls for standardization, is his explicit rendition of multicultural praxis, showing how theory and practice merge in both student and institutional texts. And, in a particularly insightful addition to the conversation, Marshall Alcorn's 2002 *Changing the Subject in English Class: Discourse and the Construction of Desire* carefully considers the power differential that continues to pervade even critical classrooms, and suggests that psychoanalytic theory should inform ideological pedagogies if they are to avoid reproducing the resistance and alienation against which Rickert warns. Taken together, these three books offer new avenues of research and theoretical insight that complicate and disrupt the unproductive and false binary that writing teachers should stop trying to save the world and instead teach an unpoliticized, “pure” version of academic writing.

“an appropriate, even unavoidable, place from which to address problems of politicized exclusion”

Each of these texts holds in common a deep concern with the content and conduct of the college writing course. They collectively persuade me that the college writing course is an appropriate, even unavoidable, place from which to address problems of politicized exclusion. I agree with Fox that if we are to prevent further inroads against access, then writing teachers, as literacy experts, must “enter into the ideological definition of ‘standards’” that promote greater inclusion (70). Composition pedagogy, of necessity, is a politicized endeavor that works for or against access. The politicized composition course may be oriented towards issues of multiculturalism, gender, sexuality, or class, or be focused on civic literacy, cultural studies or critical pedagogy. But whatever the emphasis or course title, these approaches to writing instruction acknowledge the political dimensions of learning to read and write, and help students understand the gatekeeping function that literacy standards always perform in society.

Sánchez's concern, however, is that politicized pedagogies inappropriately take the focus off writing: “Many composition theorists have sought to connect our field’s interest to the cultural practices that comprise an increasingly complex, interconnected, and written world. . . . [T]hey have changed the object of study on the assumption that the category of *writing* alone cannot describe the theoretical and cultural situations they see before them” (9). He argues that critical pedagogies, rather than exploring writing itself, give primary status to certain master terms, such as *ideology*, *interpretation*, *discourse*, *meaning*, or *communication*. Just as the composition course is viewed as a service course to serve the needs of other disciplines, writing teachers themselves employ writing as a means to achieve ends of ideological indoctrination, cultural interpretation, consciousness-raising, meaning-making or dialogical relationship building.

Teachers may question whether such privileging occurs in any given writing classroom, but it is also fair to ask why means-to-an-ideological-end pedagogy is necessarily a problem. It could be argued, for example, that Writing Across the Disciplines courses routinely use writing as a means to achieve disciplinary learning goals. The purpose of Sánchez's critique, then, emerges as he reconsiders the function of theory in the field and assesses its value and future trajectory. He believes that composition theory, as it currently informs politicized pedagogy, undermines the credibility of the field itself.

Sánchez explains that current theoretical practice consists of mining the larger realm of critical theory for applicable concepts. Compositionists seek the academic exchange value of theory for a field that is constantly viewed as service-oriented and subservient. Critical theory as an object of study is, of course, a complex body of texts written by philosophers, Marxists, and cultural theorists. The “intellectual heft” of theory makes it

appealing to teacher-scholars who seek disciplinary status and publishing opportunities (77). Sánchez uses the example of James Berlin to illustrate a common pattern. In “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” Berlin presents Althusser’s theory of ideology and then applies that philosophical frame to composition research. Subsequent scholars have adopted this strategy with the result that theory and empirical research now are “largely irrelevant” one to the other (2). Composition theory has become “an assertion of a relation between critical theory and composition practice. These forms of composition theory . . . remain the predominant ‘methods’ of theorizing in our field today” (13). The problem, in Sánchez’s assessment, with this borrowing method is that it never obtains its primary stimulus from theorizing the act of writing itself.

Here is where Sánchez’s work can be of value to those committed to open access education and critical pedagogy. For Sánchez, meaning is not created, transferred or established through writing. Rather,

to study writing might be to try to explain why and how it is that when one writes, one acts as if meaning were to issue. That it never does issue, because the arrangement of symbols (or, signifiers) is only ever “understood” through the further arrangement of symbols, is something else that the study of writing might try always to account for. (58)

This suggestion, that composition theorists tackle problematic questions—questions such as why meaning evades written representation—may help critical pedagogues at open-admission schools revision their work. If meaning is unstable and illusive, might not that fact be particularly well-demonstrated in multicultural classrooms, where meaning is constructed, yes *written*, very differently by those from varying cultures? Might not the very writtenness of culture, ideology, and interpretation be illustrated in student writing? Rather than adopting theory from other fields to gain status, composition theorists might seize the opportunity to generate their own theoretical insights. It is well to keep in mind Charles Bazerman’s observation, “the irony that although writing has been centrally implicated in practices of human cognition, consciousness and culture for over 5000 years, it still is not identified as a major university discipline” (36). Bazerman goes on to predict that the field of composition is poised to take on the challenge of synthesizing a “large, important, and multidimensional story of writing. We are the only profession that makes writing its central concern” (33).

Sánchez’s argument—that writing (as opposed to ideology/culture) be the focus in composition theory and practice—may be helpful in taking up this challenge. Yet I wonder if his argument that ideology or culture is privileged over writing may itself falsely separate

mutually constitutive entities.² He admits at one point that “it is possible, even necessary, to theorize writing and culture together” (77). Still, he believes cultural theory holds promise only as it recognizes writing not as product, but as (re)producer of culture. He finds that cultural studies’ pedagogies merely analyze and read culture, enacting a “rhetoric of literary interpretation” (69). In his view, analysis and interpretation take the focus off textual production. He presents examples from James Berlin and Michael Vivion’s *Cultural Studies in the English Classroom*, showing how teachers themselves describe practices in which “writing is, once again, only a means to an end, the by-product of a prior, interpretive act” (69). He concludes that writing “is not imagined or understood” by teachers “as a cultural and rhetorical activity” and that writing is not “presented to the students as such” (69). Cultural studies teachers may disagree. To resolve this conflict, researchers might take up Sánchez’s recommendation, following Linda Flower, that empirical research interrogate theoretical concepts (13-14). Researchers might investigate cultural studies classrooms to determine exactly how writing is understood and presented to students.³ It also seems contradictory to suppose that interpretation and analysis, ideologically based or not, can be relegated to a category distinct from that of textual production. Perhaps writing teachers could envision writing, ideology and culture in a recursive relationship in which no term holds hierarchical status. The intriguing point that emerges from my reading of these texts is how Tom Fox brilliantly demonstrates exactly this complex understanding of how writing, ideology, and culture intertwine.

First Fox deconstructs the pervasive notion that standards and access are goals somehow diametrically opposed.⁴ That opposition is precisely the one that conservative critics, such as Dinesh D’Souza, William Bennett, and Allan Bloom, try to set up. Fox challenges the assumptions upon which these critics base their arguments, noting that they “claim their version of the university will provide students of color with academic and economic access, even though history has proved them wrong. And they then assert that multicultural education

2. Sánchez sees *ideology* and *culture*, as well as additional notions such as *thought* and *ideas*, as effects or “enactments” of writing “attached retrospectively to always-already-written texts” (6-7). He sees this as a distinctive realization that goes beyond “the familiar admission that most human activity requires or takes place through or in written or otherwise signifying discourse” (5-6).

3. For recent texts that investigate writing in a cultural studies setting see Tonya M. Scott’s 2005 dissertation, *Composition Studies and Cultural Identity: Writing Instruction at a Historically Black University*, Donald Lazere’s 2003 “Composition, Culture Studies, and Critical Pedagogy in the Managed University,” and Ira Shor and Caroline Pari’s 1999 *Critical Literacy in Action*.

4. Fox compellingly argues that the worry over declining standards is a not-too-well concealed effort to disallow educational access to minority groups. He shows through historical example that the standards issue has been raised again and again when the power balance of society seems to be shifting towards equity and away from the privilege granted to upper-class white males (18-39).

and affirmative action actually deny access" (5). Fox presents statistics regarding SAT scores, affirmative-action programs, and programs such as California's English Only law that reveal the reality of the "minute, almost imaginary changes toward a multicultural society" that the standards movement is attempting to reverse. Further, he complicates the definition of literacy standards, showing how teachers' standards may be just as challenging and rigorous as "bureaucratic standards that almost always emerge from a political context of crisis" (10).

Fox confronts the fallacy that his pedagogical and administrative focus on multiculturalism can change the world, and admits the impossibility of such a task for any writing teacher. But does that mean that small incremental change is also impossible? That ground Fox refuses to concede, and in doing so provides a model for how hegemony can be resisted and redirected. Teachers do not always have administrative authority; nonetheless Fox suggests they "enter into the mire of institutional change, and transform those structures that work against access" (70). And the means to achieve such transformation is not just ideological, it is primarily and consistently *textual*. The power of Fox's book is that he gives specific, down-to-earth examples from his experiences at California State University, Chico, of writing at work, of textual interactions that elicit real-world change. In one example, he recounts how a letter to the editor in the local paper complained about American Indians having grades "doled out on the basis of their race" (74). Subsequent media conversation circulated the "commonsense" argument that standards should be raised. Soon after, a university provost, apparently in response to this media conversation, sent a memo to deans and chairs requiring that faculty enforce "demanding" writing standards in each discipline (72). The problem the University Writing Committee [UWC] found with the memo was that it moved the question of writing standards away from a faculty-based Writing Across the Disciplines [WAD] committee, to a bureaucratic stipulation (73). Fox asserts that the mandate for "commonsense" standards "signals hegemony at work. Undefined or vague standards (usually simply resting on status quo conditions) remain a primary tool of hegemony against access" (75).

Fox describes a long-term and complex response from the UWC, writing faculty, and administrators. A key text was a memo constructed by Thia Wolf, chair of the UWC, which "recast" the provost's memo, "suggesting to faculty, chairs, and deans ways for the standards requirement to become something other than a new set of rules to exclude students" (84). Wolf then organized a series of conversational meetings for departmental faculty to discuss writing assignments and evaluation. Further, WAD made a series of strategic moves aimed against the bureaucratic hegemony of exclusion. Their highly regarded faculty newsletter, *Literacy and Learning*, published a front page "collage of quotations," beginning with "published authors of color, all [who] argued for language standards that would enable access, standards that would be more plural" (85). Next on the page was an invitation for faculty to attend a WAD workshop

to explore diversity issues. The page concluded with quotations arguing for traditional standards, including an S. I. Hayakawa quotation about English-only. The successful workshop was followed with an article in the newsletter that confronted the original provost's memo, making faculty the agents for diversity standards: "Faculty . . . questioned . . . prescriptive 'standards of acceptability' as antithetical to instructors' individual approaches and emphases in teaching" (86). The result for CSU, Chico was a successful reframing of the "gatekeeping" standards memo. Fox's very specific and detailed examples give his argument currency and cogency. Rather than appealing to ideologic theories of plurality, Fox demonstrates textually how hegemony can be rewritten to enable inclusion.

In another example of how ideology becomes, to use Sánchez's phrase, "one of the many terminological residues of writing," Fox cites his students' texts to make his argument for a progressive and nuanced definition of writing standards. He shows how teachers "challenge students to achieve more, to be more thoughtful and reflective about their writing, to be more effective and powerful in their critiques, to turn their attention to compelling and important topics to write about" (iv). Fox presents excerpts from student writing that provide specific evidence in favor of access. He also shares examples of when his students fail, while showing that "lack of skills only rarely explains failure" (11). Again demonstrating his point textually, Fox shows how "failure is usually caused by a complex web of social and political circumstances" (11), precisely the circumstances that conservative calls for standards obscure and ignore.

"Writing theory or pedagogy that is divorced from the material conditions of power that surround its production, transmission, and reception, leaves out too much."

What I want to call attention to in Fox's text, then, is its central pedagogical focus on student writing. Writing, culture, and ideology intersect recursively in these examples. Keeping in mind Sánchez's critique of means-to-an-end pedagogy, these examples contravene the notion that ideology is privileged over writing, and demonstrate how hegemony can be reinforced or redirected—one text at a time. If, as Sánchez claims, an intriguing fact about writing is that we (falsely) assume it will unproblematically transmit meaning, these examples nevertheless show how texts produce functional meanings. Functional meanings, derived from material texts, determine real-

world actions, such as policies regarding access and basic writing. Theory must account not only for the instability of meaning, but also for the pragmatic fact that material texts and words themselves create consequences for human beings. Writing theory or pedagogy that is divorced from the material conditions of power that surround its production, transmission, and reception, leaves out too much.

Still, in the book's final chapter, "Access and Classroom Practice," Fox acknowledges that scholars are re-examining the effectivity of critical classrooms: "The profession has come to suspect claims of political transformation" (91). He believes such suspicions are based on evolving understandings of power and hegemony. Fox answers the critics with a tentative framework for how teachers can create localized writing standards that both challenge and create opportunity for their students, for example, valuing "writing that seeks to reduce the violence of inequality—the social forces that prevent access" (92). Still, I believe critics legitimately raise problematic questions that deserve further study—do politicized pedagogies at times substitute new repressive hegemonies for those they challenge? What about Rickert's claim that politicized pedagogy may reproduce resistance and unethical power differentials? Marshall Alcorn's study of how desire is constructed in written discourse clarifies the psychic relationship to power that the writing classroom elicits.

Alcorn sees writing as an act spurred by desire, yet the writer's desire exists in an intersubjective relationship with the desire(s) of the other (teacher/audience). Negotiating competing desires presumes an act of agency. Alcorn therefore provocatively claims the "problem of agency" is more important in composition studies than in any other field: "Agency is more central to composition because composition makes the most irrational demands on agency" (64). Unfortunately, instructors often teach composition "as a simple exercise in rational thought" (64). Alcorn alternatively offers a telling description of how conscious and unconscious forces intersect in the complexity of the writing act:

Composition characteristically requires not a rational act but a subtle, unconscious response to competing and inchoate intuitions and desires. . . . This, in fact, describes how good writing succeeds. As we seek to anticipate the responses of others, we interrupt and complicate what we ourselves want to do. Clearly, it is the desire of the other that must interrupt our relation to our own desire. (64)

This definition of writing elucidates the perennial student question about what the teacher wants: "students . . . unconsciously intuit that tacitly and unconsciously imitating a teacher's desire is more important to successful writing than following the explicit directions given by teachers" (63-64).

If students want to imitate a teacher's desire, then how do we account for the problem of student resistance? Clearly the student writer may be less than consciously aware of

not only her own desires, but also the desires of the teacher/audience/other; this fact becomes particularly apparent in the politicized classroom. Alcorn describes the irony that “when teachers gain energy in their own speech, students fall strangely silent. They are at a loss for words; they are sometimes confused, uncomfortable, or silent. Often this silence masks a pain that will not, or cannot, be spoken” (95). Rational discourse, careful logical explanation, fails to persuade. Psychoanalytic theory accounts for such resistance in terms of certain attachments or “libidinal investments” (17). These attachments make up the student-subject’s sense of identity and are maintained at a physical bodily level: “Human subjects, while they do show multiple and conflicting identities, also reveal defensive resistances to discourse If you ‘fill’ a person’s mind with new discourse, there is little chance that person will *be* this new discourse” (16-17).

Psychoanalytic theory can offer politicized pedagogy an understanding of the libidinal forces that critical thinking and writing elicit. For Alcorn, teachers disingenuously suppose the primarily enjoyable character of writing: “it is a mistake to believe that writing (and the political advancements it can effect) is essentially pleasant. Writing is always haunted by masters and interlaced with forms of authority or correctness that we cannot easily abandon without guilt or discomfort” (95). Alcorn’s point here is most relevant for open-access education and politicized classrooms. Teachers, as authority figures, present versions of master discourses (correctness being one) that likely will empower and enable students in society. Teachers want to help students bridge gaps of class and culture not only with correctness, but also by encouraging writing that questions inequality and simplified explanations for societal ills such as racism, sexism, and poverty. Yet students cannot easily ignore the attachments of identity and culture. The language of the academy challenges and disrupts deeply embedded socialized identities.

Nonetheless, certain forms of attachment can be redirected and changed, although this may entail a slow adjustment process. Alcorn explains that a physical/emotional experience of grief occurs when beliefs are challenged and changed: “giving up strong beliefs is a form of mourning” (110). Drawing on Freud, Alcorn points out that “the work of mourning . . . consists of withdrawing libido from its attachment to an object—[which is] hard and painful work” (112). Rather than indoctrinating students into political enlightenment, what composition teachers might better attempt is to help students “explore how desire supports beliefs and how the ability to be fully responsive to the ideas and real feelings of others requires slow adjustments in bodily feeling” (128). Alcorn’s chapter “Engaging Affect” recounts the use of reflective journaling and subsequent classroom readings/review to chronicle this process of “negotiation and mourning” (118). This process works “precisely by not asking students to change. Instead, it simply lets students speak honestly, and in the

emotionally charged silence in which students listen to each other, they come to define themselves differently" (119).

For teachers of open-admission students, I particularly recommend Alcorn's intriguing Lacanian reading of various politicized pedagogies and their relationship to questions of agency and resistance. He asserts that Lacan's four discourses (master, hysteric, university, and analyst) "can help composition theory better understand how the circulation of desire . . . can contribute to democratic cultural practices" (67). Certainly Alcorn's psychoanalytic inquiry may inform compositionists' efforts to not only subvert, but to productively use resistance. Resistance is, in reality, a habit of inquiry writing teachers want to teach. As Joe Hardin proposes:

Teaching resistance requires only two specific outcomes: one, that students learn to resist the uncritical acceptance of cultural representations and institutional practices by interrogating rhetoric to uncover its motives and values; and two, that students learn to produce text that uses rhetoric and convention to give voice to their own values and positions. (7)

The intriguing textual results of such resistance to dominant discourse is what most writing teachers acknowledge as powerful writing: writing that interrogates and complicates previously held beliefs and assumptions.

One contemporary observer of the academy, Julie Johnson Kidd, administrator of the Johnson Endeavor Foundation (which has contributed over \$65 million to colleges over 25 years), believes that "our system has developed serious flaws that interfere with its ability to develop in our young people the depth of critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and human understanding so essential for dealing with the problems in our world today" (195). My dialogic reading of Sánchez, Fox, and Alcorn suggests potential ways writing pedagogy can address these flaws. Each text contributes to scholarly conversation about politicized pedagogies, the significance of student writing, the applicability of composition theory to teaching, and student desire—important issues with which teachers of open-admissions students must grapple. Looking at these texts in sum, I acknowledge that Sánchez's insistence on the primacy of student writing may stimulate precisely focused research and theory. I disagree however that politicized pedagogy *necessarily* neglects writing; and, ultimately, Sánchez imagines a reciprocal theory of culture and writing: "If culture is enunciation, and enunciation is a generalized way of describing writing, then culture is writing" (81). Compositionists have the opportunity to underscore this mutually constitutive relationship and, additionally, to problematize either/or, binary thinking which pits writing against other educational goals. Contravening binary assumptions, Tom Fox clearly demonstrates how writing can be the central focus of a multicultural pedagogy. He also makes a strong case for localized assessment

standards that promote inclusion while at the same time enabling rigorous writing. Finally, Alcorn probes the complex terrain of identity and desire that complicates all pedagogy and suggests ways in which critical teachers can reconsider the ethical implications of their work. Writing theory and practice, in my estimation, is only beginning to account for how writing creates possibilities for an intersubjective ethical relationship with the other; such inquiry may be productive terrain for future scholarship and investigation.

If conservative notions of standards are to be effectively rewritten towards inclusion, then writing teachers must work towards new definitions of literacy that support those goals. Writing pedagogy must continue to foster critical writing that “willingly explores and embodies conflicts, that isn’t afraid to enter into the messy contradictions of our world” (Fox 92). Politicized writing courses may provide new theoretical insights as they reorient composition praxis towards the centrality of writing in “human cognition, consciousness and culture” (Bazerman 36). To do so, teachers must acknowledge, negotiate, and teach resistance as a part of the libidinal human response to power. Rigorous standards of literacy should foster writing that makes resistance central to its rhetorical analyses and understandings. It is impossible to “just teach writing” and presume that act carries no political implications. Therefore, laying bare the politicized nature of literacy is a way to help open-admissions/nontraditional students write more effectively because what they write is thereby rhetorically contextualized within realities of the systems of power and inequity that structure our world.

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