

TEACHING AGAINST TRADITION:  
HISTORICAL PRELUDES TO CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

A Dissertation

by

BRAD A. THOMAS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2011

Major Subject: English

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## ABSTRACT

Teaching Against Tradition: Historical Preludes to Critical Pedagogy.

(August 2011)

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This dissertation revises the historical narrative of critical pedagogy in college writing classrooms. It argues that the key principles of critical pedagogy, first articulated by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, were practiced by a number of pedagogues as early as the eighteenth century. It examines the teaching practices of these men and shows that they anticipated the methods of critical pedagogy. This dissertation spotlights the need to reinterpret the history of critical pedagogy and to select a wider lens through which to understand the current pedagogical scene.

Chapter I defines critical pedagogy as method and explains the Freirean project. Chapter II locates parallels between critical pedagogy and the process and expressive pedagogies of the late 1960s and early '70s. Specifically, it argues that the works of Peter Elbow and Donald Murray embody the principles of critical pedagogy. Their emphasis on the epistemological power of language, for example, prefigures the theoretical foundation upon which Freire constructs

his critical methodology. Chapter III argues that the pedagogical advancements of I. A. Richards in the early twentieth century anticipated the teaching methods of critical pedagogy, especially insofar as they established student-centered writing classrooms. Richards's attempts to place student interpretations at the center of the course situate his pedagogy more comfortably among contemporary approaches to writing instruction like critical pedagogy than it does among the formalist approaches to which he is generally linked. Chapter IV argues that Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge, two eighteenth-century educators, employ teaching methods that parallel contemporary critical pedagogy. Foremost, Watts and Doddridge create participatory learning environments that center on practical subjects. They are among the first educators to teach in the English vernacular and to supplement the traditional classical curriculum with new learning. Chapter V examines the historical contexts in which these preludes to critical pedagogy emerge and shows that Murray, Elbow, Richards, Watts, and Doddridge taught at times when educational access was expanding. It argues that their pedagogies developed in an effort to address classroom diversity and to discover strategies for bringing people into dialogue with each other about the world.

For Dawn and Dylan

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because the school system was very good. My father earned his college degree with the help of the G.I. Bill and understood that education provided opportunity. Platte City would provide his children the advantage of a good education. Another of my earliest memories is my mother reading to my siblings and me. Every evening, she would lie on the floor in my bedroom—my brother, sister, and I piled around and on top of her—and read from a collection of Disney and Dr. Seuss books. Each child would make one selection, but sometimes Mom would read an extra. I grew up knowing that literacy and learning were important and that I would attend college. I have not always made the most of my opportunities; but what I have achieved, I owe to my upbringing. For this and so much more, I thank my mom and dad.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION: PROMOTING AND PRACTICING DEMOCRACY  
THROUGH CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

This dissertation aims to contribute to the present identity and future direction of rhetoric and composition studies by providing a history of critical pedagogy in college English courses, particularly those focusing on the teaching of writing. A number of scholars, including Thomas Miller, Sharon Crowley, and James Berlin, have recognized or advocated critical pedagogy as a part of composition's history, but none have focused, as I do, on a history of its manifestation in the writing classroom.

Since the English translation of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970, Paulo Freire has been celebrated as the pioneer of critical pedagogy, an honor that is well deserved. His influential work, centering on the epistemological and transformative power of language, gave writing pedagogues a coherent theory of education for critical consciousness and social change. However, while Freire was the first to articulate the principles for what is today called critical pedagogy, he was not the first to find value in a critical methodology. The methods that are now associated with Freirean critical pedagogy were practiced by a number of pedagogues as early as the eighteenth century. I argue that the teaching

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This dissertation follows the style of *MLA Style Manual*.

methods of these men are preludes to critical pedagogy. By introducing and reinterpreting the classroom practices of pedagogues heretofore beyond the bounds of critical pedagogy, I also revise the historical narrative of composition and provide a wider lens through which to understand the current pedagogical scene.

My historical examination of critical pedagogy centers on the three dominant characteristics that define Freire's critical methodology in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: a focus on the generative power of language and its ability to create and transform reality; decentered and democratic classrooms where students and teachers actively engage course material through praxis and problemization; and the use of relevant discussion topics in which students have expertise, interest, and/or experience. What I do not emphasize in my study is course content. Because I understand Freirean critical pedagogy as primarily method, I am more interested in how teachers teach than what they teach—although any such distinction between method and content amounts to a false dichotomy. “The medium is the message,” as Marshall McLuhan argues (9).

### **Political Misperceptions**

Despite the inseparability of method and content, I must rely upon the distinction in order to contrast the popular conception of critical pedagogy with Freire's own conception of his project. The dominant view of education in the United States—perhaps the world—is that education is a matter of content, a

matter of remembering information supplied by teachers. This view, according to Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, requires not that students engage in substantive thought but, instead, “believe in authorities, or at least pretend to such belief when they take their tests” (19). When this view of education and teacherly authority encounter critical pedagogy, the political current of the latter often draws false charges of ideological indoctrination. What is most interesting about this criticism is how it unwittingly turns on itself: the accusation that critical pedagogy indoctrinates students is only valid under the teacher-centered, content-driven educational model. In other words, it is justified only when critical pedagogy is assumed to employ the banking methods of traditional education. Herein lies the difficulty in maintaining such criticism: a pedagogy that adheres to the banking model is not, by definition, a critical pedagogy. Freire’s approach centers not on content but on method, not on authority but on democracy, and not on memory but on process. Given these features, critical pedagogy cannot legitimately be condemned as indoctrination; it lacks the requisite constitution. Instead, critical pedagogy attempts to demythologize received wisdom and to critically engage the meaning and context of experience through reflection and action. The process eschews indoctrination because it encourages learners to embrace their existential authority and to participate in the construction of knowledge.

Even within academic circles, the view that critical pedagogy is primarily methodology is not universally accepted. To detect this discrepancy, one need

look no further than the controversy over the writing curriculum at the University of Texas in 1990. Linda Brodkey, then director of lower-division English policy at Texas, initiated a revision to the standard syllabus of English 306, the first-year writing course, which enrolls nearly half of all incoming freshman. With the input of faculty and graduate student teachers, Brodkey redesigned the syllabus with an emphasis on “Writing about Difference.” Course inquiry centered on judicial argument, the structures of which students would examine within the context of antidiscrimination law. To the extent that the course directed students to “revise and assess arguments in terms of the cases they make rather than the positions they take,” Brodkey perceived within the revised syllabus a critical methodology (166). Nevertheless, given its overt political theme, the course was attacked in the local media for endorsing a “new McCarthyism,” (“Good Riddance”), criticized by a conservative faculty group for advancing a “single hegemonic view” (“Statement”), and condemned at the highest echelon of the university for “promoting ‘politically correct’ ideologies” (Cunningham 8). Under the pressure of insurmountable criticism, the dean of the college of liberal arts postponed the new curriculum. Interestingly, Brodkey says that no one outside of the curriculum committee—not university administrators, members of the media, or other critics—had seen or asked to see the syllabus prior to the postponement of the course (181).

That critics of “Writing about Difference” would denounce the course as an ideological program without having read the proposed syllabus suggests that



they see education not as the process of active inquiry but as didacticism, the instructional process whereby teachers tell students what to think. Brodkey has a different view. Reflecting on the controversy four years later, she explains the intended purpose of the revised syllabus:

I hoped that this course would convince some students to use writing critically; to identify, analyze, and produce arguments; and in so doing, to learn that the purpose of academic argument is not to discredit an adversary (as is often in debates) but to arrive at, or construct, informed opinions about the profoundly complex and vexing social issues implied by difference. (239-40)

Clearly, Brodkey did not conceive “Writing about Difference” as a vehicle for political thought control. She saw it, instead, as a way to engage students in rhetorical inquiry and critical reasoning. Students would participate by reading, thinking, and writing about difference within “the context of antidiscrimination law and court rulings on discrimination lawsuits” (Brodkey 240). Through close readings of such documents, she intended students to reflect on the material, not simply to react to topic or to share personal opinion.

Brodkey acknowledges that course syllabi cannot establish pedagogy; however, she notes that the proposed syllabus for English 306 “explicitly valued the intellectual work of making and qualifying claims in the light of evidence rather than the positions or opinions asserted” (240). Accordingly, it would be inconsistent for instructors to approach the course in a doctrinaire manner.

Because the syllabus represents argument as inquiry, as the process of exploring and forming interpretations of concepts and circumstances, it asks students to examine the evidence in court opinions and to evaluate whether its use is justified. It does not ask them to conform to a single interpretation of the material. The process, Brodkey claims,

requires teachers and students alike to explore the assumptions, or what [Kinneavy] calls 'dogma', on which each of us bases our own beliefs about difference, in this case, and to explore the junctures at which our assertions about social reality may or may not be based on good reasons. (239)

Given the emphasis on critical thought and individual interpretation in the syllabus, a pedagogy that would advocate a single view of difference over the informed arguments of students would not only devalue the course topic but also the notion of rhetoric as inquiry. In other words, while the course syllabus for English 306 may not determine pedagogy, it strongly suggests one. Specifically, it suggests a pedagogy based on Freirean principles: it encourages students to use language to engage (and perhaps transform) social reality through the active interpretation of relevant subject matter.

Even though the basic principles of critical pedagogy support Brodkey's claim that political content can be discussed without the imposition of political opinion, Maxine Hairston denied such possibility in the aftermath of the Texas controversy. In her 1992 article "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,"

Hairston argues that Brodkey's proposed course in "racism and sexism" would have severely limited "freedom of expression" for students in the course (189). She believes that when politics enter the classroom, students can no longer express their ideas or challenge the opinions of their teachers without fear of retribution, which comes in the form of bad grades. This view extends from her belief that pedagogies concerned with politics, issues of power, or social justice are necessarily dogmatic and antithetical to free inquiry (187-88). Accordingly, her criticism against pedagogues like Brodkey denies the very possibility of critical pedagogy.

Hairston's article was not without controversy itself, receiving several responses in *College Composition and Communication*, some of which were penned by scholars whom Hairston explicitly named in her article. In nearly every case, the responders attack the associative bond that Hairston tried to establish between political content and dogmatism. Robert Wood addresses this relationship from the perspective of Freirean critical pedagogy:

Over the past few years, I have worked closely with a number of composition scholars and teachers who are unquestionably committed to social issues and change—teachers Hairston would call "radical leftists." But never have I heard even one of these instructors so much as suggests that as teachers we should coerce our students into adopting our political views or that we should use the classroom to proselytize. Doing this would conflict

with the most fundamental premise of liberatory pedagogy, which is to empower students. (250)

Wood clearly sees no direct link between politics in the classroom and indoctrination. He admits that many of his colleagues are radical, yet he has never observed what Hairston has. If such activity were as common and widespread as she maintains, then surely a “veteran instructor” like Wood would have observed some attempts at indoctrination (Wood 249). But as he and several other responders note, it is possible for teachers to discuss politics and other relevant topics without imposing their views upon students.

The conflation of political content with the politicization of the classroom is even more widespread outside of academia. Whereas institutional controversies over course content—such as that at the University of Texas—rarely escalate to national attention, an ongoing assault against higher education persists in the media today. The most vocal critic has been David Horowitz, author of several inflammatory books on higher education and the architect of the Academic Bill of Rights. In *The Professors*, he argues that the traditional disinterested pursuit of knowledge—once the hallmark of academics—has been replaced with relevant subjects matter and political agendas. He blames the transformation on 1960s’ anti-war activists who he says avoided the draft by staying in school to earn doctorates. According to Horowitz, when these radicals received tenure-track appointments, they took their political activism with them. “As tenured radicals,” Horowitz says, “they were determined to do away with the concept of the ivory

tower and [ . . . ] set about re-shaping the university curriculum to support their political interests” (ix-x). To emphasize the radical nature of these professors and their ideologies, Horowitz lists a few of the interdisciplinary fields that have appeared over the years (e.g. peace studies, post-colonial studies, social justice studies) and argue that they attack various aspects of America, including its military and national identity (xi).

While Horowitz does not explicitly name critical pedagogy in his assault on higher education, it is nevertheless clearly within his crosshairs. Most of his criticism, for example centers on the movement to make education relevant to current events and to the lives of students, a mainstay of critical pedagogy. He maintains that the movement, which often introduces politics into the classroom, constitutes political advocacy. He does not recognize, however, that the mere mention of a political topic in the classroom no more constitutes advocacy for a position than a discussion of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” promotes the confinement of new mothers. To maintain such a position is to ignore a hundred or more years of pedagogical scholarship in the United States, scholarship that has advanced educational theory and developed alternatives to traditional classroom methods. John Dewey, I. A. Richards, Paulo Freire, and bell hooks, for example, have promoted democratic learning environments that encourage students to participate in the creation of knowledge. To assume, as Horowitz does, that teachers who bring relevant topics into the classroom ignore pedagogical scholarship is unreasonable, especially when educational theorists

who advocate the use of the relevant topics often do so to promote democratic and participatory learning. Case in point: Freire argues that the content of education must start with students. It must be organized around their existential, concrete, and present situations. If the content is not relevant, then students are not equipped to participate in their education (*Pedagogy* 95-96). For critical pedagogues, a commitment to democratic education is, at once, a commitment to relevant topics. For Horowitz, however, no such connection exists: he believes that teachers bring relevant material into the classroom to advance radical political agendas; he never acknowledges that teachers might draw on such material—as part of a valid pedagogical method—to engage students in critical discussions of issues.

Despite his opposition to relevant topics, Horowitz professes the same educational values as critical pedagogy. In his introduction to *The Professors*, he argues that the professorial task is “to teach students how to think, not to tell them what to think” (xxvi). He supports this view on the grounds that “all human knowledge is uncertain and only imperfectly grasped” (xxvi). This uncertainty, he says, is what makes issues controversial. There are no “correct” answers, only interpretations of evidence. Accordingly, Horowitz argues that teachers must temper their lessons with alternative interpretations of course material. Critical pedagogy shares these values. Starting with the premise that all knowledge is situational, it seeks to engage students in the creation and transformation of reality. In other words, like Horowitz, critical pedagogy

maintains that all human knowledge is unfinished (“uncertain”) and that the primary educational objective is to engage students in a critique of received wisdom (“to think for themselves”). However, while critical pedagogy strives to reach the same educational goal that Horowitz champions, the process through which it pursues that goal is different from that which Horowitz recommends.

Critical pedagogy maintains that authentic education must be dialogic: it must include the views of teachers and students. Through dialogue with others, Freire says, we become critically aware of the situations in which various views of the world manifest (*Pedagogy* 96). When teachers and students share their diverse interpretations of reality, alternatives emerge against which participants are compelled to reconcile and evaluate their knowledge and perceptions of world. If the process is not democratic, then students do not learn to negotiate knowledge and to think for themselves; instead, they are conditioned to uncritically accept interpretations of reality that are imposed by authorities. Horowitz also wants students to think for themselves, but he expects professors to provide the various intellectual perspectives from which students will form conclusions. “[T]eachers,” he says, “are expected to make their students aware of controversies surrounding the evidence, including the significant challenges to their own interpretations” (xxvi). In other words, Horowitz believes that students learn to think for themselves by collecting opposing viewpoints. This approach provides students with ready-made arguments on both sides of an issue, allowing them to decide for themselves which is more convincing; however,

deciding which side of an issue makes better arguments—or which position is more consistent with a particular worldview—is hardly considered thinking for oneself. It does not engage students in a critique of knowledge but asks them to choose between established positions.

Horowitz's approach is far less independent than Freire's, which encourages students to consider the extent to which their concrete situations inform their understanding of issues and their interpretations of arguments, a process that expands opportunities to think beyond conventional boundaries and ideological categories. Accordingly, despite its focus on relevant topics, critical pedagogy is more consistent with Horowitz's educational values than Horowitz's own approach. The latter inhibits independent and creative thinking by providing students with packaged arguments. That more than one position is addressed is less significant than from where the critiques and arguments come. Because teachers remain the exclusive source of knowledge under his approach, Horowitz unwittingly promotes a pedagogy that reflects not the "democratic systems of education" that he wants to protect but their "totalitarian counterparts" (xlv). In the end, his approach has teachers speaking for and acting upon students, a practice that meets Freire's criteria for indoctrination (94).

My criticism against Horowitz and others who conflate political content with political activism (including those who attacked Brodkey's revision to the first-year writing syllabus at the University of Texas) should not be read as a rejection of the claim that indoctrination occurs in college classrooms. It would



be naïve to assume that it never does. However, it is equally naïve to assume that political discussions are always doctrinaire. Critical pedagogues frequently introduce social and political topics, but they do so without the imposition of political opinion. Any attempt to do so would violate the principles of critical pedagogy. The Freirean educational model, therefore, cannot be defined as commitment to a particular political agenda. Nevertheless, to say that critical pedagogy does not impose a partisan agenda is not to deny that it asserts an ideology. It does. In this respect, it is no different than any other educational approach: “Each pedagogy,” Berlin observes, “is imbricated in ideology, in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed” (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 492). Critical pedagogy reflects an ideology grounded in freedom and democracy. It promotes these values by performing them, by leveling traditional educational hierarchies and empowering students to seek alternative possibilities in the world. It does not merely profess them. Any attempt to achieve freedom and democracy via the banking model of education is paradoxical, for such attempts actually deny students the right to practice these values. Because the liberatory potential of critical pedagogy manifests in practice, critical pedagogy must be conceived primarily as methodology, not content.

Perhaps some of the misperceptions about pedagogies that bring politics and other relevant topics into the classroom are driven by pedagogical scholarship that privileges social vision over classroom practice. Critical

pedagogy has its fair share of such scholarship. The educational works of Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, for example, emphasize the role of education in disrupting existing power structures and transforming dominant social and political realities within communities and cultures; they emphasize this role at the expense of classroom methods by which critical educational theories might be enacted. Giroux and McLaren maintain that teachers should define themselves not as classroom technicians but as transformative intellectuals “who are able and willing reflect upon the ideological principles that inform their practice, who connect pedagogical theory and practice to wider social issues, and who work together to share ideas, exercise power over the conditions of their labor, and embody in their teaching a vision of a better and more human life” (xxiii). While Giroux and McLaren do not ignore the topic of pedagogical practice, they generally address it in an abstract manner. As a result, their discussions of methodology do less to alter actual classroom practices than they do to redefine the social and political meanings of those practices as transformative events.

Such privileging of theory over practice can give the impression that critical pedagogy is first and foremost a body of knowledge. This perception can lead teachers who are drawn to the liberatory goals of critical pedagogy—or even to the image of the radical transformative educator—to view themselves as bearers of critical knowledge. Chris Gallagher, reflecting on his earliest college teaching experience, admits that he once viewed his role as a critical pedagogue in much the same way: “When my first semester at the college turned out so

disastrously, then, my conclusion was that I simply didn't 'have' enough 'critical knowledge' to 'give' to others" (74). Gallagher initially believed that the liberatory goals of critical pedagogy could be achieved by transmitting his knowledge to students. When his efforts failed, he could only assume that he did not possess or transmit enough of the right knowledge, as he then believed that the critical project was a matter of content. Gallagher could not then understand how critical pedagogy differed from traditional banking pedagogies that critical pedagogues denounced.

Gallagher's candid reflections illustrate the degree to which abstract and theoretical scholarship on critical pedagogy can reinforce the notion that education is about transmitting content. Shari Stenberg echoes this point in *Professing and Pedagogy*: "Critical education scholarship that 'promotes' pedagogy to the level of abstraction—knowledge to be mastered more than engaged—in fact only replicates the most traditional professorial model" (51). The consequence of viewing critical pedagogy as a body of knowledge is that some teachers will misinterpret the transmission of that knowledge as the enactment of a critical pedagogy. In other words, they will operate under the banner of critical pedagogy while still practicing the banking methods of traditional education as Gallagher initially did.

Not all critical pedagogy scholarship privileges theory over practice. Ira Shor, bell hooks, Jennifer Gore, and Amy Lee, for example, emphasize teaching practices in their work. In this regard, their scholarship closely aligns with that of

Paulo Freire. Case in point: in *Empowering Education*, Shor reflects on his attempts to enact critical pedagogy within his courses. He spend some time discussing the theory and goals of critical pedagogy, but his primary focus is clearly classroom practice: he offers strategies for generating and introducing themes; he analyzes some of the obstacles that he encountered in his teaching; he provides a number of resources to help teachers enact critical pedagogies; and he offers examples of the class discussions that he and his students have had. Amy Lee accomplishes much same thing in *Composing Critical Pedagogies*, where she presents a “critical portfolio of one teacher’s (ongoing) process of coming to a specific version of critical pedagogy in the teaching of writing” (5).

Even though Shor and Lee take similar practical approaches to scholarship, their critical pedagogies are not the same; hence, Lee’s statement about her “specific version” of critical pedagogy. One such disparity between versions relates to the selection of subject matter. Shor generates course themes with the input of his students: he dialogues with them at the start of the semester to locate issues within the “unsettled intersection of personal life and society” (55). The resulting themes become the subject of inquiry for the course. Lee does not take this approach. She initiates course themes and selects discussion topics. Nevertheless, her selections center on the theme of identity with the intent of empowering students to speak from a position of authority (179-249). On the surface, Shor’s version of critical pedagogy appears to

adhere more faithfully to the Freirean blueprint of education than Lee's version does because it utilizes generative themes; however, this detail seems minor when we consider that generative themes are designed to represent student views of the world and to guard against the imposition of ideas (Freire, *Pedagogy* 108-9), values shared by Lee's version of critical pedagogy. Through writing assignments and class discussion, Lee prompts her students to engage in examinations of their identities. She initiates the themes, but she also permits the exploration of experience and the discovery of meaning through dialogue. In other words, Lee still centers her pedagogy on the ideas of students. It is also important to remember that Freire and Shor are not opposed to the practice of teachers introducing themes for investigation. In fact, Freire encourages such activity because it corresponds to the dialogical relationship that critical education creates between teachers and students (*Pedagogy* 120).

The specific version of critical pedagogy practiced by Lee is different than the version practiced by Shor, but the differences lie not within the fundamental principles of the critical methodology but within the particulars of a specific manifestation. In this regard, we might reasonably say that each enactment of critical pedagogy is a version, for every teacher in every classroom context will negotiate the methods differently. This is not mean, however, that Gallagher's first attempt at college teaching was a version of critical pedagogy. By virtue of its banking methodology, his pedagogy was incompatible with Freire's educational project.

The type of scholarship represented by Shor and Lee gives a rounder view of critical pedagogy than that which foregrounds theory and social vision. That is not to say that it proposes a better model of critical pedagogy, only that it highlights to a greater extent the importance of Freire's methodology within the critical project. At the very least, the scholarship that permits praxis between theory and practice guards the banner of critical pedagogy against inadvertent misrepresentations, the sort of which Gallagher describes above; it also suggests that critical pedagogy is not a static project but a process that "must be conceptualized in relation to the real contexts, to the complex and dynamic sites in which our teaching takes place" (Lee 8).

### **Defining the Freirean Project**

While the theoretical separation of method and content is helpful in distinguishing critical pedagogy from popular and distorted characterizations thereof, McLuhan suggests that no real separation is possible. He maintains that a symbiotic relationship exists between method and content, and that the former "shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (9). From an educational perspective, McLuhan's argument suggests that teaching methodologies structure the relationship between students and knowledge: more specifically, it determines who has the authority to define reality and to give meaning to experience. These determinants constitute the content of education and are linked to what students do in the classroom. Under

the traditional model of education, students do little more than listen to teachers and memorize information. “They are almost never,” according to Postman and Weingartner, “required to make observations, formulate definitions, or perform any intellectual operations that go beyond repeating what someone else says is true” (19). Because students rarely retain the information that they are taught from one test to the next, Postman and Weingartner argue that “just about the *only* learning that occurs in classrooms is communicated by the structure of the classroom itself” (20). In other words, the content of a course can be found in its methods. According to Freire, traditional education is oppressive because it teaches the following:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;

- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of students;
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are the mere objects. (*Pedagogy* 73)

Conversely, the content of critical pedagogy is liberation—the practice of freedom and democracy. Of course, critical pedagogues do not impose this content from the outside (e.g. lecturing about the oppressive power structures of society), for such constitutes oppression under Freire’s view of banking education; instead, they attempt to empower their students through the enactment of democracy in the classroom. In other words, rather than treat their methodology as a means to achieving the liberatory goals of critical pedagogy, critical teachers treat their classroom practices as democratic achievements in themselves. Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, for example, argue that schools are “democratic public spheres” where students learn about democracy and civic responsibility through the practice thereof (224). Ann George agrees, noting that students learn democracy by “participating in democratic dialogue about lived experience, including the content and conduct of their own education” (97). Nevertheless, as surveyed above, critical pedagogy is sometimes characterized as a reformist pedagogy whose political objective is to make students aware of their oppressed social existences and to encourage them to engage in the struggle for equality and social justice. While critical awareness is an important



step along the path to liberation, it should not be understood as a commitment. Critical pedagogues do not set out to reform their students' beliefs or political opinions; rather, they attempt to enrich student learning through participation. To be sure, critical awareness may follow, but the course content of critical pedagogy is always the practice of democracy.

One of the ways in which Freire pursues his educational vision is the establishment of decentered classrooms. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he proposes a leveling of the traditional educational hierarchy, conceiving teachers not as authorized distributors of knowledge but as partners in the search for truth and meaning. Unlike banking models of education, which emphasize the voices of teachers over students, Freire's pedagogy encourages dialogue between students and teachers. He recognizes that students possess knowledge, and he wants them to share their knowledge with other members of the class, for just as teachers become learners in decentered classrooms, learners become teachers. Of course, such restructuring does not mean a simple reversal of institutional roles, as the inversion of the relevant terms suggests; instead, it means the destruction of the dichotomy between teacher and student, the creation of an environment where all course participants equally engage in the making of meaning. "To resolve the teacher-student contradiction," Freire argues, "to exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of student among students would be to undermine the power of oppression and serve the cause of liberation" (*Pedagogy* 75).

Freire's advocacy of decentered classrooms is grounded in a belief that humans do not exist independent of the world that they know. According to this view, reality is not a completed thing but a dynamic process that is dialectically shaped by men and women. Freire believes that everyone should participate in the process. In fact, he says that it is the "ontological and historical vocation" of all human beings, regardless of social rank or status, to do so (*Pedagogy* 66). That is to say, the process of acting upon and transforming reality is the foundation of freedom. If a person is not allowed the right to engage the process, then oppression results: he or she is subjected to an interpretation of reality with which he or she has nothing to do. Conceiving education as the practice of freedom, Freire encourages students to act upon their realities, to consider the extent to which received wisdom reflects their experiences and concrete situations and to envision alternative ways of thinking and being. He wants to abandon the model of education where teachers regulate and impose reality upon students, adopting instead a decentered model where teachers and students democratically confront their existence in the world (*Pedagogy* 76-79).

Because dialogue is instrumental in creating decentered classrooms, Freire encourages teachers to introduce topics about which students have some knowledge. If students have no knowledge or experience about a particular topic, then they will likely feel that they have nothing to contribute to a discussion, effectively refocusing the course on the teacher. To avoid slipping

into the banking model and to further encourage participation, Freire maintains that the starting point for dialogue is the “here and now“:

The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response. (*Pedagogy* 95-96)

Freire wants to locate topics within concrete situations because they are relevant to the lives of students. He believes that students will put more energy into their education when they can more readily perceive its connection to the real issues that they face. Relevant topics also give students the opportunity to reflect on lived experiences and to speak from a position of authority. This concrete approach to education, which Freire calls “problem-posing education,” is designed to bring learners into conversation with one another. It encourages them to share their experiences about the world and to consider the extent to which knowledge is rooted in social situations. Moreover, problem-posing education, insofar as it promotes reflective dialogue about the world, provides learners the opportunity to act upon reality with words.

Language is the final element in Freire’s educational vision. It is the indispensable instrument through which learners reflect upon and transform the world. “Within the word,” he writes, “we find two dimensions, reflection and

action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers” (*Pedagogy* 87). Freire assigns the Greek term “praxis” to this interaction because it implies a kinship between theory (reflection) and practice (action), terms widely considered incompatible. He believes that words, utilized in authentic dialogue, have transformative power. The ability to name the world is also the ability to change it. However, words are not always instruments of empowerment. When a dichotomy is imposed upon the two dimensions of the word, then positive transformation is never possible. Deprived of action, the word amounts to no more than verbalism or “idle chatter”; deprived of reflection, it amounts to no more than activism or “action for action’s sake” (Freire, *Pedagogy* 87-88). Either dichotomy, Freire maintains, inhibits authentic dialogue and authentic forms of thought.

Because authenticity is necessary to achieve the educational goals of critical pedagogy, students must learn to think critically. For Freire, this means perceiving a dialectical relationship between language and reality. Students must see language as an instrument that is capable of transforming individuals and the world, both of which are constantly in the process of becoming. In other words, students must accept that dialogue is praxis:

[T]rue dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as

transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action. (*Pedagogy* 92)

Freire maintains that true education is only possible when his criteria for critical thinking are met. Only when students perceive their dialectical relationship with the world can the contradiction between teacher and student be resolved. Only then can their words have transformative power and can education become the practice of freedom. “Authentic education,” Freire says, “is not carried on by ‘A’ for ‘B’ or by ‘A’ about ‘B,’ but rather by ‘A’ with ‘B,’ mediated by the world—a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it” (*Pedagogy* 93).

To achieve his vision of education as the practice of freedom, Freire unites linguistic praxis with relevant course topics and decentered classrooms. Together, these pedagogical strategies compose Freire’s critical methodology. Note that no single strategy—or combination of two—can achieve the status of critical pedagogy on its own. The efficacy of each strategy depends upon the others. For example, students cannot fully participate in class discussions and resolve the teacher-student dichotomy if they do not have a say in the content of the course. Likewise, students have little incentive to engage class discussions when their voices have no authority to create meaning. The strategies overlap too much to be effective on their own. Despite such overlap, it is necessary to consider the strategies as discrete entities within the broader framework of critical pedagogy, for such delineation provides the analytical formula for

understanding Freire's methodology and examining historical manifestations thereof.

Once critical pedagogy is defined as method and detached from the political agenda with which it is often associated, its history and scope broaden. That is to say, it expands its reach across pedagogical boundaries. Moreover, critical pedagogy becomes compatible with a number of modern pedagogies, including those that adopt feminist, cultural, rhetorical, and expressive perspectives; it also becomes compatible with many of the educational methods employed decades before Freire constructed the theoretical framework for critical pedagogy. The view that critical pedagogy is a classroom method that traverses contemporary divisions between composition pedagogies informs my approach to critical pedagogy and engenders my historical investigation thereof. By interpreting Freirean pedagogy as method, I have established parallels between critical pedagogy and the process and expressive movements of late 1960s and early '70s, the classroom practices of I. A. Richards in the 1920s, and the deliberative methods of the English dissenting academies in the 1700s. As much as possible, I have attempted to focus my study on teaching practices, as they are they backbone of critical pedagogy. Of course, any such attempt to reconstruct and understand those practices requires an examination of scholarly works and theoretical principles that surround (and likely inform) the pedagogies. Furthermore, a consideration of the historical contexts in which the manifestations of critical pedagogy emerge is also necessary, for it provides

insight into possible social and educational motivations for revising tradition pedagogical methods within academia.

### **Historical Preludes to Critical Pedagogy**

My historical examination of critical pedagogy begins in the late 1960s and early '70s. I begin with this period because it represents the modern rebirth of composition pedagogy and provides an immediate opportunity to address the common historical narratives surrounding the establishment of Freirean critical pedagogy. Specifically, Chapter II challenges Berlin's and Berthoff's claims that critical pedagogy followed the process and expressive movements and represents a significant advancement in the teaching of writing. I examine the works of Donald Murray and Peter Elbow and show that their pedagogies embody the teaching methods that later define the critical project. Murray, for example, advocated the use of decentered classrooms: arguing that students should take a more active role in their education, he proposed a flattening of the traditional classroom hierarchy and encouraged students to engage meaning-making process through writing. Similarly, Elbow proposed a writing classroom where teachers become learners themselves, participating in every aspect of the course. Unlike several critics of expressivism—namely, James Berlin and Ann Berthoff—my analysis does not seek to discredit the process and expressive movements by spotlighting their disparity with critical pedagogy; rather, it seeks to identify intersections between Murray, Elbow, and Freire. I conclude that the

teaching practices of Murray and Elbow exhibit and anticipate the fundamental principles of critical pedagogy, as articulated in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Chapter III focuses on the work of I. A. Richards, the prominent literary critic of the 1920s and teacher of English at Cambridge University and Harvard. I argue that Richards proposed and practiced the principle teaching methods of Freirean critical pedagogy, making him an early proponent of democratic education. Central to Richards's pedagogy is his use of relevant subject matter. He believed that the skills required for literary analysis are the same as those required for the interpretation of experience. As such, he viewed the study of literature as a practical endeavor and conceived the classroom as a laboratory for learning to interpret the world. To facilitate learning, Richards developed a strategy to elicit more authentic interpretations from his students: he removed all identifying markers from texts that they were asked to interpret. His goal was to prompt students not to respond to the reputations of authors but to rely upon and develop their own interpretive skills. Despite these intentions, the strategy has perpetually linked Richards to literary formalism and moved him to the fringe of scholarly interest within English departments. My analysis of his teaching methods and theories demonstrates that Richards locates meaning not within form but within social praxis and that his perspective on language and meaning provides a solid foundation for building critical pedagogies and for conceiving education as the practice of freedom.



While Richards employed many of the educational methods now associated with Freire, he was not the earliest pedagogue to practice an early form of critical pedagogy. As early as the eighteenth century, ministers within England's dissenting academies challenged the traditional teaching methods (and curriculum) of the ancient universities and developed a more deliberative style of education. Chapter IV examines these developments through the pedagogical theories and practices of Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge. I argue that the classroom practices of these men parallel the fundamental teachings of modern-day critical pedagogy. Watts, for example, believed that conversation was the most important instrument for intellectual growth that men and women possessed. He believed it gave students an opportunity to understand the situated nature of knowledge and to perceive their role in the meaning-making process. As such, he valued dialogue in the classroom. Watts encouraged his students to interrupt lectures and to converse with him about their sentiments and doubts. Doddridge took a slightly different approach, employing a comparative method of education that immersed students in the various perspectives of a topic. The method is similar to Freire's problem-posing strategy insofar as it urges students to think through difficulties surrounding issues, to weigh the merits of established arguments, and to form their own opinion on matters. My analysis of Watts and Doddridge revises the widespread narrative that portrays eighteenth-century rhetorical education as current-traditional, as emphasizing the principles of style and form and grammatical

correctness over the process of rhetorical discovery. It demonstrates that participatory learning environments and practical concerns are not the invention of twentieth-century writing instructors.

Each of the chapters outlined above traces the social, economic, and political landscape in which each manifestation of critical pedagogy emerged. My final chapter bridges those historical contexts. I show that Murray, Elbow, Richards, Watts, and Doddridge taught within similar situations—specifically, at times when educational access was broadening. While the traditional methods of education might theretofore have been effective, they could no longer be reconciled with the new student constituencies. Classrooms that were once filled with students from privileged backgrounds were now filled with students from socially- and economically-diverse backgrounds. I argue that the historical preludes to critical pedagogy developed in effort to address classroom diversity and to discover a strategy for bringing people into dialogue with each other about the world. My historical analysis of critical pedagogy also provides warning for the field of composition studies—namely, beware of pedagogical sectarianism. Drawing a lesson from the history of the eighteenth-century dissenting academies, I argue that a more inclusive view of critical pedagogy (and composition pedagogies, in general) is vital to the continued success of composition studies.

CHAPTER II  
CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND CLASSROOM DEMOCRACY: FASHIONING  
CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

This chapter will challenge and revise the historical narratives that characterize the emergence of critical pedagogy in American college writing classrooms as revolutionary in the history of composition pedagogy, marking significant progress over prior pedagogical achievements, including those of the process and expressive movements of the late 1960s. I argue, conversely, that early formulations of process pedagogy and expressivism, championed by Peter Elbow and Donald Murray, anticipated many of the aims and methods of critical pedagogy. Their emphasis on the epistemological power of language prefigures the theoretical foundation upon which Freire constructs his critical methodology in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I also argue that the historical context in which these pedagogies emerged is important because it reveals the pedagogical and rhetorical exigency for reassessing and eventually abandoning traditional methods of teaching writing in the academy.

The late 1960s and early '70s were a period of change for American college English departments. The era of current-traditional writing instruction was falling out of fashion as a new generation of scholars and writing teachers reintroduced the concepts of rhetoric to the composition classroom. The notion that all communication is situated—that writing involves an interaction between

writer, audience, and context—challenged the then common belief that good writing is above all a matter of adhering to standard forms and proper grammar. By emphasizing the latter, Christopher Burnham notes, current-traditional writing instruction “reinforced middle-class values, such as social stability and cultural homogeneity” (22). Accordingly, success in the first-year composition course was linked to the ability to assimilate and reproduce a specific set of cultural values encoded in the conventions of the proper English essay. That the course functioned to preserve hegemonic cultural norms became more obvious in the wake of the G.I. Bill, open-admission policies, and the civil rights movement. American college campuses became more diverse and a growing number of students struggled to assimilate the values intrinsic to and imposed by methods of current-traditionalism. Unfortunately, an inability to assimilate brought many college careers to an end because freshman composition courses had replaced economic class and then merit, as measured by SAT and scholarships during the 1920s and ‘30s, as gatekeeper to the university (Burnham 22).

Judging the current-traditional methods of writing instruction ineffective, a number of young pedagogues—most notably Donald Murray and Peter Elbow—initiated the process and expressive movements of the ‘60s and ‘70s and helped professionalize the field of composition pedagogy. These movements opposed the assumption that writing is a rote subject that can be taught via lecture and memorization; they maintained, instead, that writing is a process that can only be learned through practice. Accordingly, they proposed that writing teachers

rethink the dominant approach to writing instruction: rather than teach the finished form of an essay, teachers ought to encourage the process of discovering and developing new ideas through writing. The epistemological assumption behind the movement's rhetorical stance is that the human mind is an essential element in the construction of reality. While this perspective clearly departs from the objectivism of the dominant mode of writing instruction in the nineteenth century, Roskelly and Ronald argue that it was not a groundbreaking intellectual development. In *Reason to Believe*, they show that considerations of the self are prominent in the history of American intellectual thought, including the educational philosophies of Emerson and Dewey. Ultimately, the authors contend that the so-called pioneers of process pedagogy and expressivism established no new intellectual ground but traveled the path of earlier generations.

Roskelly and Ronald do not deny that Elbow and Murray injected the notion of personal experience into a pedagogical conversation then dominated by public forms of writing, but they do reject the narrative that mythologizes the expressivist turn as a groundbreaking development in educational theory. In this respect, they embrace Berthoff's view that the history of composition pedagogy is a series of "pendulum-swing[s]":

We go from sentence combining to free writing and back again to the formal outline; from vague notions of "pre-writing" to vaguer notions of heuristics; from rigid rubrics to the idea of no writing at

all. Some might celebrate this uncertainty as evidence of pluralism and a lack of dogmatism in the field, but it could also be characterized as a distracted, purposeless, despairing adhocism. An idea which one year is everywhere hailed and celebrated vanishes the next without a trace. (“Rhetoric as Hermeneutic” 279)

Even though Berthoff believes that the latest and greatest trends in composition theory and practice are but routine swings between two poles, she does not view the extremes as polar opposites or even as distinguishable. In fact, she says that both poles manifest the same dyadic conception of language where meaning “comes either from within or without” (“Rhetoric as Hermeneutic” 279). Such an approach, she says, does not concern meaning because it ruptures the dialectical relationship between thought and language, between individual knowledge and social context. Berthoff argues that a triadic semiotics maintains that relationship and ought to replace dyadic theories of language in the composition classroom. She says that Peirce’s triadic model—which locates meaning within the interaction between language, thought, and the world—is better suited to writing instruction because it spotlights the instrumentality of language in the formation of individual and social identities.

Berthoff’s pendulum metaphor stands in direct contrast to the evolutionary metaphor more common in the retelling of composition’s history. One portrays teachers as oscillating between two superficially-distinct but epistemologically-consistent pedagogical theories, while the other has them steadily progressing

toward a more complex and sophisticated synthesis of prior theoretical and practical achievements. Despite different ways of framing the past, however, both perspectives envision a similar future. They exhort the superiority of what Berlin calls epistemic rhetoric, a language-based theory of knowledge that locates reality in the discursive interaction between the material world, the subjective self, and society. Although Berthoff does not classify her pedagogy using Berlin's terminology, the triadic theory of meaning for which she argues is nevertheless structured in ways similar to the characteristics of epistemic rhetoric. Berlin, one of the most prominent voices of the evolutionary narrative, cites Berthoff as a leader within the epistemic group. Both Berlin and Berthoff specify Paulo Freire as a noteworthy practitioner of their preferred pedagogies. What is interesting about this convergence is that Freire's critical pedagogy denotes a pedagogical advancement within both historical narratives—at once signifying a synthesis of and a separation from prior pedagogical achievements.

The contrasting images mobilized by the evolution and pendulum metaphors around which the histories of composition pedagogy are organized obscure an important similarity between them—namely, that they are both, in the end, stories of progress. Berthoff sees critical pedagogy, for example, as a leap beyond the repetitive back-and-forth motion of prior pedagogies, and Berlin sees it as but one more step in a series of intermediate pedagogical advancements. That they interpret the history of composition pedagogy differently and define the nature of its progress in incompatible terms (radical versus gradual) should not

overshadow their mutual conviction that critical pedagogy and its epistemic cognates are inherently better than their predecessors, including process pedagogy and expressivism. The works of Elbow and Murray, fundamental as they were to the process and expressive movements of the 1960s and '70s, share many key features of Freirean critical pedagogy, not the least of which is their propensity to place students and their ability to create meaning through language at the center of the classroom. Early formulations of process pedagogy and expressivism parallel and anticipate critical pedagogy. Even though the former movements have been criticized for being solipsistic and apolitical and the latter has been attacked for being overly political, they are not as incompatible as their distinctive designations suggest. All three pedagogies manifest in their methods an emphasis on the generative power of language, the use of relevant subject matter, and decentered classrooms. That Elbow and Murray represent part of the pedagogical past against which Berthoff and Berlin contrast their (purportedly) more sophisticated pedagogical visions challenges the narrative that critical pedagogy *as such* signaled an intellectual break from or progress over earlier composition pedagogies. By and large, the rudiments of critical pedagogy were expressed in the process and expressive movements of the 1960s by writing pedagogues who struggled to adapt to the classroom changes triggered by a broadening of educational access in America over the course of the prior two decades. The following review will provide a historical context for understanding the shift in student demographics.



## Opening Doors to American Higher Education

Prior to World War II, higher education in America was largely confined to affluent members of society. The high school movement increased secondary school enrollment and expanded the number of college aspirants; but by and large, higher education continued to be the financial burden of the family and remained beyond the reach of many. Universities enrolled white students from predominately upper-middle-class backgrounds—the more elite schools recruiting their ranks from private boarding schools—while less affluent groups remained underserved by higher education. Illustrating the degree to which higher education in the United States was a limited endeavor, Robert Pattison reports that the number of high-school students taking the SAT in the academic year 1951-52 was 81,000, twenty-six percent of whom eventually matriculated at college (183). The extent to which college was then an elite privilege is especially visible when compared to statistics twenty-five years later:

By 1976-77 the number of eighteen-year-old in the population had doubled while the number of graduating high school students taking the SAT had risen from 81,000 to 1,401,000, a seven-fold increase. Meanwhile the number of institutions of higher education had gone up from about 1800 in 1950 to around 3100 in 1978.

(Pattison 183)

The increased number of students taking the SAT—indicative of greater educational preparation for and aspiration to attend college—as well as the

growing number of post-secondary institutions at which those students could matriculate demonstrate the extent to which America, after WWII, was edging towards mass participation in higher education. “Traditionally underserved groups (e.g. the working class),” John Thelin writes, “could now aspire to a college education, at least for their children if not for themselves” (254).

Enactment of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, more widely known as the G.I. Bill, accelerated the path to college for many military men and women who did not have the economic resources to attend college prior to the war. The idea that the government ought to promote and help fund higher education for veterans sprung from Roosevelt’s concern that the reintegration of twenty million soldiers into the workforce might bring to an end the economic growth and prosperity generated by the war. The government wanted to convert wartime production into peacetime economy and do so without rousing social discontent in droves of unemployed veterans. By helping fund higher education, the G.I. Bill redirected many veterans away from the workforce and into colleges, reducing the number of unemployed veterans and prolonging national prosperity. Many universities welcomed veterans into their classrooms and viewed government educational assistance to veterans as an opportunity to return student enrollment (and college revenue) to prewar levels. Harvard was among these institutions, and so eager were its administrators to enroll servicemen that they launched an overseas recruitment program before the war had even ended (Thelin 263). But not all colleges were as veteran-friendly as

Harvard. Some of them opposed the G.I. Bill because they preferred to enroll traditional students and to preserve the high standards of the academy (Thelin 263, Gutek 12). Regardless of position, no one expected such widespread participation from military men and women. By 1946, veterans represented nearly fifty-two percent of the nation's total college enrollment (Gutek 12).

In addition to keeping veterans productive and content, the G.I. Bill was further motivated by the idea that higher education could help the government meet the needs of the nation. Higher education had already been "effective and engaged" in the war, so there was little reason to assume that universities could not also provide valuable resources in the "large-scale planning for the transition to a peacetime society, including a civilian economy, long after the end of the war" (Thelin 261). Consequently, federal and state governments gave more public attention to the formation of educational policies. President Truman, for instance, established a Commission on Education in 1946 to examine higher education and discover the best means to expand educational opportunities. The subsequent report addressed economic and racial inequalities in schools and recommended greater federal involvement in education. Ultimately, the commission's proposal that the federal government trespass into state and local policies proved too controversial to gain significant support throughout the country and in Congress. Even though the Truman Commission failed to reshape higher education at the national level, it did draw attention to the many injustices in American colleges and universities. Taking notice of the report,

many state governments, school administrators, and private foundations devoted themselves to resolving such injustices (Thelin 270). The state of California, for example, took unprecedented steps towards mass higher education by significantly increasing the annual operating budget for the University of California system and its eight campuses, providing free tuition to state residents, and increasing student-teacher ratios to make learning more economically efficient. California's educational experiment eventually led to the Master Plan of 1960, which was heralded across the United States and Europe as the premier model for the expansion and governance of public education (Douglass 311-12).

Despite the excitement over the Master Plan, California was not alone in the quest to resolve the educational inequalities identified by the Truman report. New York also engaged the issue of educational injustice and worked to expand higher education. Hence the creation of the SUNY and CUNY systems, which subsidized higher education for state and local residents across a combined network of nearly ninety campuses. From its inception, the CUNY network was the most financially accessible of the two systems, for it provided free tuition to all city residents; however, given the demand for higher education in the decades following WWII, administrators were compelled to raise admission standards to limit student enrollment. As a result of higher admission standards, the CUNY system no longer represented the social demographics of the city, for the new standards were too stringent to be met by urban students, whose public

schools were largely characterized by “low teacher expectations, low student academic achievement, poor discipline, truancy, high dropout rates, and high teacher turnover” (Guttek 141). Affordable tuition alone was not enough to equalize educational opportunity in New York’s cities. Therefore, in 1970, CUNY’s Board of Trustees implemented an open-admissions policy, which guaranteed admission to all residents holding a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma. Under the new policy, minority enrollment quadrupled (Lavin and Hyllegard 32). However, the sudden shift in student demographics generated by open-admissions at CUNY revealed practical problems with racial integration during the American civil rights movement.

Even though the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown versus Board of Education* acknowledged that separate facilities were rarely equal and ruled *de jure* racial segregation a violation of the Constitution’s Fourteenth Amendment, *de facto* segregation remained a social reality in America. “White flight” to the suburbs—a phenomenon that coincided with the court’s desegregation ruling—effectively circumvented racial integration, making it geographically impossible for whites and blacks to attend the same elementary and secondary schools. Because geography was drawn along racial lines, over which also existed a considerable economic imbalance, city schools had fewer tax dollars with which to educate students than their suburban counterparts. Such disparities in funding created disparities in the quality of education between city and suburban public schools. Accordingly, the issue with providing equal access to higher

education, as CUNY eventually learned, went beyond financial affordability to include academic preparedness. Not until CUNY altered its admission standards could students of color widely take advantage of its affordability. The same was true for minority veterans. While the G.I. Bill gave military men and women of color the means to pay for college, some schools refused to admit them. This remained the case even after the Brown ruling, as there was very little legislation in place to enforce non-discrimination. In 1964, the federal government enacted the Civil Rights Act, which authorized the withdrawal of federal funding from any institution where illegal discrimination was found and also gave the U.S. Attorney General the power to file suit against any school practicing racial discrimination.

Since WWII, the federal government had established a strong working relationship with higher education and had been providing elite universities with large research grants. However, in the 1960s, it began to rethink its uncritical financial support of higher education (Thelin 312). Reacting to the widespread and often violent demonstrations on college campuses and the general inability of administrators to control their students, federal funding agencies, such as the Department of Defense, eventually pulled their research dollars away from the universities. The loss of federal research grants put a financial strain on those institutions that had come to rely upon federal funding as part of their operating budget. Even though the federal government had largely abandoned research programs within universities, it was not willing to abandon higher education

altogether. That is to say, it still wanted to provide Americans the opportunity and means to pursue a college education. Therefore, in 1972, Congress enacted the Basic Educational Opportunities Grant program—later dubbed the Pell Grant program—which reallocated federal educational research dollars to low-income students. According to Thelin, the grant program achieved three government objectives: it fulfilled the recommendation of the 1947 Truman report; it required recipients to comply with a set of provisions; and it shifted attention towards civil rights (324-26). The Pell Grant program accomplished the latter by expanding the number of schools receiving federal funds, thus encouraging them—via the terms of the 1964 Civil Rights Act—to enroll more minority students.

The Pell Grant program, the G.I. Bill, and the educational reforms in California, New York, and a few other states significantly broadened access to higher education in American. Rather than have college remain the exclusive territory of economically privileged groups and SAT merit scholarship winners, a number of local, state, and federal officials, as well as university administrators, pursued measures that supported and achieved greater social representation and diversity in higher education. The combined legacy of these educational initiatives—to expand Thelin’s remarks about the G.I. Bill to include California’s Master Plan, the Pell grant program, open-admissions, etc.—is that “quantitative change promoted qualitative change in the structure and culture of American campuses” (265). More people could afford higher education, so the classroom

was no longer limited primarily to white middle-class students; it now included racial minorities and non-traditional students, too. Moreover, by 1970, women represented forty-one percent of college enrollment in the United States, up from thirty-four percent in 1950 (Thelin 344). The physical markers represented by the change in student demographics from WWII to the early 1970s also mark differences in economic, educational, and social backgrounds of students. Such diversity of mind and experience tested the pedagogical trends that had long dominated American college classrooms and prompted what has been described as a revolution in the way writing teachers teach writing.

### **Rethinking the Role of Writing Teachers**

In 1968, Donald Murray published *A Writer Teaches Writing: A Practical Method of Teaching Composition*. As the title implies, Murray's work criticizes the then accepted institutional approach to teaching writing on the grounds that most composition instructors are trained literary critics whose pedagogical methods are ineffective in the writing classroom, a critique to which he would return and more explicitly develop in "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product." A professional writer himself, Murray reminds composition teachers that they are not the ultimate evaluators and critics of their students' work—only the audiences for whom writers write can judge the effectiveness of their compositions; instead, he maintains that the teacher's primary responsibility is to prepare students to function when he or she is not there (*Writer Teaches Writing*



129-33). In other words, Murray wants to create an environment where students take responsibility for their own learning. Their independence, he says, is cause for teacherly pride:

When a teacher can stop teaching, can stand back and see his students teaching themselves, then he has succeeded. His ambitions should be to teach as little as possible, and eventually not to teach at all. He is most successful when the students have become their own teachers. (*Writer Teaches Writing* 133)

What is most striking about Murray's proposed pedagogy is that it strives to remove writing teachers from the center of the classroom, thus making their professional title a misnomer. Murray believes that effective writing teachers are those who do not teach, at least not in the conventional sense of the word. Traditionally, he explains, teachers of writing approach their subject through analysis. They talk, and students listen to their lessons on traditional grammar, transformational grammar, structural linguistics, and the history of the English language. While such an approach offers students a historical perspective on how language has been used in the past, it too often isolates language from meaning and insufficiently prepares students to write (*Writer Teaches Writing* 104). Learning to write is not a matter of acquiring information about language mechanics but of having the opportunity to perform the job of a writer. In other words, students must have the opportunity in their writing classes to write,

revise, and edit, and to share and discuss their writing with their teachers and peers. Engaging the writing process makes better writers.

Because Murray believes that the final judge of a piece of writing is its intended audience, he wants writing students to share their work with a variety of readers. While teachers have traditionally held the exclusive role of reader and evaluator in the composition class, Murray argues that students should shoulder some of the responsibility. His position is rooted in the notion that small peer groups offer several advantages over student-teacher writing conferences:

The peer group allows the students to reach an audience other than the English teacher, and the students must know that as writers, in school and outside of school, they have to be able to reach many different people in different disciplines. The students should realize they may be able to help each other better than the teacher can help them, for they are facing comparable problems at a similar stage of development. The students should also be convinced that through working on classmates' papers they will understand the professional writer's problem of choice, because the other class members will demonstrate in their own papers, as well as in their criticisms, that there are many appropriate ways to say the same thing. (*Writer Teaches Writing* 131)

The advantages of group work, as Murray explains them, are clear; nevertheless, they can be, as many composition teachers know, mitigated by the

reluctance of students to embrace their ability to assist other students and to productively comment on their compositions. For this reason, Murray suggests that peer groups not be formed until students understand the benefits of utilizing the instructional method. Furthermore, he notes that teachers should not proceed until they have created an environment in which students perceive the value of engaging a recursive and reflexive writing process. For peer review groups to be effective, writing students must be convinced that “criticism and revision are necessary—and constructive—parts of the process of writing”; moreover, they should understand that “they have the primary responsibility to teach themselves to write and that they are capable, through re-evaluation and revision of their papers, of solving their own writing problems” (*Writer Teaches Writing* 131-32).

Although Murray wants students to take primary responsibility for learning, he does not advocate teacherless writing classrooms. Instead, he argues for a reconceptualization of the role of writing teachers, one that shifts the focus of learning from the teacher to the student. On the surface and through the lens of traditional teacher-centered pedagogies, such a shift seemingly limits or even diminishes the importance of the writing instructor, but it does not. In fact, the opposite is true. Murray’s model does not have teachers holding forth on, say, the virtues of active voice over passive voice but has them instead adopting the role of a coach, diagnostician, and engineer. To this end, Murray broadens and expands the role of writing teachers. The only limitation

that his model proposes concerns the amount of time spent lecturing in the classroom. Murray believes that writers learn to write when they are writing, not when they are being talked to about writing. Accordingly, he proclaims rather provocatively in his 1973 essay "Teach Process Not Product" that teachers can motivate students to engage the writing process not by talking but by "shutting up" (5).

Fulfilling the role of an engineer under Murray's model, writing teachers must create writing workshops within the physical boundaries of the classroom. These workshops should be open, demanding, disciplined, and flexible, just like lesson plans (D. Murray, *Writer Teaches Writing* 103). Students must have the opportunity to practice the writing process, sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing. They must feel comfortable taking risks when they write, for learning occurs and success is achieved when a person is willing to step beyond his or her usual boundaries. The teacher compels students to push beyond their comfort zones by demanding that they take responsibility for their writing. The teacher does not give students formulae for writing but challenges them to find the most effective ways to say what they want to say in their compositions. This process of searching for and finding the appropriate voice for a text demands discipline and focus. The workshop environment urges students to muster the intellectual courage to confront the blank page and to rethink failed drafts.

While Murray wants teachers to create writing workshops in which students assume responsibility for their own writing and learning, he does not

encourage or permit teachers to avoid total responsibility. Teachers continue to play an important role in the writing course, even if they are not at its center.

Murray believes that good writing teachers are like coaches because they design practice workouts to help students develop their individual potential and motivate students to exhibit their best performance. Regarding the former, he suggests that writing teachers take cues from athletic coaches:

Out on the football field he [the writing teacher] will find that the coach has organized the afternoon's work so that the team is broken into small units, each player learning and practicing the skills he needs the most. And then he will find the coach walking from player to player, showing one how to get a quick start, another how to throw a block, a third how to cut to the left, a fourth how to catch the ball. (*Writer Teaches Writing* 18)

As Murray suggests, there is no reason for an athletic coach to teach a single skill to the whole team, for each athlete has a specific skill that needs honing. Teaching the entire wrestling team to shoot single-leg takedown, for example, does little to make the experienced wrestler who is already "good on his feet" a better competitor. Likewise, a technical explanation of the single-leg takedown will not necessarily benefit the novice wrestler who knows the proper technique but has practical problems finishing the move. As long as the coach ignores the individual strengths and weaknesses of his athletes, no amount of technical instruction will make better wrestlers. All it will do is interrupt the opportunities

that the wrestlers have to develop their skills through practice and deny them the occasion of having their individual needs addressed. The same is true of writing instruction. A one-size-fits-all lecture about comma usage, for example, is sure to bypass more students than it confronts. Accordingly, good writing teachers, like coaches, will identify areas of improvement for their students and assign exercises that target and develop those areas. This individual approach to writing instruction has the added benefit of communicating to students the message that teachers care about them. And when students feel that teachers are genuinely interested in them as individuals, they are motivated to write, for as Murray says, “all students will respond to a listener” (*Writer Teaches Writing* 151). In other words, writing teachers who focus their efforts on individualized instruction fulfill another crucial aspect of coaching: they motivate students to display and discover their writerly potential.

In addition to their roles as engineers and coaches, writing teachers, as Murray conceives of them, must also perform the task of diagnosticians. In other words, the task of teacher “is not to say that the student is writing poorly, but to say why he is writing poorly and to provide an answer which will work for him” (*Writer Teaches Writing* 129). Like good medical doctors, writing teachers do not merely point to symptoms and say “this one is not good, and this one looks really bad,” ad nauseam; rather he or she studies the symptoms, diagnoses their cause, and provides treatment to heal or improve the writer’s condition. By diagnosing and holistically treating the cause of compositional

maladies—instead of focusing on the manifest symptoms of the condition—writing teachers can help students become stronger, healthier writers.

Like Murray, Peter Elbow also redefines the role of writing teachers. But Elbow pulls teachers even farther than Murray from the central position they have traditionally occupied in the writing classroom. The title of his 1973 book, *Writing Without Teachers*, makes this point clear. Elbow believes that peer writing groups are the single most effective pedagogical tool that composition teachers have at their disposal, more important than any advice or knowledge that composition teachers traditionally dispense to students. Such groups give writers the opportunity to share their work with and receive feedback from actual readers. Because writing is an interaction between people, Elbow believes that students become better writers—that is, more adept at negotiating the writer-reader transaction—when they know how readers “experience” words on a page, not when teachers point out their errors and make suggestions for improvement. Accordingly, he redefines the role of the writing teacher as a participant in the composition course.

As active participants in a writing classroom, teachers must participate in every aspect of the composition course. This means that they must follow the same pedagogical procedures outlined for students: writing when students write, sharing their work with the other writers in class, and offering reactions to student compositions (Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers* ix). When teachers join students in these activities, the consequences are all but trivial. Teachers who

engage the learning process as Elbow recommends, not only challenge the educational status quo but also begin to collapse the dichotomy that traditionally separates students and teachers. Elbow argues that the structural breakdown of the established educational hierarchy is beneficial because the roles traditionally ascribed to teachers and students are fallaciously connected. In other words, teaching is not pivotal to learning. Most instructors understand this, yet many continue to teach as though learning depends upon what they say or do in class. Elbow discourages the use of such teacher-centered pedagogies, arguing that writing teachers “are more *useful* when it is clearer that they are not *necessary*” (*Writing Without Teachers* x). The notion that teachers are unnecessary underlies Elbow’s proposal for “teacherless” writing classes.

While Elbow elevates the status of teacherless writing classes, he does not expect writing teachers to abandon the halls of academia in search of new careers and professional identities. He does, however, expect teachers and students to revise their pedagogical assumptions about what it means to teach and learn. The term “teacherless” is thus a bit of a misnomer, chosen not for its ability to portray such classrooms in a literal sense but for its capacity to define symbolically the responsibilities of both students and teachers. In other words, he is trying to say, “we are all learners.” Because Elbow’s model transforms the milieu of the writing course and because teachers are but one part of that social equation, *Writing Without Teachers* does not limit its focus to teachers and what they do in the classroom. Contrary to that which remains standard scholarly fare



in works on composition pedagogy, Elbow's treatise also focuses on students and their educational responsibilities. Instead of presenting student perceptions about learning as behavioral responses to a teacher's pedagogical methods, Elbow treats writing students as autonomous individuals and urges them to rethink their assumptions about education. His use of the term "teacherless" provides the exigency. It aspires to encourage students to claim responsibility for their own learning. For Elbow's educational model to work, teachers and students must adjust their roles with synchronicity and harmony. A writing teacher, for example, who initiates a decentered writing course will always struggle in her efforts to help students become better writers when her students are unwilling to engage the course and assume responsibility for their learning. Conversely, students who actively participate in their education will have a more difficult time developing their writing skills when their teacher stands at the blackboard lecturing to them each period. When one party accepts its revised role and the other does not, students learning is no greater than had instruction occurred under the traditional model of teaching composition. Moreover, when such is the case, those who initially embrace their revised roles will typically revert back to more familiar and traditional forms of teaching and learning, ultimately acknowledging the futility of their purpose.

Understanding the challenge that comes with trying to break down the traditional dichotomy between teachers and students—a structure that has been assembled and reinforced through years of formal schooling—Elbow

encourages teachers to share their compositions with their writing classes, especially those pieces about which they are still unsure. The benefit of sharing “rough” drafts is that teachers and students will have the opportunity to see that their counterparts do not hold the trademark on the activities by which their roles are traditionally defined. A situation is created wherein teachers learn and learners teach. Awareness of this possibility—which is remote under the traditional model of education—is essential to the teacherless writing course, as students are more likely to engage the course when they know that they add value to it. In addition to sharing his writing, Elbow further facilitates the acquisition of such awareness by circumventing his traditional role as teacher during peer review, offering not the usual teacherly assessments of student writing but highly personal and idiosyncratic reactions to student compositions. Such reactions stress that reader feedback should not evaluate the quality of a composition but describes what happens to the reader when he or she experiences the words on the page. Because every reader is an expert at what he or she feels during reading, every student is a valuable resource to the other writers in class. As long as students provide subjective feedback, then they are helping their peers become better writers, helping them learn to use language to more effectively negotiate the writing situation. By demonstrating and participating in this feedback process, Elbow begins to shift the responsibility for learning from teacher to student and redefines his role in the classroom as that

of a learner, a role that he says makes writing teachers more useful to students (*Writing Without Teachers* ix-x).

While Elbow and Murray define the role of composition instructors in different terms, they agree that teachers should not be the center of learning. Accordingly, both pedagogues treat the writing classroom as a laboratory where students practice their craft and engage the writing process. The extent to which the laboratories are sites of learning depends mutually upon the teacher's ability to establish an environment conducive to student-centered learning and upon students' willingness to actively engage their responsibilities as learners. When these conditions are met, the traditional hierarchy of the classroom is razed and students no longer expect teachers to tell them how to become better writers. In this regard, the classrooms that Elbow and Murray promote resemble those that are constructed under critical pedagogies, insofar as they subvert the oppressive teaching practices and institutional structures of traditional education. According to Freire, the traditional methods and structures are oppressive because they do not regard students as human beings but as empty vessels that teachers must fill with knowledge. Under the traditional model of education, students believe that they are ignorant and that teachers alone possess the authority of knowledge. "Almost never," Freire writes, "do [students] realize that they, too, 'know things' they have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men" (*Pedagogy* 63). Like Freire's critical pedagogy, the student-centered writing laboratories that Elbow and Murray construct challenge this

view by operating on the assumption that students possess knowledge. Such treatment restores the student's humanity.

In addition to dismantling the oppressive teacher-student dichotomy that characterizes most writing education, Elbow's and Murray's student-centered pedagogies also break down the perceived division between subjective and objective theories of meaning and knowledge. When teachers abandon their usual positions in the classroom and engage the writing process alongside students, they send the message that good writing does not proceed from the mastery of external knowledge but from the interaction between writer and reader. This message is reinforced through the writing process, in which writers frequently share with their work with other students. When those readers offer their reactions to a composition, writers begin to see that their words are not always experienced as intended. They see that meaning resides between the writer and reader.

Here is where Berthoff and Berlin mischaracterize expressive pedagogy. They argue that expressivism locates meaning exclusively within the subjective mind. Berlin pushes this point to its logical conclusion:

Since truth must finally be discovered or, at the least, confirmed through a private act of intuition, teachers cannot communicate truth. Indeed, the teacher cannot even instruct the student in the principles of writing, since writing is inextricably intertwined with the discovery of truth. (*Rhetoric and Reality* 13)

Berlin believes that expressivism asserts an epistemology that negates any possibility of teaching of students to write. To him, expressivist classrooms are teacherless on a whole new level: all that teachers can do is create an environment in which students can learn to write by themselves; they cannot participate in or contribute to the learning process. However, Elbow and Murray do not profess the subjective pedagogies for which they are criticized; they view writing as a social and collaborative activity through which meaning is explored and revised. In this regard, their pedagogies present writing not as an isolated individual event but as a rhetorical process.

The notion that meaning and knowledge are grounded in social interaction is also an important principle of critical pedagogy, one that Freire says is denied by current-traditional writing instruction: “Implicit in the banking concept [of education] is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others” (*Pedagogy* 75). Freirean critical pedagogy rejects this dichotomy. It holds, in its place, that humans exist together with the world. We do not live apart from our surroundings; we are a part them. This connectedness gives us the ability to create and recreate meaning in the world. It gives us the power to transform reality through acts of cognition.

In decentered writing courses, like those proposed by Elbow and Murray, writers can engage their creative and transformative powers through praxis, the term Freire gives to the recurrent and cyclical process of reflection and action.

As writers compose, they consider the effects that their words have on readers, the degree to which their language will shape thought and influence how other people interpret the world. And when readers read, they will be moved by the composition, assimilating or synthesizing from it some truth about their world. The process of speaking the world and transforming it are so intertwined that the distinction between words and actions can no longer be reasonably dissociated. As a consequence, those who speak or write their voices have the freedom to create the world. The decentered classrooms of Elbow and Murray foster such freedom. To this end, process pedagogy and expressivism parallel Freirean critical pedagogy insofar as they, too, value and promote democracy and freedom within the classroom. They do not want students to inherit their teacher's interpretation of the world but, instead, want to create environments where students have the freedom to critically engage the world and to interact with others in a collaborative existential search for meaning.

### **Discovering the Subject of Writing**

One of the primary goals of achieving democracy in the classroom is nurturing what Freire calls "authentic thinking" (*Pedagogy* 77). Freire believes that thinking and communication are intertwined to such an extent that the world is meaningless outside of human social interaction. Accordingly, where education is defined as the process by which men and women critically engage reality and learn to participate in the world, it must be grounded in dialogue.

Although such interaction is facilitated by the resolution of the teacher-student contradiction, it cannot be equitable until course content is mutually accessible to students and teachers. Traditional views of education are not suitable for shared dialogue because they project ignorance onto students. In other words, they operate on the assumption that teachers are knowledgeable and students are not. According to this model, students are unfit to enter meaningful dialogue with teachers. The relationship between the two parties is one of transmission and reception; dialogue in the classroom is largely confined to issues of clarification. To circumvent this arrangement, Freire recommends that course topics originate not from those ivory towers for which academia is known but from the practical concerns of everyday life, the reality of lived experiences of which students also have knowledge (*Pedagogy* 77). Because authentic thinking is grounded in communication, teachers must—if their goal is to prepare students for participatory democracy and active citizenship—introduce and raise questions about topics that are both relevant and practical to the lives of students.

The classroom practice of introducing, discussing, and raising questions about relevant topics is as much a part of process pedagogy and expressivism as it is critical pedagogy. However, because each pedagogy stresses a different mode of language-use (i.e. writing versus discussion), the vehicle for addressing relevant topics varies. Freire, for instance, believes that discussion topics begin with teachers. He believes they are responsible for “present[ing] the materials to

the students for their consideration” (*Pedagogy* 81). He does not want teachers to encroach upon human freedom and tell students what to think, but he does want them to pose challenging questions to students about the world. When those questions address concrete reality over concepts, he says that students engage the course material and the world more critically:

Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems related to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed. (*Pedagogy* 81)

Like Freire, Elbow and Murray also strive to critically engage students in the world, but their approach does not rely upon teachers to introduce discussion topics through questions. They rely upon students. Because Elbow and Murray give students the opportunity to choose their own writing topics and because student compositions provide the basis for small group discussion, course topics originate with student-writers, and discussions proceed from the questions and comments that student-readers advance.



Elbow says the *subject* of a composition matters less than the *act* of composing. Therefore, he does not care about what students write as long as they are writing (*Writing Without Teachers* 79). In an effort to motivate students to put words on paper, Elbow does not pre-select course topics but gives students the freedom to write about their experiences and interests. In other words, he encourages them to write about those things that they deem relevant to their lives. Unfortunately, my experience indicates that students do not always appreciate such latitude. They have been told what to write for so long that they do not trust their ability to choose what they consider to be a suitable academic topic. Elbow's concept of freewriting helps to mitigate such doubt by providing a practical method for discovering topics and what to say about them. Elbow rejects the conventional wisdom that writing is a two-step process whereby "[f]irst you figure out your meaning, then you put it into language" (*Writing Without Teachers* 14). He argues instead that meaning emerges through language use. Writers might have an idea about what they want to write, but they discover new connections and insights as they work with words and often end up in unexpected places. When writers free themselves from the pressures of maintaining control over the traditional writing process—deciding what to say, creating a plan of development, sticking to the outline, etc.—they can more readily generate words and more comfortably explore questions and ideas that arise in the writing process. Freewriting provides students the opportunity to find worthwhile topics.

Elbow's instructions for discovering writing topics is quite simple: "think of a person, place, feeling, object, incident, or transaction that is important to you [and perform] one or two freewriting exercises while trying to hold it in mind" (*Writing Without Teachers* 9). This procedure, he says, will yield writing topics and starting points, unfocused though they may initially be. Perhaps it can be argued that Elbow's instructions yield topics only because they impose topics, violating his claim that the act of writing is more important than the subject. But I think any such claim blurs the boundaries between instruction and direction. The former implies learning, while the latter implies guidance. Elbow is not trying to direct or guide students to a topic; he is merely providing the method and motivation for them to discover topics on their own. Because he wants them to write with energy and authority, he does advocate personal writing; however, students still have near limitless freedom within such parameters yet are not overwhelmed by an utter lack of bearing or orientation. As many writing teachers know, students are frequently driven to frustration and writer's block when assignments are too wide open or vague. Elbow's instructions position students narrowly enough to start writing but widely enough to discover their own subjects. He encourages them to find points of interest or energy in their freewritings and develop those points through further freewriting exercises.

Elbow does not want students to worry about writing grammatically-correct sentences and coherent paragraphs, as these concerns distract writers and interrupt writing; he wants them instead to "pour *more* attention, focus, and

energy” into writing about their topics, which become more focused as they move from one freewrite to the next. (*Writing Without Teachers* 8). He understands that an emphasis on non-stop writing will create some amount of garbage, but he also maintains that “the *good* bits will be much better than anything else you can produce by any other method” (*Writing Without Teachers* 9). Moreover, from those good bits comes a more sophisticated understanding of the topic and its meaning in the world. Elbow’s freewriting technique is designed to do more than facilitate the invention of relevant writing topics; it also puts students in conversation with themselves. While students will generally start out with only vague conceptions of their topic, the process of extracting ideas and passages from one freewrite and expanding upon them in the next allows students to interact with their own words and ideas and develop more coherent and meaningful interpretations of their topics. They restate, refine, expand, question, and struggle with what they have said, just as a conversant might do. The process, Elbow notes, often compels writers to see things in unfamiliar or unsuspecting ways. And just when they have organized their thoughts on a topic, they invite further discussion by sharing their work with their peer groups, where new questions, comments, and considerations emerge.

Murray also believes that course topics should be relevant to students. For this reason, like Elbow, he does not think that composition teachers should force writing topics on students; instead, he thinks students should write about those topics that interest them most. In the event that students struggle to find

topics, he encourages them to look at events within their personal histories from different points of view. Like Elbow's freewriting instructions, Murray's approach to writing can be viewed as a way of forcing topics on students. To be sure, Murray's recommendation encourages personal writing; however, it also allows more flexibility than most essay prompts. Consider, for example, the following assignment that Amy Lee gave her first-year writing students:

For the first assignment, students interrogated stereotypes from a personal perspective. We discussed, and they wrote about assumptions they commonly encounter about their own identity, what groups they are typically assigned to, what characteristics are attributed to them as a result of this grouping, how these assumptions vary or remain the same according to context, who was most likely to buy into and act on these stereotypes, how these assumptions function not only to affect them individually but also to produce broader social and political implications, and how and why (and whether) individuals respond when they encounter them. (111)

Even though Lee's assignment begins with personal experience, such is the extent to which it parallels Murray's topic recommendation. Lee controls the direction of her students' compositions far more specifically than Murray. She asks students to consider the ways in which they are assigned to certain social and political groups and how those assumptions about membership shape their

identities. In other words, she wants them to discuss one narrow aspect of their lives. Murray, on the other hand, does not limit the range of topics within the scope of student experience.

Contrary to the nature of most contrasts, I am not suggesting that Lee's assignments are antithetical to Murray's. Perhaps on the continuum of student autonomy, she offers few choices; however, her assignment still lets students choose from a variety of experiences in which normative discourses have figured them. I am also not suggesting that Lee, a self-proclaimed critical pedagogue, rejects student-centered teaching. Such criticism is only applicable where student-centeredness is defined in terms of student autonomy, which it rarely is. Student-centeredness is more widely understood as the practice of valuing student perspectives and experiences and of including students in the pursuit and discovery of knowledge. By asking students to write about their experiences with stereotypes, Lee obliges them use language to explore their vision of the world and to disrupt dominant discourses. To this end, her assignment is consistent with the student-centered approach that she advocates. Writing prompts in teacher-centered classrooms, on the other hand, generally direct students to compose essays on topics that teachers already know and have probably discussed in class—e.g. symbolism in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" and character in John Updike's "A&P." Such prompts fail to include students in the meaning-making process; they are only designed to show teachers how much students know and how well they can inscribe

(established) thought into prose. Yet Murray's suggestion for finding writing topics nowhere approaches the level of control imposed by traditional writing prompts. This variance reveals the extent to which Murray's topic recommendation does not impose a topic. Nevertheless, such comparison is not necessary to show the absence of imposition in Murray's writing assignments, for topic choice is not a relative matter under his pedagogy. Remember that Murray only offers his recommendation—i.e. to look for topics in personal experiences—when students are having difficulty finding writing topics. Such qualification suggests that Murray is fine with students writing on topics that do not involve personal history.

Ultimately, Murray believes that the inability to find an interesting writing topic is actually an inability to find something interesting to say about it (*Writer Teaches Writing* 27). Accordingly, one of his invention strategies includes a consideration of perspective:

The writer develops his subject by putting things in focus, by developing a point of view. It may be his own point of view about the subject or it may be the point of view within the subject. And he may discover this subject by switching his point of view, moving around the subject the way a photographer moves around his subject. (*Writer Teaches Writing* 41)

Murray's photography metaphor is fitting because it illustrates the notion that a subject is less important than its depiction. Ordinary objects are often rendered

interesting in photographs through the creative control of space—camera angle, depth of field, focus—and, most importantly, light. The Belgian photographer Léonard Misonne explains this: “Light glorifies everything. It transforms and ennobles the most commonplace and ordinary subjects. The object is nothing; light is everything” (qtd. in Sussman 19). The concepts of space and light are as important to writing as they are to photography. Once a writer determines her point of view—angle and focus, as Murray describes it—she must next decide what to say about a topic. In photographic terms, this corresponds to how much light she directs through her camera lens, which shapes the depth and dimension of her photographed object, as well as the degree to which that object contrasts with the other objects in the frame. Murray prompts writing students to experiment with various exposure settings by composing what journalists call leads, the first few—and most important—lines of a news story. He encourages students to write several leads and then outline an essay for each. The process helps students find an interesting perspective from which to view and write about their experiences. Moreover, Murray says, it shows students “how the beginning of a piece of writing shapes the entire piece of writing” (*Writer Teaches Writing* 60).

Murray’s assumption that the beginning of a composition shapes the entire work is grounded in the belief that meaning cannot be separated from language. According to this view, writing is a process of making meaning and discovering the world. When writers compose, they confront a number of

possibilities related to voice, diction, and syntax, each of which influences meaning at the most local levels of an essay. With each new choice in the writing process, the overall number of possibilities narrows; at the same time, however, that newest range of possibilities can be seen more clearly. In this respect, each decision shapes the overall meaning of a composition, even if that decision is made halfway through an essay. The shape of a composition is not exclusively determined by the start, as Murray suggests; nevertheless, writers are more likely to discover new interpretations (and less likely to reproduce dominant discourses) when they shift perspectives and make unconventional choices in the early stages of essay writing. The traditional view of language—that it is the communicative vehicle of preexisting ideas—does not allow for Murray's assumption that early writing choices shape the meaning of a composition. While language is considered an imperfect medium for the transmission of information under the traditional view, it does not have the epistemological power to create knowledge. It can distort but not create, for truth is believed to exist independent of language.

Another benefit of lead-writing, Murray says, is that it focuses on content over form. Murray knows that many composition students have a preoccupation with the formal elements of writing. He also knows that that preoccupation shifts attention away the writing topic, frequently inhibiting progress and preventing the discovery of new meanings. Murray attempts to mitigate this shift by employing writing activities that promote promiscuity over perfection. That is to say, much



like Elbow, he encourages waste. Because good writing rarely results from the first effort, Murray argues that writers must give themselves permission to write badly in order to write well (*Writer Teaches Writing*, 2nd ed. 29). Lead-writing grants such permission. However, consent should not be confused with intent: garbage is not a goal but a byproduct of discovering what to say and how to say it. Elbow notes the same of his invention strategies, which is not altogether surprising given the similarity between lead-writing and freewriting. Both writing activities are performed in small units of time; they encourage the unexpected; they help writers find and explore their topics; and most importantly, they get writers writing. And even though some garbage will accumulate during the lead-writing (or freewriting) process, Murray argues that good writing frequently accompanies garbage. To this end, writers in search of a subject have even more in common with photographers than what Murray initially acknowledges, for the latter often waste rolls of film (or megabytes of memory in today's digital age) to capture but a few good moments.

Murray's invention exercises reflect a belief that all writing, to some extent, is autobiographical. Every person, he argues, has a unique way of viewing the world and of using language to communicate that vision. Romantic and humanistic perceptions of the self maintain that personal uniqueness is the exclusive invention of individuals; however, this is not the sense in which Murray interprets distinctiveness. Human beings, he suggests, are also shaped by

social discourse. Consider the following statement about his personal configuration:

I confess that at my age I am not sure about the source of most of my autobiography. I have written poems that describe what happened when I left the operating table, looked back and decided to return. My war stories are constructed of what I experienced, what I heard later, what the history books say, what I needed to believe to survive and recover. ("All Writing" 72)

What Murray describes is a dialectical man, someone who is influenced by personal and social experiences alike. Accordingly, he is as much constituted by social structures as he is personal psychology. The consequence of this position is that all writing might also be considered social. But Murray does not say this. He suggests instead that the aggregate of social experiences, which varies from person to person, constitutes one's individuality. In other words, uniqueness is a matter of composition: one collection of experiences will shape an individual differently than another collection. In "All Writing is Autobiography," Murray gives the following examples:

I have my own peculiar way of looking at the world and my own way of using language to communicate what I see. My voice is the product of Scottish genes and a Yankee environment, of Baptists sermons and the newspaper city room, of all the language I have heard and spoken. (67)

What is interesting about Murray's statement is that he appropriates the social influences in his life. Rather than saying that his highland heritage and religious background, for example, influence the way he interprets the world, he takes ownership of them. They no longer exert external influence over their subject but emanate from within: "my voice," "my particular way." From this perspective, particular ways of knowing and composing the world cannot be separated from their linguistic agents. Hence Murray's claim that all writing is autobiography that "grows from a few deep taproots that are set down into our past in childhood" ("All Writing" 67).

Given his view that personal history can never be extracted from a piece of writing, Murray encourages students to write subjectively by exploring their interests and experiences. He sees no reason to attempt to suppress the idiosyncrasies that inevitably pervade all communication. Some scholars have criticized this personal approach to composition on the grounds that it promotes solipsism. James Berlin, for example, writes that expressivism "locate[s] truth either within the individual or within a realm that is accessible only through the individual's internal apprehension, apart from the empirically verifiable sensory world" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 11). But just because Murray encourages students to begin writing through the lens of personal history does not mean that he promotes solipsism. In fact, as Murray describes the process of motivating students to write, his pedagogy sounds not solipsistic but transactional. That is to say, it appears to search for truth within the interaction of the writer, reader,

subject, and language. Accordingly, his approach mirrors the rhetorical theory that Berlin ranks highest. Consider the trajectory Murray would have students follow:

[S]tudents may write about an important incident in their life. This starts most subjectively with a listing of the relevant parts, but when they expand the incident, perhaps changing the point of view and the tone, showing the life-long implications of that incident for their own lives, then for other lives, and perhaps for all lives, they control and use their material. Hopefully, they have read widely enough so that they can combine their own experiences with the insights of others who are more intelligent, more perceptive, or more experienced. (*Writer Teaches Writing* 153)

Murray's writing process clearly encourages students to move beyond solipsism. Lead-writing exercises, for example, prompt students to consider different points of view on their subjects, which lead to new insights, while interaction with other writers provides even further perspective and insight. As Murray notes, the latter can occur with writers of published works, by actively and critically engaging their texts; it can also occur with other writers in class, through group workshops.

The workshop—or peer review, as it is commonly known—lets writers share their work with and receive feedback from other writers in class. Murray advocates the process because it gives student writers the opportunity to help each other “develop their own meanings and their own voices” (*Writer Teaches*

*Writing*, 2nd ed. 187). While Murray puts emphasis on developing one's *own* meanings, he knows that reader feedback will help move writers further away from their initial subjective positions. When readers ask for clarification, when they point out contradictions, or when they ask for more detail about an idea, then writers have an opportunity to see their work through the eyes of others and to consider their subjects from the diverse perspectives of others. These new perspectives often allow writers to achieve greater objectivity. By thus engaging the workshop process—as part of the larger composing process—the writer, as Murray notes, “discovers the universal through the personal” (*Writer Teaches Writing* 153). That is to say, personal and expressive writing is not necessarily antithetical to thoughtful and critical writing, as Joseph Harris has charged. Asking writers to explore familiar and interesting topics from their personal lives helps them to find motivation to enter the writing process. And that process is at once a critical exploration of reality and a search for meaning through language. Lest anyone persists labeling the subjective approach to writing instruction “anti-intellectual” (Harris 31), Murray reminds his readers that even scholarship, if it is good, “evolves from personal curiosity” (*Writer Teaches Writing* 153).

### **Language Matters in the Writing Classroom**

The idea that writing is the process of discovering meaning through language further aligns process pedagogy and expressivism with critical pedagogy. Freire believes that the ability to name the world is the ability to

transform it (*Pedagogy* 88). He argues that human beings have a dialectical relationship with the world and, as such, have the potential to interact with and shape reality through language. This view of the world as an unfinished reality under constant revision underlies the pedagogies of Elbow and Murray and motivates their emphasis on the writing process. Each stage of the process, including each revision, gives writers the opportunity to make new connections between ideas and leads them closer to discovering the meaning of their experiences and thus the truth about the world.

In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow notes that language is the principal means by which people can interact with themselves. “Without a symbol system such as language,” he writes, “it is difficult if not impossible to think about more than one thing at a time, and thus to allow two thoughts to interact” (55). The process of placing thought into symbols allows humans to easily move from one idea to another without losing the first. Furthermore, it allows us to hold two or more ideas in our minds at one time and explore the relationship between them. In short, language lets us objectify our noetic inventions and place our thoughts at a distance (Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers* 55). Walter J. Ong claims that the extent to which we can objectify ideas and distance ourselves from thought increases with writing, opening the human psyche to greater introspection and analysis (105). This distancing effect is what Elbow hopes to achieve through his writing process. He believes that the traditional understanding of writing is backwards. Meaning is not something that writers formulate before they begin

writing; rather, it is something they discover as they write.

While I agree with Elbow's claim that writing is a process of discovering meaning, I also think that his argument is too simplistic in its portrayal of thinking and writing. It assumes that thinking, as an activity, is less sophisticated than writing, that it is unable to provide the same level of critical analysis. This perspective echoes what E. M. Forster believed when he asked, "How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?" (101), and what Joan Didion thought when she declared, "I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means" (2). For Elbow, Forster, and Didion, the act of putting words on paper facilitates critical reflection and analytical insight in ways that thinking cannot. But this does not mean that thinking is incapable of generating creative and interesting ideas. Case in point: Socrates is rumored to be one of the greatest minds in the history of Western civilization, yet he never wrote a word. He did, however, if we believe Plato, discover new insights through dialogue with others. To be sure, Socrates was as critically competent through speech as most intellectuals are through writing. This point challenges the notion that writing occasions greater critical analysis exclusively because it objectifies the word to a greater degree than speech. Perhaps the analytical strength of writing resides also in its tendency to slow the thinking process—a tendency shared by conversation. When students, for example, write or vocalize ideas, they give themselves the space necessary to consider their subjects more carefully and thoroughly. However, as many teachers will attest, the space is

not always utilized. Herein lies the problem with the implication that writing can discover knowledge more readily than thinking. Some students will take the time to discover ideas without writing, often talking through ideas with themselves; they will have developed greater knowledge about their subject than those who write but do not utilize the opportunity for reflection and analysis that the process affords them. In other words, the thinking process can yield as much intellectual fruit as writing. Nevertheless, my experience as a writer and teacher suggests that where the composing process is actively engaged, it wields greater potential for intellectual discovery than other modes of cognition. Because the products of writing are less fleeting than other linguistic events, writing can objectify language and accommodate a prolonged contemplation of ideas to a greater extent than intracranial thinking and deliberative discourse. To this end, I agree with Elbow's claim that writing uncovers meaning. Unfortunately—and herein lies my disagreement with Elbow's sweeping portrayal of thinking and writing—students do not always pursue or realize this potential in their writing.

The process of putting words on paper, Elbow maintains, can help students conceive of their ideas as objects, as things exterior to the self. This distance gives them the opportunity to interact with their words—to find gaps in their reasoning, pinpoint contradictions in their beliefs, and realize new connections between ideas. It also lets students more impartially test their perceptions against received wisdom and the experiences of others. The result is that writers will discover new meaning in their experiences and articulate fresh



truths about the world. The process is one of reflection and action via language and parallels Freire's notion of praxis. By reflecting on their experiences through dialogue with themselves (made possible through the objectification of the word) and with others in their peer groups, writers actively participate in the creation and transformation of reality, a cornerstone of critical pedagogy. Accordingly, process pedagogy and expressivism are not as narrowly concerned with the individual as some critics have charged. Insofar as the pedagogies encourage the re-examination of experience and meaning, both of which are situated within specific social and political contexts, they encourage a reinterpretation of social and political realities.

Murray also sees language as a powerful instrument capable of creating and transforming the world. This notion is so central to his idea of writing that it undergirds his definition of the writing process. "A writer," he says, "is an individual who uses language to discover meaning in experience and communicate it" ("Interior View" 21). What is important about this definition is that it locates meaning outside of experience. It acknowledges that an event or happening has no inherent meaning but only achieves significance when it undergoes interpretation. Moreover, the definition suggests that the interpretation of the experience must be discovered through language. Existential philosophers may hasten to suggest that lived experience is the organizing unit of life and of the world, but they overwhelmingly ignore the role that language plays in establishing the meaning of an experience. Murray does

not. He believes that language is an essential element in the search for meaning and truth in the world. Writing facilitates the search for meaning by objectifying words and ideas. Elbow appreciates the distancing potential of language; so does Murray. The ability to place ideas outside of oneself and view them more objectively gives a writer the opportunity to see connections that might otherwise be imperceptible. As Murray describes it, “words are put down to see what they reveal when they bump into other words on the page” (“Interior View” 23).

According to Murray’s model, as writers interact with their written words and ideas, new meanings emerge. Sometimes those meanings reinforce what we already know, but sometimes they run contrary to established knowledge. The latter situation compels writers to reconsider what they believe to be the truth about the world. Such reconsiderations exercise what Freire calls the ontological right of humans to speak their truth about the world and remake reality. To the extent that I perceive my common humanity with others, I agree with Freire that each person has a right to name the world; however, universal attainment of that right may never be secured, as power is encoded in countless varieties of cultural institutions, practices, and discourses. But no matter how difficult the task, human equality and freedom are moral imperatives that deserve commitment.

## Conclusion

In *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy*, Knoblauch and Brannon argue that process pedagogy and expressivism are “the precursors to critical teaching, despite the fact that they don’t, for the most part, derive from the customary sources of liberatory praxis—Marxism, feminism, post-modernism” (126). Such a statement can easily be supported by methodological overlaps between the pedagogies. This chapter explores the degree to which process pedagogy and expressivism parallel the practices of critical pedagogy insofar as they promote the generative power of language to remake reality, decenter their classrooms, and advocate the use of relevant topics for writing and discussion. Given that these classroom practices form the backbone of critical pedagogy as Freire articulates it, process pedagogy and expressivism can comfortably be interpreted as precursors to critical pedagogy. Elbow and Murray may be viewed as the American forefathers of critical teaching. Such a reading of the history of critical pedagogy and of the process and expressive movements is important because it revises the common historical narratives of composition theory. The advantage of this revision is that it considers the sources of critical pedagogy and their consequences on pedagogical practice. According to Roskelly and Ronald, such reflection is absent from most pedagogical scholarship:

In the last three decades, composition has often embraced visions of itself as revolutionary, cutting-edge, and above all, new. Insofar as it fuels change and energizes teachers, revolutionary

sloganeering probably does a lot of good. Yet this kind of fascination with the new resists reflection; the harm lies in ignoring the consequences or the sources of new approaches. (104)

This chapter examined the teaching practices of Elbow and Murray and argued that they exhibited and anticipated several key features of Freirean critical pedagogy. The next chapter will argue that I. A. Richards, in the first half of the nineteenth century, developed and practiced an early form of critical pedagogy that embodied Freire's principle methods.

CHAPTER III  
PRACTICAL CRITICISM / PRACTICAL PEDAGOGY: I. A. RICHARDS  
PROMOTES INDEPENDENT THINKING

The purpose of this chapter is to show that I. A. Richards, during the 1920s and '30s, anticipated the principal teaching methods of critical pedagogy first articulated by Paulo Freire in the 1970s. I argue that Richards's pedagogy embodied the Freirean focus on the generative power of language, the study of relevant subject matter, and instructional methods grounded in democracy and praxis. Like the radical American pedagogues of the 1960s, Richards and his colleagues at the University of Cambridge taught during a time of significant social change. By the early nineteenth century, industrialization and war had moved England towards greater social, economic, and political equality: the middle classes enjoyed increased prosperity; women and the working classes gained political power; and traditional markers of class status were deteriorating. Moreover, following a number of legislative reforms, including the elimination of public education fees and increases in the legal dropout age, a wider variety of men and women pursued an education. This expansion of the student population soon highlighted deficiencies in traditional pedagogical models. Richards took these deficiencies seriously and devoted much of his work to developing more efficient methods for teaching non-traditional students. These methods made Richards an early champion of student-centered education. "His

pedagogical inventions,” writes Ann Berthoff, “are all conceived of as ways and means of placing the process of composing, or framing, in the control of the meaning-maker” (“I. A. Richards” 197).

Current-traditional writing instruction—which emphasizes the modes of discourse and technical proficiency—had reigned supreme in writing classrooms since the late eighteenth century, but it was not until the 1940s that it began to include the study of literary texts as formal manifestations of the principles of discourse. To some extent, eighteenth-century pedagogues also included criticism as a means of rhetorical instruction, yet their focus, as Thomas Miller notes, was not literature *per se* but “cosmopolitan forms of public discourse, particularly essays of taste and manners” (194). While both methods of instruction challenged the traditional association between rhetoric and civic participation, the eighteenth-century approach nevertheless emphasized more conventional rhetorical works than the latter. The introduction of literary texts into composition classrooms, according to Sharon Crowley, follows the rise of new criticism as both a teachable and legitimate method for studying literature. Because composition teachers were largely students of literature, and because there was no established theoretical framework for teaching composition, writing instructors exploited the formalist biases of current-traditionalism and new criticism and began to “[conflate] poetic principles with rules for exposition” (Crowley 115). This impulse to drive literary criticism into the domain of composition was further assisted by the publication of several writing textbooks

that borrowed from the principles of new criticism, some of which were written by prominent new critics, including Monroe Beardsley's *Writing with Reason* and Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Modern Rhetoric*.

Given the influence of new criticism on current-traditional writing instruction in the mid-twentieth-century American composition classroom, it comes as no surprise that I. A. Richards, the purported father of new criticism (Russo 523), despite significant contributions to the field of rhetoric and writing, has been a scarce figure in the throng of post-1960s' scholarship in composition pedagogy. Today less than a handful of his twenty books remain in print; his works earn only brief and perfunctory appearances in graduate English seminars; and his name seldom receives mention in professional journals of rhetoric. Over the years, a few scholars have tried to rescue Richards from this well of silence. In 1991, for example, Ann Berthoff published *Richards on Rhetoric*, a collection of twenty-five essays and passages taken from Richards's most important rhetorical works. Her explicit goal was to make Richards's ideas on language and learning more accessible to scholars, for as she proclaims in the introduction to her edited collection, "[Richards] is a critic we urgently need" (ix). In the spring of 1992, Stuart Brown echoed Berthoff's assertion, arguing that Richards "identified the major critical components needed to formulate a rhetoric for the twenty-first century" (219). These small but significant steps towards a renewed interest in the works of Richards never gained momentum.

The widespread resistance to re-engage Richards may be grounded in the tension between what Peter Elbow calls the institutional “*cultures or traditions or identities* of literature and composition” (“The Cultures” 534). Because modern composition developed in response to the text-centered pedagogy of literary studies that valued product over process and scholarship over teaching, compositionists seem unwilling to embrace any aspect of the period immediately preceding the institutional formation of their field in the 1960s, an era in which writing instruction had not only been co-opted by new criticism but was also treated as inferior to literary studies (see Kinneavy 1; Elbow “The Cultures” 541). Perhaps they are concerned that a return to Richards might signify a move towards acknowledging the value (or even the superiority) of the formalist principles of current-traditional writing instruction, which might then be viewed as a revocation of composition’s institutional authority. To fear this slippery slope is gratuitous, for finding value in the pedagogies of the past will not negate or discredit composition’s claims of progress. This is especially true in the case of Richards, who remains, even by 1960s’ standards, a progressive writing instructor. Richards saw the direction his country was headed and worked to develop educational methods that prepared student to communicate and participate in an increasingly diverse society. The result was an early incarnation of critical pedagogy that stressed participatory learning, critical reflection, and the epistemological influence of language.



In the opening paragraph of *Practical Criticism*, published in 1929, Richards defines the aims of his project. There are three, but only the second and third concern pedagogy. One of his goals is “to provide a new technique for those who wish to discover for themselves what they think and feel about poetry (and cognate matters) and why they should like or dislike it” (3). Another is “to prepare the way for education methods more efficient than those we use now in developing discrimination and the power to understand what we hear and read” (3). On the surface these aims appear only to address consumption and critique. However, as Richard E. Miller points out, “practical criticism was born, in part, out of a desire to get students to write about poetry in a different (Richards would say more ‘discriminating’) way” (176). In other words, Richards’s project concerned the teaching of composition as much as it did the teaching of criticism *per se*. And because his goal was the formulation of new techniques for teaching criticism and composition, it seems certain that Richards found ineffective the old methods of the university. Retrospectively, his efforts might be interpreted as indication that an educational disruption upset the traditional paradigm for teaching students to analyze and write about literature. This disruption can be attributed to a broadening of student constituencies in higher education, which followed and facilitated the political rise of England’s lower and middle classes.

## **Political Power and Educational Access**

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the English government played a very small role in the education of its citizenry. It had provided limited grants to religious institutions to build schools and teach basic literacy to the lower orders, but there remained no organized system of education. Accordingly, despite the opportunities made possible by government grants, laboring classes continued to receive sporadic and unsatisfactory schooling. Because children often shared in the domestic and financial responsibilities of household, they did not regularly attend school. Roy Strong estimates that under such class conditions many children had but three or four years of formal education (415). This neglect of public education eventually drew criticism as England's position in the industrial world began to slip. A prominent voice in the debate over education reform was W.E. Forster, a member of parliament. He introduced the Elementary Education Act of 1870, which universalized elementary education and established elected local school boards. When he brought his bill to the House of Commons, he argued that England's industrial prosperity, constitutional system, and national power depended upon "the speedy provision of elementary education" (HC Deb c465).

Even though England had ushered in the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century, T. L. Jarman notes that it was one of the last industrial nations to create a national system of education (213). Consequently, England had no viable mechanism for preparing its citizenry to meet the demands of

industrialization. As scientific farming and machine-based manufacturing replaced primitive methods of agriculture and domestic craftsmanship, the demand for technicians and engineers, as well as clerks and accountants and other trained personnel increased (Jarman 212). All these jobs, writes Jarman, “needed at least an elementary education: in reading, writing, and arithmetic” (213). The Elementary Education Act of 1870 was an important step towards meeting these demands of human economy. It did not make primary education mandatory or free, but it did make elementary schools available for those who wished to attend them. As a corollary, the bill paved the way for further legislative acts making elementary education compulsory until the age of twelve. Ironically, however, the industrial pressures that initiated the Educational Act of 1870 and its nineteenth-century successors would eventually drive juveniles to leave school once they reached the dropout age. According to Asa Briggs, the number of working children ages fourteen and under quadrupled during World War I (263). This spike in the number of young workers in the early twentieth century may be the product of wartime changes in social roles. Regardless, English officials were not comfortable with the idea that juveniles were primarily seen as cheap substitute labor, thus prompting the Minister of Education, H. A. L. Fisher, to introduce and defend a bill raising the dropout age to fourteen and abolishing all fees for public elementary education (Briggs 263). The Fisher bill also supported secondary education by directing local school authorities to make provisions for students who wished to stay in school beyond their

fourteenth year (Jarman 197; Andrews 84). To be sure, Fisher believed that education should be available to all classes of citizens and that success should reward ability, not just privilege.

The educational reforms of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries primarily concerned elementary and secondary education, but their impact on higher education cannot be overstated. Because children from less privileged backgrounds were now given greater opportunity to pursue a comprehensive education until their eighteenth year, many young men and women who had historically been shut out from universities found themselves prepared to pursue a higher education, and statistics indicate that many did. According to the Report of the Robbins Committee on Higher Education, the number of students entering university in Britain doubled between 1900 and 1938 (qtd. in Ross 27). For the first time, a significant number of those students hailed from the lower and middle classes. A measure of the degree to which education reform increased access to higher education is that boys from manual backgrounds born between 1910 and 1929 reached university at twice the rate of those born before 1910, and boys from business and professional backgrounds reached university at thrice the rate of the earlier birth cohort (Floud 114, 137).

While the Educational Acts of 1870 and 1918 provided the means by which all children could prepare to enter the university, they were not solely responsible for increasing university enrollment and diversity. They worked in

concert with a number of other developments. One contributing factor was the establishment of new universities. The first wave of charters began as early as 1900 and included the universities in Birmingham, Sheffield, and Bristol. Unlike Oxford and Cambridge, these newer civic, or “redbrick,” universities taught technical knowledge over the purely academic. Their focus on practical learning was grounded in their origins as working-men’s institutions that were typically “founded and endowed by local businessmen, with the express commitment of providing opportunities for social advancement for young men from the region” (Ross 25). That the founders were motivated by meritocratic advancement is impressive, especially when viewed through the corporate mentality of education today, where colleges and universities are increasingly viewed as factories that manufacture employees for the job market and where institutional success is defined and measured by graduate employment rates and starting salaries; nevertheless, it is probably a bit naïve to assume that the motivation behind these colleges and institutions was strictly philanthropic. As businessmen, the founders also stood to benefit from the education of those who did not have the wealth and social status to attend Oxford or Cambridge: by providing young men of ability the opportunity to obtain job-related skills, the founders increased the number of qualified individuals in the workforce. Local professionals later joined these members of commerce and manufacturing to lobby for university status (Ross 25). The path to securing such charters was assisted by the increasing

political power and social status of the lower and middle classes in the early twentieth century.

As manufacturing activity continued to increase before and during the Great War, the rural masses steadily migrated to the cities. As this occurred, the landowning gentry began to sell its estates, for that which had once been the basis for its aristocratic and political power was no longer profitable. Agriculture was in decline and taxes were rising. Fortunately, the gentry found prospective buyers from among the increasingly wealthy business and professional classes who nostalgically desired the upper-class rural lifestyle (Strong 489). Accompanying these changes in land ownership were a host of other developments that further deteriorated traditional class markers, including the advent of the BBC, which Strong says hastened the leveling of social status by “introducing to the public for the first time a universally accepted voice for speech” (489). Such ruptures in the façade of social hierarchy are tangible markers of England’s democratic progress during the war, which arguably culminated with the Representation of the People Act of 1918. This extension of franchise extended voting rights to all men over the age of twenty-one and to women over the age of thirty. Because the war-front effort so heavily relied upon machinery produced by factory labor at home, workers gained leverage, trade unions expanded their membership, and women joined men in the industrial labor force (Porter 173). Their political strength of the workers could not be denied, and they soon gained unprecedented access to the political

process, first with the creation of the Ministry of Labor and next with the extension of voting rights. The latter gave laboring classes enough influence to tip the electorate, thus making the interests of workers the interests of the state (Strong 481).

These moves towards political equality—initiated as they were by the interests of the governing elite—increased opportunities for lower- and middle-class children to pursue a university education. And even if those students were initially financially limited to local redbrick universities, the state eventually saw the value of meritocratic advancement and began to offer scholarships to those students whose families could not afford to send them to Oxford or Cambridge. The state initially provided two hundred scholarships in 1919, in addition to the smaller number that was offered through private university endowments and by local authorities (Ross 26). The result is that a growing number of students attending England's most elite and prestigious universities hailed from economically- and socially-diverse backgrounds. These demographic changes reduced the exclusivity of Oxford and Cambridge, placing a premier education within the reach of talented young men who had not the advantage of inherited privilege. Moreover, given their diverse backgrounds, scholarship students, unlike typical Oxbridge men, did not hail from the most prestigious independent boarding schools in Britain, making their educational (and social) experiences quite different from those who generally matriculated. These differences made the transition to university a more challenging affair for scholarship students and

also agitated the status quo. Nevertheless, the ancient universities welcomed such diversity during a time when working-class men had acquired political power, for it provided them an opportunity to “reassert [their] claim as the premier national institution, with a special responsibility to train the nation’s leaders” (Vernon 173).

Class is not the only indicator of increased educational diversity in England during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—so is gender. Women began to receive undergraduate education in 1869 with the founding of Girton College, the first residential college for women. The college was located in Cambridge but was not then affiliated with the university there. Consequently, its students could not attend lectures or sit for examinations at the University of Cambridge. Moreover, Girton did not have the charter to grant degrees and held a very low rank within the university community (Deslandes 185). Eventually, the women of Girton began to receive limited privileges at Cambridge, including the right to attend lectures, to sit for examinations, and to participate in university organizations. Despite such progress on the policy front, the male students at Cambridge behaved belligerently towards the women entering the university community—*their* university community. Paul Deslandes says that male students felt threatened by female students and would protect and exert their cultural dominance through unflattering sexual characterizations and harsh oppositional rhetoric (187-96). Nevertheless, by 1910 the number of women



attending courses at Cambridge steadily increased to about ten percent of the total student population.

While women had been earning degrees since the turn of the century at local redbrick universities and received twenty-three percent of all first degrees awarded in 1922 (Hicks and Allen 10), Oxford and Cambridge continued to deny them such privileges until after the war. The increased presence of women in industry and the extension of franchise in 1918 gave women considerable political weight alongside the working classes, and the government began to heed the interests of women. In 1919, a Royal Commission was established to “force the universities to clarify women’s status” (Deslandes 209). In response, Oxford began to extend full university privileges to women. Cambridge refused to do the same but did make a small concession in 1921 to award titular degrees to women. Full privileges were not granted until 1948 when Girton College received its official status as a college of Cambridge University.

Alongside women, foreign students attended England’s universities at higher rates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They began to attend English universities after a number of educational reforms, not the least of which was legislation abolishing religious tests at Oxford and Cambridge in 1871. Indian students made up the majority of international students by the end of the nineteenth century, yet they never exceeded two to three percent of the student population (Deslandes 209-10). After the war, the number of foreign students grew exponentially. By 1920, thirty percent of the incoming class at

Oxford, for example, came from other countries, including the Commonwealth of Nations, Europe, and the United States (Deslandes 210).

### **Richards and the Instrumentality of Language**

Understanding the history of educational reform and social progress in England between 1870 and 1920 is paramount to understanding the climate in which Richards began his teaching career at Cambridge and the impetus behind his early experiments in pedagogy. By the time he began lecturing at Magdalene College in 1922, the university had become quite diverse. It was no longer an institution of privilege for white upper-class Anglican boys, as various social and political developments had opened the doors of higher education to more diverse demographics, including women, foreigners, and working class scholarship students. Such diversity posed a pedagogical problem for educators at the University of Cambridge, for the one-size-fits-all model of education is rendered ineffective in classrooms where students themselves are not *the same size*. Because learning styles vary from student to student and are shaped in no small part by culture and background (see Swanson 9-13, Bond 246-53), Richards and his colleagues had to revise their pedagogical assumptions in order to meet the diverse needs of their students and remain effective teachers.

I believe that Richards's understanding of language, thought, and meaning made him particularly sensitive to cognitive differences related to culture, class, and gender. He develops these points and establishes a

comprehensive theory of context in *The Meaning of Meaning*, co-authored with C. K. Ogden and published in 1923. The implication of starting with linguistic theory as common ground is that misunderstanding is viewed primarily as misuses of language. Such awareness obliges men and women to more carefully control the meaning of their words and to more prudently pursue an understanding of others. Richards begins *Meaning of Meaning* by addressing what he calls the “proper meaning superstition,” the common yet false belief that words have inherent meaning. “Words, as everyone knows, ‘mean’ nothing by themselves,” he writes. “It is only when a thinker makes use of them that they stand for anything, or, in one sense, have ‘meaning’” (*Meaning* 9-10). Richards maintains that words are signs that have arbitrary connections to the concepts that they signify and acquire meaning only through the process of interpretation. Moreover, he says that the meaning of signs is always shaped by the situations in which those signs have previously been experienced. Accordingly, when a thinker makes use of signs, he or she does so through remembered contexts; that is, through the prior situations in which those signs have appeared to the interpreter. While this view of interpretation seems to make meaning subjective, it does not ignore or trivialize its social foundations. Richards recognizes that the “norms of existence” are manifest in linguistic categories (Russo 159). He believes that individual members of various cultures and groups inherit with their languages distinctive patterns of organizing experiences and that social background provides context for meaning.

The influence of background on interpretation is strong. Because thought relies upon language, and because language projects the values, beliefs, and prejudices of the communities to which people belong, background will always contribute to the perceived meaning of any given event. A person will process her experiences using the associations and categories habitual to her language. In other words, her interpretation of a particular experience—i.e. her perception of reality—is dominated by the cognitive structures of her language. Richards explains this connection between language and reality in the following terms:

It must be remembered, disconcerting though the fact may be, that so far from a grammar—the structure of a symbol system—being a reflection of the structure of the world, any supposed structure of the world is more probably a reflection of the grammar used.

*(Meaning 96)*

The mirror imagery used by Richards here is valuable because it illustrates the process by which reality is perceived: far from experiencing the world as neutral subjects, human beings actually perceive their own reflections when they look at the world. Of course, the reflections we see, as Richards presents it, are reflections of thoughts, which are, in turn, reflections (or echoes) of language.

Because words think for us, language takes possession of active thinking. Our thoughts and minds—our entire existential being—is ruled by what Richards calls the “tyranny of language” (*Meaning 4*). Fortunately, we are not powerless against such tyranny. Richards argues that liberation can be achieved through

an awareness of the controlling influence of language (*Meaning* 47). That is to say, we can more readily resist intellectual colonization when we understand that meaning develops in context. By developing an understanding of the relationship between words and things, people can communicate more effectively, envision alternative possibilities, and more actively shape their worlds. These potentialities establish the framework for greater human freedom and tolerance. *The Meaning of Meaning* nurtures these ideals by advocating for a “more alert and efficient use of language—self-willed, self-controlled, bound for some purposes, free of others, but free at the root—to help order the mind” (Russo 113).

Richards does not find many virtues in language. This is evident throughout *Meaning of Meaning* in the various metaphors of manipulation that he applies to language—e.g. tyranny, magic, hypnosis—and the persistence with which he urges us to escape the treacheries thereof. Richards’s negative view toward language recapitulates some of the earliest known attitudes about rhetoric: Gorgias, for example, compares the power of speech to a drug, while Plato likens it to seduction. The dominant theme conveyed by these metaphors is that language is an instrument of misdirection and control. Richards intends his contextual theory of meaning to guard men and women against such verbal exploitation. Unfortunately, his negative approach obscures the possibilities of language, namely, its ability to open the mind to alternative ways of interpreting the world. Richards clearly believes that language is not just an instrument of

control but also one of liberation; however, his skepticism towards language often conceals his more optimistic belief that words accord power democratically.

Richards's view that language is a powerful instrument that summons great responsibility and awareness from its users is shared by Paulo Freire, who makes language and dialogue the center of his pedagogy. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that human beings exist dialectically with the world, and that the world is not a static reality but an ever-changing process (64). According to this view, the ways in which we interpret the world—a manifestation of language, as both Richards and Freire contend—actively transform reality. While words have the unique ability to expand the world, both authors lament that words can also collapse it. That is to say, language can limit one's creative capacity to imagine possibilities in this world. Consequently, Freire argues that it can also limit the ability to become more fully human, especially for those who have been denied the right to name the world and seek their own truth (*Pedagogy* 70). Because Freire's pedagogy values freedom above all else, he is adamant that people have the primordial right to speak for themselves: "If it is in speaking their world that people, by naming the world transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity" (*Pedagogy* 69).

Dialogue is essential to Freire because it is a shared and equitable conversation between two or more people about the world. It is the process

whereby dialoguers reflect on their experiences and create meaning and reality through language. It is not a one-sided activity whereby one person imposes his truth upon another. If each person does not share equally in the creation of truth, then a situation is created where some people speak on behalf of others. Such domination interferes with the ontological vocation of all those involved to be more fully human. Freire thus appropriately argues that (humanizing) dialogue must be founded upon love, humility, and faith (*Pedagogy* 72). When dialogue includes these three elements—and dialogue *as such* always does—then men and women can actively recreate reality with others, critically engaging and negotiating a diverse collection of experiences and truths. To engage these realities dialogically is also to engage the contexts in which various meanings are negotiated and formed and to understand that divergent views of reality proceed from what Freire calls “the concrete, existential, present situation of real people” (*Pedagogy* 74). Reality, in other words, is not the province of any one group; it is open for all to name and varies according to situation.

### **Dialogue and Difference in the Classroom**

Richards and Freire certainly agree upon the point that meaning is rooted in context and that each person has the right to speak a particular meaning as it relates to his or her situation. Moreover, they both view any infringement on the right to name the world as an encroachment on human freedom. These points are fundamental to the pedagogies that Richards and Freire, each in his time,

advocate and practice. For example: Because Freire believes that any attempt to “deposit” ideas into another is an act of dehumanization, he is averse to any teaching model that does not abolish the dichotomy between teachers and students and nurture a dialogue that is based on mutual respect and inquiry. Educators, he maintains, must recognize that educational programs designed for students—if they are to be successful—must consider the concrete situations that students occupy:

We simply cannot go to the laborers—urban or peasant—in the banking style, to give them “knowledge” or to impose upon them the model of the “good man” contained in a program whose content we have ourselves organized. Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to the own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the *men-in-a-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed.

*(Pedagogy 75)*

While the pitfalls that accompany one-sided, teacher-oriented pedagogies are always present, they become all the more evident when there is diversity in the classroom. If students have backgrounds similar to their teachers, then both parties will likely share similar social and ideological realities. Such is the case when education is the limited province of the privileged classes. When financial assistance is not available and schooling is dependent on wealth, those who



have financial advantage enough to obtain an education will share a classroom with teachers and other students whose backgrounds are very much like their own. On the other hand, when students hail from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, there is very little homogeneity between the parties who occupy the learning space of the classroom. Any educational program that ignores differences and is founded on a singular view of reality will alienate students whose diverse situations render a reality different than that upon which a program is based. "Such a program," Freire writes, "constitutes cultural invasion" (*Pedagogy* 77). Moreover, it is ineffective.

As the social and educational history of England makes clear, university classrooms were increasingly and significantly more diverse in the early twentieth century than they had been before. As noted above, this is the period in which Richards began his teaching career at Cambridge. Accordingly, his lectures were presumably attended by a sizable number of students from various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. While the exact ratio of new students to traditional ones is uncharted, Richards makes clear in his introduction to *Practical Criticism* that his students are far from homogenous. First, he notes that about half of his student-respondents were women. This statistic suggests that Richards taught female students in disproportionate numbers, as they only represented ten percent of the overall undergraduate population at Cambridge. Second, he notes that *Practical Criticism* is a "record of a piece of fieldwork in comparative ideology" (6). While this statement speaks

less explicitly on the composition of his participant group than his first statement, it nevertheless implies that his protocol-writers were a diverse group. We can thus reasonably conclude that the general population at Cambridge, to some significant extent, reflected such diversity. What is more, we may further reason that the number of young men from disadvantaged backgrounds and colonial nations who attended Richards's lectures surpassed the number of women who attended, for it is unlikely that Cambridge appreciably restricted enrollment of non-traditional students who, unlike women, enjoyed full university privileges. All of this is to say that Richards's recognized a considerable amount of diversity in his lecture halls.

Given Richards's awareness of the existential power of language and his underlying theme of human freedom in *Meaning of Meaning*, we can reasonably contend that Richards was mindful of the dehumanizing effects of coerced silence on men and women. Such presumption potentially identifies the philosophical underpinnings of his pedagogy. Richards believed that language had the ability to possess the mind and influence thought, even in academic settings. Accordingly, he likely considered the extent to which teacher-centered educational models suppress the voices of students and impinge upon their right to interpret the world. Such models, Freire says, create situations where teachers interpret the world for students. Moreover, they elude learning and value cultural reproduction and information accumulation over critical thinking. Predictably, the shortcomings of non-dialogic education are less obvious when

all parties share similar backgrounds, as was the case in nineteenth-century England. In such instances, teachers and students interpret the world in like fashion. However, when students come from a variety of backgrounds and multiple realities are present in the classroom, the deficiencies of non-dialogic education become more pronounced. Richards was so fully aware of the shortcomings of the dominant teacher-centered pedagogies of his time that he embarked upon an experiment to help discover “educational methods more efficient than those we use now in developing discrimination and the power to understand what we hear and read” (*Practical 3*). And because he also wanted his study to “provide a new technique for those who wish to discover for themselves what they think and feel about poetry (and cognate matters)” (*Practical 3*), it is clear that his vision of a more efficient pedagogy placed greater focus on the ideas of students than those of teachers.

The pedagogy for which Richards argues in *Practical Criticism*, the published record of his experiment in literary analysis, anticipates many of the aims of critical pedagogy. First and foremost, and not at all surprising given his views of language, Richards placed students and their perspectives at the center of the learning situation and recast instructors as co-investigators of knowledge. He did not believe that teachers were the sole possessors of truth whose job it was to dispense knowledge to passive student-recipients. He valued their minds and experiences. Instead of ignoring the diverse perspectives of students and reacting negatively to their interpretations of texts and events, Richards believed

that he should try harder to understand why his students interpreted things as they did. He maintained that any attempt to disparage an interpretation without adequately investigating its foundation was dogmatic and counterproductive:

When views that seem to conflict with our own prepossessions are set before us, the impulse to refute, to combat or to reconstruct them, rather than to investigate them, is all but overwhelming. So the history of criticism [...] is a history of dogmatism and argumentation rather than a history of research. And like all such histories the chief lesson to be learnt from it is the futility of all argumentation that precedes understanding. (*Practical 7-8*)

In this passage, Richards sheds the elitism for which he is sometimes scorned (see, e.g., Said 5, Welleck 624) and suggests that there is much to be learned from diverse opinions and analyses of literary works. He does not suggest that a work of criticism is wrong because it does not conform to, say, received institutional knowledge of what the work “really” means; he maintains instead that such analyses, no matter how unconventional or inaccurate they initially seem, enrich our knowledge of the poem, as well as our appreciation for it, provided we understand how it evokes the responses it does.

Ultimately, Richards is engaging in what Freire calls *conscientização*, or consciousness-raising. He is well aware that privileged forms of literacy silence the voices of marginalized groups, and he actively combats such oppression in and through his pedagogy. While the details thereof are not as well formulated

and theorized in *Practical Criticism* as in Freire's work, they still have the same general sense. Freire wants to empower students in the classroom: he wants them to understand that they possess knowledge and that their voices matter. Richards wants this, as well. Accordingly, he does not advocate the monological model of learning where teachers tell students what to think. He favors creative and democratic learning environments where students have the opportunity to reflect on their worlds and actively create meaning. In other words, Richards believes that classrooms should be thought of as workshops or laboratories for the practical analysis of texts (Berthoff, "I. A. Richards" 209; Russo 215). He believes that such classrooms are both educational and moral because they provide occasions to understand and assess the meaning-making process and allow students to exercise their ontological right to name the world, providing them a greater degree of human freedom (*So Much Nearer* 196-98; *Speculative Instruments* 104-06). This pedagogical process facilitates an awareness of oneself as a creative and self-determining subject, not an impuissant object of others. Such awareness has implications far beyond the classroom.

### **The Practical Side of Literary Analysis**

Richards maintains in *Practical Criticism* that there is a correspondence between the skills involved in literary analysis and those used to interpret other experiences. Accordingly, literary study is a practical and relevant endeavor because it develops one's ability to communicate with others and to creatively

interpret the world beyond the classroom. For Richards, the indispensable feature of literary training and its relevance to the “real world” is its focus on language:

[I]f there be any means by which we may artificially strengthen our minds' capacity to order themselves, we must avail ourselves of them. And of all possible means, Poetry, the unique, linguistic instrument by which our minds ordered their thoughts, emotions, desires . . . in the past, seems to be the most serviceable in the interests of our standard of civilisation. It may well be a matter of some urgency for us, in the interests of our standard of civilisation, to make this highest form of language more accessible. From the beginning civilisation has been dependent upon speech, for words are our chief link with the past and with one another and the channel of our spiritual inheritance. (*Practical* 301)

Because the study of literature has the potential to strengthen one's ability to structure reality, Richards argues that a literary education ought to cultivate in students “a better receptive command of these resources of language” (*Practical* 302). Richards believes the best way to develop such reader competency is to have students respond to works of literature. By asking them to engage literature—through writing or class discussion—teachers free students from oppressive learning situations. When students are encouraged to interpret literary works on their own, they are empowered to discover alternative

meanings within a text. Moreover, Freire argues, instructional methods that engage students in the meaning-making process prepare students to actively engage civil society and to envision alternative possibilities for the future. Richards's pedagogy has a similar aim: "He was hopelessly optimistic" Berthoff writes, "about the capacity of education to change society, to say nothing of saving the planet, energetically demanding of himself practical demonstrations of just what was required in language teaching in order to make a crucial difference in the way we conceive of the human future" (*Richards on Rhetoric* x).

Victor Villanueva says in "Considerations for American Freireistas" that student-centered pedagogies, despite their purported humanistic and democratic virtues, are a challenge to enact, especially when less-privileged students aspire to climb the ranks of the existing oppressive social structure, rather than recreate a society that respects the voices of all its citizens. When such students see the world as divided between the "haves" and the "have-nots" and view themselves as members of the latter group, they often strive to obtain the knowledge of the "haves," perceiving it to be the instrument of success and upward mobility (631-2). The desire to acquire a specific tract of knowledge obstructs critical pedagogies because it treats learning as the procurement of information and regards teaching as a top-down authoritative event. Such views promote the self-reflexive perception that students have no knowledge and that they should not trust their intellectual ability to interpret and judge literature or other life experiences. Consider, for example, the novice literature student who

announces during his introduction on the first day of class that his favorite book is Orwell's *1984* or Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. He is generally trying to establish with his statement that he possesses the requisite knowledge for proper literary judgment. However, when asked to explain why he reveres the book as he does, he often cannot articulate a response. He knows not why he likes a particular work, only that it is judged favorably by the educated privileged class of which he wants to be part. He therefore regurgitates their appraisals of literature in an attempt to achieve sodality with his instructor, which he believes will afford him success in the classroom without having ordered his personal thoughts on the subject.

Richards addresses such responses in *Practical Criticism*. He calls them "stock responses." Students, he says, are prone to draw inappropriately from a repertoire of acquired responses when they are themselves unsure of how to respond. Sometimes these responses arise out of preconceptions about what is to be admired or despised in poetry. And sometimes they arise solely from the rank or public opinion of an author. Regardless of where they come from, Richards maintains that students ought not permit them into critical responses:

If we wish for a population easy to control by suggestion we shall decide what repertory of suggestion it shall be susceptible to and encourage this tendency except in the few. But if we wish for a high and diffused civilization, with its attendant risks, we shall combat this form of mental inertia. (*Practical* 295)



Here Richards insists upon the value of diversity of mind and culture and the depravity of groupthink. Accordingly, in the name of diversity, Richards attempts to eliminate stock responses from his poetic experiment at Cambridge, developing a methodology that will forever link him to the new critical school of literary criticism. Before giving students the poems to which they are asked to respond, he removes all identifying markers, such as titles and names. He gives them only the texts. Without these identifying markers, he hopes to coax more authentic poetic analyses from his students and avoid superficial responses that rely on the reputations of poets.

Richards was aware that poets with established reputations are often approached differently than poets with little or no rank. He understands that “we take a hint for our response from the poet’s reputation [and] the traditional view runs through our response like the wire upon which a climbing plant is trained” (*Practical* 297). In order to reach a better understanding of how readers actually respond to poetry, Richards refused to provide his experimental subjects with titles of poems or names of authors, for he feared that they might respond in a manner not genuine but consistent with the authors’ reputations. “There cannot be much doubt,” he writes, “that when we know we are reading Milton or Shelley, a great deal of our approval and admiration is being accorded not to the poetry but to an idol” (*Practical* 297). Reading poetry without the cues of author and title puts pressure on students to develop their own assessments of a poem, independent of the traditional value judgments established by past critics.

Despite his explicit reasons for withholding the titles of poems and names of authors from his protocol-writers, Richards's experimental methods are largely interpreted as a methodological achievement in new criticism. Consequently, *Practical Criticism* is considered by new critics a fountainhead of objectivist poetics. Richards was uncomfortable with this association and "tended to apologize for the varieties of 'practical criticism' that his method promoted" (Russo 216). The new critics see reading as an act of uncovering meaning that is objectively planted in a work of literature. Such a view transforms readers into passive agents who strive to uncover the revealed truths of a work. This notion that meaning is inherent in literature or any other cultural text overwhelmingly contradicts Richards's theory of interpretation. He believed that meaning was "'subjective' in the sense that it is a psychological event determined by the needs and resources of a mind" (*Practical* 326). In other words, it resides in people, not in words or texts. He argues this fact extensively in *Meaning of Meaning* and returns to it in the closing paragraph of *Practical Criticism*:

The critical reading of poetry is an arduous discipline; few exercises reveal to us more clearly the limitations under which, from moment to moment, we suffer. But, equally, the immense extension of our capacities that follows a summoning of our resources is made plain. The lesson of all criticism is that we have nothing to rely upon in making our choices but ourselves. (328-29)

To be sure, Richards believes that the mental processes of readers are the most important factors in the interpretation of the meaning of a poem, as well as the judgment of its value.

*Practical Criticism*, although its proper subject is literary judgment, extends Richards's rhetorical schema to literature, insofar as it treats literary interpretation in the same way that *The Meaning of Meaning* and *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* treat (non-literary) experiential interpretation. The relationship between literary and rhetorical interpretation is grounded in the principles of multiple meanings and remembered contexts. In *Practical Criticism*, for example, Richards writes, "the all-important fact for the study of literature—or any other mode of communication—is that there are several kinds of meaning" (174). That literature is open to ambiguity and overdetermination draws it into Richards's realm of rhetoric, which he famously defines as the "study of misunderstanding and its remedies" (*Philosophy* 3). Because rhetoric and literature are equally open to multiple valid interpretations of meaning, Richards "discourag[es] our habit of behaving as though, if one passage means one thing it cannot at the same time mean another" (*Philosophy* 38). Moreover, such interpretations, as he and Ogden suggest in *Meaning of Meaning*, are largely grounded in the remembered contexts of individual readers. Therefore, when Richards argues that responses to poetry, including those of his students, are psychological events shaped by the resources of the mind, he means that poetic interpretations occur in the collective tensions between each word's

“usual applications and contexts and its special context in the poem” (*Practical* 200). The associations that readers have with words in remembered contexts vary from reader to reader, creating a multiplicity of meanings in any given literary text.

Despite the claim that poems can have several valid interpretations, Richards notes in *Practical Criticism* that many of his students are unable to interpret the meanings of the poems to which they are asked to respond (12). Such an assertion seemingly contradicts his contextual theory of interpretation, even though he does argue, in this and other critical works, against the idea that poems have universally correct interpretations. In *Principles of Literary Criticism*, for example, he writes the following:

[W]e tend constantly to overlook differences in situation which would explain differences in behaviour. We assume to a ridiculous extent that what is stimulating us will stimulate others in the same way, forgetting that what will happen depends upon what has happened before and upon what is already happening within, about which we can usually know little. (196)

It is certainly *possible* that Richards overlooks the different situations in which he and his students are engaged when he claims that certain interpretations of poems are incorrect; however, it is not very *likely* that he would do so when the principles of overdetermination and ambiguity are major theoretical motifs in his scholarly work. Nor does it mean that Richards briefly abandons the concept of

multiplicity in favor of the single-meaning doctrine of the new critics. It means, instead, that he believed some interpretations of poetry are better than others (*Practical* 326). Just because Richards argues that a single experience or work of poetry has multiple meanings does not mean that he thinks any interpretation thereof was valid. Such an assumption commits the *either-or* fallacy.

While Richards argues that the backgrounds and experiences of readers shape their literary interpretations, he also maintains that young learners often lack the experience and maturity necessary to produce satisfactory judgments. Hence the following statement about his students at Cambridge:

Thus the gaps in these readers' equipments are very significant. First may be placed the general immaturity of the readers. Their average age would be between nineteen and twenty. Yet with several of the poems [ . . . ] one important reason for erratic opinions seems undeniably to be the lack of general experience. (*Practical* 293)

Youthful inexperience and immaturity is an important pedagogical topic. In fact, it is so central to educational theory that John Dewey discusses it extensively in *Experience and Education*. Dewey's progressive education does not include linguistic theory, but it does emphasize democratic learning. In this latter regard, it is similar to the educational models of Richards and Freire. Dewey identifies the challenge of enacting democracy in the classroom as the experiential gulf between teachers and students. On the one hand, he wants to share

educational control with students, as opposed to imposing his interpretations and experiences upon students; but on the other hand, he does not want to relinquish complete control and authority to students. He believes that teachers have important experiences to share, and that to withhold such experiences is immoral. Dewey maintains that teachers have an obligation to evaluate the immature experiences of young students and to help them organize the conditions thereof without imposing external control over said experiences (38). Teachers must establish, he says, educational conditions that nurture interaction between mature and immature experiences, between teachers and students. Such is the only way to awaken the desire to learn and to successfully educate students.

The interaction of experiences between students and teachers is likewise fundamental to Richards's pedagogy. In fact, it provides the means of resolving his apparent contradiction between the principle of multiple meanings and the notion that some interpretations are better or more valid than others. Richards believes that the interaction of minds can help develop the ability to think. This is especially true in a classroom, where students interact with the adult minds of teachers. "When we consider the dehumanizing and even brutalizing conditions amid which so many children grow up," writes Richards, "contact with an instructing mind, real participation in a joint exploration can often be the one thing that can enlighten—relieve *and* illumine—minds so endangered" ("Sens/Sits" 266). Richards's view of education is clearly collaborative. He

wants students to think for themselves—to interpret literature and the world through their experiences—yet he also wants to problematize their interpretations by introducing other perspectives and examining their contexts. So rather than treat education as a problem-solving activity where students search for and find meanings in a text, Richards treats it as an examination of the situations in which knowledge and meaning are formed, an educational exercise that “puts the learner into a cooperative and creative contact with what is being studied, with his own endeavors, and with the would-be helpful presentation offered to him” (“Sens/Sits” 266). At this tripartite intersection, students attempt to form their own ideas while simultaneously engaging the veil of established knowledge and the thinking of others (“Sens/Sits” 266). Richards argues that teachers ought to design instruction such that it fosters this dialectical process, the interaction between reflection and action that Freire calls the praxis.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that human activity is praxis, dialectic between theory and practice, or reflection and action. The constituent elements of praxis do not occur in distinct stages but simultaneously. That is to say, theory relies upon practice, and practice upon theory. Each informs the other. Praxis is important in education because it enables human freedom, allowing learners to more critically engage reality and envision alternative ways of being in the world. Richards provides opportunities for praxis in his instruction by offering students “assisted invitations to attempt to find out

just what they are trying to do and thereby how to do it” (“Learning and Looking 251). He believed that people learn how to do things while in the process of determining what to do. Accordingly, he offered students opportunities in class to reflect upon the various situations in which meanings are formed and to create alternative possibilities. Berthoff explains the process thus:

The composer—the one who forms; the meaning-maker; the interpreter; the one who constructs and construes, writes and reads—poses questions in order to determine what the choices are, the choices of perspective and purpose, context and words, which will thus determine meanings. The process is never stable or linear or “correct”; it is not, to repeat, a matter of solving problems but of posing them in the light of tentative solutions.

(“I. A. Richards” 197)

The process described here is the process of negotiating meaning. It is the goal to which the critical pedagogies of Richards and Freire aspire. It is tantamount to “critical thinking” or “thinking for oneself.” The movement between reflection and action (i.e. between established knowledge and generated knowledge) conveys to students that knowledge is formed in situations and that new situations call for alternative interpretations. What is more, this movement between contexts—what Freire calls praxis, and Richards calls dialectic—develops a certain interpretive flexibility that Richards suggests is necessary for



mutual understanding and productive communication among the people, societies, and cultures of the world:

The mind that can shift its view-point and still keep its orientation, that can carry over into quite a new set of definitions the results gained through past experience in other frameworks, the mind that can rapidly and without strain or confusion perform the systematic transformations required by such a shift, is the mind of the future. (*Practical 322*).

## **Conclusion**

Richards designed his pedagogy to develop minds for the future because he clearly saw in the early twentieth century the direction in which his country was heading. Owing largely to industrialization and war, the social structure of England changed. The middle classes gained prosperity; the working classes gained political power, as did women; and traditional class markers began to deteriorate. The educational benefits that accompanied these changes were enormous. More students from a wider variety of backgrounds were given access to schooling at all levels. Richards's classrooms became significantly diverse as England moved towards greater social equality, and the traditional methods of instruction were no longer effective. Richards therefore worked to develop better teaching methods that prepared students to communicate and participate in an increasingly diverse society. The result was an early

incarnation of critical pedagogy, one that exhibited Freire's emphasis on language, practical learning, and praxis.

The next chapter will examine the teaching practices of Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge, two eighteenth-century pedagogues, and show that they, too, practiced an early form of critical pedagogy. Much like Richards, Watts and Doddridge developed their teaching methods to address student diversity in the classroom and to meet the desire for a practical and relevant education. Their pedagogical efforts yielded teaching methods that encouraged students to challenge received wisdom and to explore alternative ways of knowing.

CHAPTER IV  
DISSENT FROM DIDACTICISM: CRITICAL PEDAGOGIES IN EIGHTEENTH-  
CENTURY ENGLISH DISSENTING ACADEMIES

This chapter will examine the teaching practices of two lesser-known eighteenth-century British pedagogues—namely, Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge—in order to show that the archetypal treatment of eighteenth-century rhetoric as current-traditional ignores alternative visions of writing instruction during the period. Within the dissenting academies, Watts and Doddridge employed a number of teaching practices that parallel the fundamental teachings of modern-day critical pedagogies, the most important of which are the creation of participatory learning environments, the use of dialogue in the classroom, and an emphasis on practical learning.

Today, critical pedagogy is understood as enacting democracy in the classroom and empowering students to envision and voice alternatives, yet it has a largely unexplored history in the eighteenth century. Interestingly, the social and political context of that history is not unlike that which surrounds critical pedagogy in twentieth century. Both emerged in a time of widespread antiauthoritarianism; both emerged in the midst of a diversity movement; and both emerged in the face of an overwhelming demand for practical learning. These likenesses in historical context let us see that the methods and goals of

both were similar, especially insofar as they valued democracy inside and outside the classroom.

### **A History of Dissenting Education**

Participatory pedagogies surfaced in eighteenth-century English classrooms after a number of social and political changes tested the efficacy of traditional teaching practices in higher education. However, unlike those in the mid-twentieth century, pedagogical revisions in the eighteenth-century did not take place within the traditional university system. They took place, instead, within dissenting academies. The academies were formed to give students from myriad backgrounds access to higher education, for the ancient universities of England refused to admit religious dissenters. They were also formed to give students a more practical learning experience than was available at Oxford and Cambridge, both of which provided a classical curriculum. As Thomas Miller notes in *The Formation of College English*, the dissenting academies were the first institutions of higher education in England to make learning a practical endeavor. They opted, for example, to teach courses in vernacular literature and composition while the ancient universities maintained a strict adherence to the classics.

The demand for practical learning in England, according to Irene Parker, grew under the influence of Puritanism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. With the strengthening of the protestant notion of individual worth, the

people of England increasingly wanted influence over church and state matters. Accompanying these desires was a strong commitment to realistic and universal education (Parker 24). While many efforts were made on that front, especially during the Commonwealth, the Restoration ultimately thwarted the Puritan project. After the return of Charles II in 1660, Lord Clarendon passed the Act of Uniformity, requiring all schoolmasters to conform to the liturgy as established by law and to obtain a license to teach from the Church. The goal of the conformity legislation was to crush reform efforts and to secure the power of the Church and State. Despite its intents, the statute actually compelled nonconformists to fulfill the educational project of the Puritans (Parker 46). These new schools were England's dissenting academies.

While the religious grounds upon which the dissenting academies formed—specifically, Anglican dissent and the Protestant notion of individual worth—are largely responsible for the success of the academies, several other factors contributed to their popularity as institutions of practical learning. Many families would send their children to dissenting academies because they believed higher education was the means to job security and higher social standing. And while such families may have always viewed education as the instrument of social mobility, the prospect of sending a child to an elite university was largely unappealing, especially given the curriculum and cost. Lawrence Stone notes that there was a sharp decline in the number of students attending the elite universities in England during the eighteenth century and argues that

their regimen of classical studies was to blame. “Many of the urban middle classes,” he writes, “became hostile to the classics as a gentlemanly but futile waste of time, offering few job prospects except in the lower ranks of the church” (132). Focusing on modern languages, natural history, commerce, geography, political history, and other “modern” subjects, the dissenting academies fulfilled the practical learning needs of students in a way that Oxford and Cambridge could not. What is more, their tuition costs were significantly lower, making a college education possible for the less well-to-do.

The combined results of these social and political developments on education in the eighteenth century are not unlike the educational effects of the diversity movement in the 1960s and ‘70s: they made it possible for a wider range of student to pursue higher education. Accordingly, tutors at the dissenting academies in England moved beyond the sterile teaching methods that had been employed for years in the elite universities. For not only did their students lack the educational foundations necessary to engage a curriculum of Greek and Latin studies, but also, as Thomas Miller suggests, their experiences often called into question received knowledge, making them less than ideal subjects for traditional teaching methods (62). What they required were classroom models that treated learning as a generative process and not as a mastery of information.

Responding to the needs of their diverse student constituencies and exemplifying the antiauthoritarian attitude of the nonconformity movement, tutors

at the dissenting academies developed democratic pedagogies that fostered critical inquiry and debate. Arguably the most important of these eighteenth-century tutors were Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge. Watts was best known for his advocacy of the inductive method associated with Locke, and Doddridge for his comparative method of instruction (T. Miller 87). While each of these men did their fair share of lecturing in the classroom, they never refused students the opportunity to critically challenge the contents of their lessons, as their colleagues did in the elite universities. Instead, these pedagogues regularly encouraged discussion questions from their students and welcomed occasions to debate contrary positions. Furthermore, as Thomas Miller notes, these pedagogues often presented their students with conflicting views on controversial issues, and then required them to research and compose essays arguing their positions (86). Teaching methods such as these engaged students in critical thought and “were consistent with the dissenters’ belief that free inquiry would advance political reform and economic and moral improvement” (T. Miller 86). Because of the innovative and open-minded teaching methods of their tutors, dissenting academies, according to Ana Acosta, were “an essential component of the public sphere and the style of debate that emerged from it” (7).

### **Isaac Watts and Linguistic Praxis**

Isaac Watts was born in 1674 to a family of well-known dissenters. His father, who was a clothier, schoolmaster, and respected figure in the community,

was imprisoned twice for nonconformity. In fact, the elder Watts was serving sentence the year that young Isaac was born. “[T]radition reports,” writes Arthur Paul Davis, “that Watts was often suckled on the steps of Old Town Gaol, Southampton, when his mother made her daily visits to the prison” (2). Despite his family’s history of dissent, Watts received a classical education under the tutelage of the Reverend John Pinhorne, schoolmaster of the Free-School in Southampton and minister of the Establishment. His course of study was orthodox for his age and included Latin at four, Greek at nine, and Hebrew at thirteen. Watts excelled in his studies and was generously offered a scholarship to attend one of the universities. “The whole community,” Davis notes, “Anglican and dissenter alike, seems to have been proud of the young scholar” (9). Preferring, however, to follow family tradition and take his place among the dissenters, Watts declined the scholarship and opted to study instead at Thomas Rowe’s academy at Stoke Newington.

Watts developed an interest in education at a young age. Perhaps this was owed in part to the influence of Rowe, whose untraditional teaching methods at the academy encouraged free inquiry and stimulated classroom debate. Walter Wilson writes the following regarding the latter’s critical practices:

[Rowe] possessed a noble and generous mind, free from the shackles of a party, and utterly averse to all impositions in the concerns of religion. It was this that made him a decided



Nonconformist. To his pupils he allowed the most enlarged freedom of enquiry, and it is well known that some of them followed a path in controversy very different to that of the tutor. (171)

That Rowe would allow such academic freedom in the seventeenth century makes him an early champion of liberal education. Yet his penchant for empowering students in such ways seems less than astounding when his own academic character is considered. For as Alexander Gordon suggests, Rowe merely bestowed upon his students the same academic freedoms that he regularly employed:

Thomas Rowe, the London Independent, was the first to desert the traditional text-books, introducing his pupils, about 1680, to what was known as “free philosophy.” Rowe was a Cartesian at a time when the Aristotelic philosophy was dominant in the older schools of learning; and while in physics he adhered to Descartes against the rising influence of Newton, in mental science he became one of the earliest exponents of Locke. (18)

Rowe had a profound influence on Watts’s intellectual life. By way of his influence, Watts learned to challenge received knowledge, to think critically about matters of religion, philosophy, politics, and education. Posthumously honoring Rowe for cultivating in him such critical awareness, Watts composed a

tribute to his schoolmaster in the form of a poem entitled “Free Philosophy.” In his poem, he celebrates Rowe for challenging traditional modes of learning:

I love thy gentle influence, Rowe:  
 Thy gentle influence, like the sun,  
 Only dissolves the frozen snow,  
 Then bids our thoughts like rivers flow,  
 And choose the channels where they run. (15-19)

Watts began his career two years after his graduation from the academy as a tutor for the son of Sir John Hartopp. During his tenure at the Hartopp residence, Watts composed *Logick* and part of *Improvement of the Mind*, his student guide to academic study. In outlining his principles for academic study and the attainment of knowledge in the latter work, Watts demonstrated that his pedagogy is much indebted to Rowe. Like his admired schoolmaster, Watts encouraged students to exercise reason and to form a critical awareness of the world. He advised them against developing a dogmatic spirit and urged them to improve their knowledge through conversation. In his chapter entitled “Rules for Improvement by Conversation,” Watts writes,

Confine not yourself always to one sort of company, or persons of the same party or opinion, either in matters of learning, religion, or the civil life, lest if you should happen to be nursed up or educated in early mistake, you should be confirmed of the same sentiments.  
 A free and general conversation with men of very various countries

and of different parties, opinions, and practices (so far as it may be done safely) is of excellent use to undeceive us in many wrong judgments which we may have framed, and to lead us into juster thoughts. (*Improvement of the Mind* 233)

By focusing his attention on the common act of conversation, Watts strongly suggests that learning is not limited to formal education. For the opportunities to engage in free conversation are both widespread and frequent. Watts contends that all persons, regardless of wealth or position, harbor the capacity for intellectual growth.

Despite spending his academic life in formal settings—having been educated at the finest grammar and secondary schools, and then tutoring the children of wealthy families—Watts believed that learning was possible where formal education was not. *Improvement of the Mind* is indicative of this point, as it addressed an audience of self-learners alongside an audience of traditional students. In a footnote following his general rules for the attainment of knowledge, Watts makes his diverse audience known:

Though the most of these following rules are chiefly addressed to those whom their fortune or their station require to addict themselves to the peculiar improvement of their minds in greater degrees of knowledge, yet every one who has leisure and opportunity to be acquainted with such writings as these, may find something among them for their own use. (179)

To speak of conversation and sociability as avenues of intellectual refinement situates learning outside of the formal classroom. This seems a radical idea in the eighteenth-century, when education was structured around the knowledge of teachers. The teacher-based model of education common to this era (and beyond) had defined education as a top-down transference of information. By way of this mechanistic process (to which Freire later applies his banking metaphor), teachers stand atop a classroom hierarchy dictating their expert knowledge to students. Conversation eludes the learning process because students are cast as passive agents in a hierarchical learning model where they are presumed to possess no real knowledge of their own. Despite the prevalence of teacher-centered learning in eighteenth-century education, Watts encouraged his students to actively engage class lectures. He felt that students should never satisfy themselves with the mere attendance of lectures, but ought to frequently ask questions of their instructors. “A *young disciple*,” Watts writes, “should behave himself so well as to gain the affection and the ear of his *instructor*, that upon every occasion he may with the utmost freedom ask questions, and talk over his own sentiments, his doubts and difficulties with him, and in an humble and modest manner desire the solution of them” (*Improvement of the Mind* 214). Accordingly, when Watts speaks of conversation as a means of intellectual improvement, he is not strictly situating learning outside of the classroom as the term “conversation” may seem to suggest.

Conversation is only one element of Watts's pedagogy and his proposed path to intellectual growth. He also cites the importance of observation, instruction, and reading. The value of these activities, he suggests, resides in their ability to convey the notions and sentiments of others. But knowing the minds of others is not a terminal value to Watts. He believes that education is the critical process whereby students learn to challenge received knowledge and to think for themselves. Conversation, observation, instruction, and reading do not guarantee independent thinking. However, they do provide a starting point, a foundation of ideas from which one may form his or her judgments. Meditation and study, according to Watts, are the keys to critical thinking.

By *study* and *meditation*, we *improve the hints* that we have acquired by observation, conversation, and reading; we take more time in thinking, and by the labour of the mind we penetrate deeper into themes of knowledge, and carry our thoughts sometimes much farther on many subjects, than we ever met with either in the books of the dead or discourses of the living. It is our own *reasoning* that draws out one truth from another, and forms a whole scheme of science from a few hints which we borrowed elsewhere. (*Improvement of the Mind* 194)

Even though Watts sometimes places study and meditation atop a hierarchy of educational essentials, almost exclusively on the strength of their ability to allow individuals to form propositions of truth out of the ideas of others

and to “perfect” the other methods of intellectual improvement, he argues that study and meditation must nonetheless accompany conversation, observation, instruction, and reading, for these practices expose students to the diverse minds of others. A person without such exposure “will be in danger of a narrow spirit, a vain conceit of himself, and an unreasonable contempt of others; and after all, he will obtain but a very limited and imperfect view and knowledge of things, and he will seldom learn how to make that knowledge useful” (*Improvement of the Mind* 194-95).

Watts’s focus on free and frequent conversation as a means to intellectual growth in *Improvement of the Mind* nicely overlays his earlier work in *Logick*, which deals largely with the nature of language and its role in the process of making meaning and knowledge. Watts never explicitly says that the two works ought to be read in tandem; however, a prefatory remark in the latter work indicates that *Improvement of the Mind* picks up where *Logick* left off. Examined with this relationship in mind, *Logick* exposes the conceptual framework upon which Watts’s pedagogical methods, as outlined in *Improvement of the Mind*, derive significance. His analysis of concept and perception in *Logick* reflect what Berlin calls a transactional epistemology insofar as it situates knowledge-production within a complex web of language, material reality, and social interaction. By treating knowledge as a dialectical process involving the elements of the rhetorical situation, Watts expands the epistemological role of language and relocates truth as the product of inquiry

and discussion; moreover, he empowers individuals to transform reality and to imagine new possibilities through alternative discourses, a manifestation of Freirean praxis that animates participatory pedagogies.

Published in 1724, *Logick* is divided into four parts: Perception and Ideas, Judgment and Proposition, Reasoning and Syllogism, and Disposition and Method. Each section builds upon the ideas outlined in the section it follows, beginning with a discussion of the relationship between words and things, which places Watts amid the historical development of modern semiotics, nestled between Augustine and Ockham on one side and Peirce and Richards on the other. Watts contends that ideas, although first acquired through sensory perception, can only be conveyed via a language system. Accordingly, he suggests that a sizable portion of what we know is procured through words, in our verbal interactions with others. But just as words lead us to knowledge, they equally have the ability to lead us astray (*Logick* 27). Watts, therefore, offers a few observations to help guard against the abuses of language.

The first observation that Watts makes about language is that it has no foundation in the physical world. Words stand for things and ideas not because they have a natural connection to the things they signify, but because society has agreed to associate certain words (i.e. certain combinations of sounds or graphic marks) with certain objects. It is a mental operation whereby words are arbitrarily linked to things and ideas. Watts writes,

There is no manner of affinity between the sounds *white* in *English*, or *blanc* in *French*, and that colour which we call by that name; nor have the letters, of which these words are composed, any natural aptness to signify that colour rather than red or green. Words and names therefore are mere *arbitrary signs* invented by men to communicate their thoughts or ideas to one another. (*Logick* 27)

Pointing out that different languages have different names for the same idea is an effective way to substantiate the claim that words are not motivated to signify objects by virtue of the inherent characteristics of either, but that words and objects are tied together through repetition and social agreement. Indeed, what Watts is challenging is the common belief that words have a one-to-one relationship to their referents, a false assumption that Ogden and Richards later call the “proper meaning superstition.”

Also present in Watts’s initial observation about language is the notion that signification is a two-part process that is always negotiated by the individual minds of those persons involved in a communicative act. Watts unpacks this idea in his subsequent observations about language, which he begins with the following premise: “If one single word were appointed to express but one simple idea, and nothing else, [ . . . ] there would be scarce mistake about them” (*Logick* 27). Unfortunately, he notes, such is not the case, as a single word will sometimes express a number of simple ideas, whereas others will sometimes express an entire network of ideas. Concerning the latter, Watts writes, “one



word will never distinctly manifest all the parts of a complex idea; and thereby it will often happen, that one man includes more or less in his idea, than another does, while he affixes the *same* word to it" (*Logick* 28). Whether a word expresses a simple idea or complex one, Watts implies that its meaning is rarely obvious. He clearly perceives the use of language as a complex social activity requiring human interpretation. And even though the act of interpretation may be facilitated by interpretive cues—by way of extra-linguistic behaviors and social contexts—the meaning of an utterance takes shape in the human mind, where a seemingly endless chain of assumptions and experiences will bear upon the message. Language, therefore, must always confront the potential for misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

Watts contends that once the human mind has framed ideas about things, it proceeds next to the process of judgment, whereby ideas are compared to one another, and either joined through affirmation, or disjoined through negation, as we see them to agree or disagree (*Logick* 72). This process, the inclusion of which gestures to Francis Bacon's system of "true induction," while seemingly straightforward, is no less involved than the forming of ideas. Just as the mind negotiates the bond between words and things, the mind also intervenes in the forming of judgments. This interference of the mind, an act of will, according to Watts, can lead us to false judgment. In other words, it is not always the case that judgments are the result of our perceptions of agreement or disagreement between ideas, but that they are the result of the interplay between our minds

and ideas. Given that our ideas are also framed by our minds, the obstacles that potentially hinder the forming of correct judgments—namely, coloration and distortion, introduced by idiosyncratic and conventional patterns of thinking—are evermore compounded. Judgments are often passed from one person to another through propositions—i.e. a statement (combining words to form sentences) that affirms or negates relationships between ideas. Because propositions, when communicated, undergo an encoding/decoding process, they are subject to interpretive errors, as ambiguity resides at their most basic level—words.

Once ideas have been framed, and after propositions have joined or disjoined those ideas, reasoning emerges as the third operation of the mind. “When we are unable to judge of the truth or falsehood of a proposition in an *immediate* manner, by the mere contemplation of its subject and predicate,” Watts writes, “we are then constrained to use a *medium*, and to compare each of them with some *third idea*, that by seeing how far they agree or disagree among themselves” (*Logick* 136). The medium to which Watts refers is the syllogism. He maintains that reasoning is the process of employing learned logic to join propositions and draw conclusions from accepted truths. While the conclusions are generally the result of logical deduction, they may also be born through induction, a sort of argument that Watts considers an irregular syllogism, one that stands not independently yet not unproblematically next to the syllogism

(Howell 337). Watts offers in this chapter the rules governing the construction of various syllogisms, both regular and irregular.

Having completed the third division of logical inquiry—drawing conclusions by way of syllogistic reasoning—Watts turns to the fourth operation of the mind, method and disposition. This final operation is the process of arranging thoughts in such a way that we may more readily recall them and more easily communicate our ideas, judgments, and propositions to others. He offers in this concluding chapter some guidelines for the orderly disposition of a variety of thoughts on a number of different subjects. But what he does not do in this or the preceding chapter is confront the problem that resides upstream of these final two operations—that is, the instability of meaning. Instead, he proceeds as though the propositions upon which the discovery and communication of truth are based are reliable statements that do not have an arbitrary and ambiguous relationship to the world.

Howell points out in his quantitative analysis of *Logick* that Watts spends three-quarters of his space on the first two chapters of his work—“Of Perception and Ideas” and “Of Judgment and Proposition”—and less than one-quarter on his last two chapters—“Of Reasoning and Syllogism” and “Of Disposition and Method.” According to Howell, this valuable statistic reveals the following about Watts’s pedagogical priorities: “To him perception and judgment were the points that young [students] should be taught at greatest length, while syllogism and method were to be given nothing beyond a conventional emphasis” (335). While

Howell's conclusion appears faultless within the context of *Logick*, we must remember that Watts sees *Improvement of the Mind* as an extension of this earlier work and emphasizes therein the last two operations of the mind, particularly method. But we must also remember that the first two operations—perception and judgment—have primal immediacy over the others, for they are the foundation upon which reason and method build. And even though Watts's first two chapters of *Logick* do not discuss in great length the ambiguous nature of meaning—an amalgamation of words, perceptions, judgment, and propositions—he does identify at the start of each chapter the inherent difficulty that language mediation poses to existing knowledge and the development of new knowledge. The significance of knowing that meaning eludes an essential connection to the world is that knowledge, truth, and reality become social and linguistic constructs. They are the mutable products of what Freire would later call praxis.

Watts's view of language as central to the production of knowledge positions him at the frontier of postmodern and poststructural thought, a detail that enables his critical teaching. For those who posit that language is a social construct, meaning emerges (and is transformed) through social and symbolic interaction. It precedes individuals and influences their perceptions about the world. As Berlin notes, Freire takes this position a step further: while many social constructionists emphasize the controlling aspects of language, Freire highlights its ability to liberate men and women ("Freirean Pedagogy" 414). He

wants people to recognize—and exercise—their fundamental right to engage the interaction from which meaning is derived and to transform the conditions that govern their experiences. According to Berlin, the duality of language as an instrument of oppression and emancipation places each person at “the intersection of a multitude of discourses” (“Freirean Pedagogy” 415). These discourses have the ability to define individuals as passive cultural consumers upon whom the world acts, or as active citizens who willingly engage the world around them. Watts’s emphasis on classroom conversation and intellectual reflection in *Improvement of the Mind* indicates that he wished to cultivate minds of the latter persuasion.

By empowering students to actively participate in their educations and to use their words to challenge the ascendancy of received knowledge, Watts develops in his students the requisite intellectual capital for civic participation. Consequently, his pedagogy advances what Davis identifies as the primary goal of the dissenting academies, the establishment of a strong and stable middle-class government (18). In *Teachers are Cultural Workers*, Freire notes that citizenship conveys freedom; but to whom that freedom extends is variable, for the concept of citizenship is a social construction (90). Through participation in public matters, men and women can engage the concept of citizenship and remake its meaning. Much of the history of eighteenth-century England can be interpreted as a struggle for the lower and middle classes and dissenters of all ranks to secure a greater degree of citizenship, a greater degree of freedom.

Watts's pedagogy benefits this cause by honing the critical literacy skills of students and empowering them to transform the realities of their condition through public dialogue and debate. By gaining an awareness of the situated nature of knowledge, Watts's students can more readily critique established traditions and authorities. Moreover, they can also more easily perceive their role within the meaning-making process, empowering them to transform the dominant systems of society.

Watts was not alone in linking the power of language to knowledge production; nor was he alone in suggesting that the production of alternative knowledge calls into question the authority of the status quo and lays the foundation for civic participation. Philip Doddridge, a fellow dissenting minister and tutor, held similar intellectual and pedagogical views. In fact, Watts thought so highly of Doddridge's mind and character that he recommended Doddridge for appointment to the dissenting academy at Northampton. Moreover, as Davis notes, Watts entrusted Doddridge to write *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* when he was too weak to do so himself (63-64). That Watts would ask his friend to take over such an important intellectual task speaks volumes about the degree to which these pedagogues likely shared a common ideological vision—one that values intellectual freedom over dogma.

### **Philip Doddridge and the Comparative Method**

Doddridge was born the youngest child of twenty in London in 1702. His father was a well-known oilman, while both of his grandfathers were ministers. Doddridge was born into a tradition of nonconformity on his father's side, which bore legacies of several ejected ministers (Nuttall 12), including his grandfather, John Doddridge, an Oxford-educated minister and one-time rector at Shepperton in Middlesex (Harsha 23). Doddridge attended private school at St. Alban's, under the tutelage of Samuel Clark, and was later given an opportunity to pursue a university education by the Duchess of Bedford. She offered to underwrite his education at Oxford or Cambridge on the condition that he conform to the Church of England. Despite the generosity of her proposition, Doddridge, like his friend-to-be Watts, turned down the scholarship so that he might contribute to the advancement of the dissenting cause. He instead enrolled in the academy at Kibworth in Leicestershire in 1719 to train for the ministry under John Jennings. When Jennings left Kibworth for Hinckley (taking his academy with him), Doddridge was asked by the church at Kibworth to succeed his mentor as minister of the congregation in 1723. He accepted, and two years into his tenure as minister at Kibworth, he removed his residence to the neighboring town of Market Harborough. There Doddridge entered into an arrangement with his friend and fellow minister David Some, whereby the two men would share a joint pastorate of the congregations at Kibworth and Market Harborough.

As Doddridge worked to establish his reputation as a minister, the untimely death of John Jennings and the subsequent closing of his academy, just one short year after leaving Kibworth, had left the midlands without a liberal evangelical institution. While Jennings had looked to Doddridge to continue his work, the Presbyterian board had someone else in mind (Taylor 18). However, when Doddridge submitted to Isaac Watts an account of Jennings's methods, Watts recommended to David Some that Doddridge, "the *man* who so admirably described this scheme of education," take the post ("From a Manuscript" 461). Observing the recommendation, Some proposed, at a minister's meeting in Lutterworth, the establishment of an academy at Market Harborough, of which Doddridge should be appointed tutor. The ministers voted unanimously in favor of the proposal, and the academy opened three months later, in July of 1729 (Taylor 18). A mere five months after the opening of the school, however, Doddridge accepted a pastorate at Castle Hill. Because dissenting academies were usually attached to ministers and not to specific churches or towns, Doddridge's newly-formed academy followed him to Northampton.

While Doddridge's academy filled the vacancy left by Jennings for theological training, it did not strictly serve those entering the ministry. It was open to students of various pursuits and included practical and secular courses in mathematics, physics, geography, and modern languages. The study of these subjects prepared students for careers in commerce and industry during at time when Oxford and Cambridge held strong to their antiquarianism. This is not



to say, however, that Doddridge ignored the classics in favor of a modern curriculum. He found value in both approaches. “He was one of those,” writes A. Victor Murray, “who saw learning as a whole and to whom literature, theology, science and philosophy were aspects of the one eternal mind at work in the world” (102). Accordingly, Doddridge believed that a well-rounded education included the study of modern and classic subjects alike. His modern curriculum was therefore tempered with courses in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and ancient history and philosophy. Courses in divinity and Church history rounded out his academic program, although students who planned to enter the ministry would stay an additional two years, where they would engage a theology-intensive course of study. Doddridge, like John Jennings, believed that divinity was a post-graduate affair that must be supported by a well-established bedrock of education and culture (A. Murray 106).

In addition to providing a secular education that siphoned knowledge from both classic and modern subjects, Doddridge’s academy gave theology students a non-sectarian education. Although Doddridge identified himself as Calvinist “in all the most important points,” (“To Mr. Mason” 439), A. Victor Murray insists that he was “Catholic in his theology as well as his sympathies” (120). Alexander Gordon agrees with Murray’s assessment (30), although neither scholar actively seeks to undermine Doddridge’s stated denominational identity. Their goal is only to emphasize the extent to which Doddridge valued religious diversity and the freedom of individual religious thought. In other words, their use of the term

“catholic” is non-ecclesiastical. As Murray explains, Doddridge’s catholicism was not a sectarian classification but a universal one: “For him ‘Catholic’ was not the badge of a party, but the symbol of the universal love of God seeking to save the lost” (120-21). That Doddridge embodied a catholic sensibility is easily supported by his aversion to sectarian dogma. He sought truth in scripture and encouraged his students to do the same, to eschew doctrinal interpretations (Calvinist or otherwise) in favor of their own (Gordon 24). Interestingly, as Murray points out, Doddridge was never doctrinaire in his anti-doctrine approach:

Many men have been fanatical in their dislike of fanaticism, and dogmatic in their opposition to dogma. Doddridge was not of this sort. He had an extraordinary *wholeness* about his character so that his refusal of theological subscription, his encouragement of free enquiry among his students, and his wide charity towards opposing views were all part of an attitude to life. (111)

While the “wholeness” of Doddridge’s character may be questioned on the grounds that his nonconformity pits him against the Establishment, Gordon explains that his support for the dissenting cause was not principally an objection to the Anglican Church, but instead a commitment to the freedom to serve the evangelical cause: “[Doddridge] claimed that Dissent should not be viewed or treated as schismatical; and he urged upon Archbishop Herring, that Dissent ought to be relieved of this stigma, by an authorized interchange of

pulpits between the Established and the Tolerated clergy” (30) Doddridge’s proposal to bring Anglican ministers before dissenting congregations is a powerful gesture that not only reveals the extent to which he was tolerant of intolerance, but also reveals his highest regard for intellectual inquiry and open-mindedness over dogma. These qualities garnered him so much respect across ecclesiastical lines that he attracted to his academy nonconformists and conformists alike. What is more, “some few were from the first intended for the Anglican ministry” (Gordon 27).

There is no stronger evidence that Doddridge offered an open-minded, non-sectarian education to his pupils than the fact that future Anglican ministers occasionally pursued their theological training at his academy, especially when his school at Northampton was not the only alternative to the poor education offered at Oxford and Cambridge. As Thomas Miller reports, the Scottish universities also offered a quality education (157-66). If members of the Establishment suspected that Doddridge might attempt to enlist students into the service of religious dissent—or at the very least, make them sympathetic to the movement’s cause—then those members would not have allowed their ministers-in-training to study at Doddridge’s academy, nor would they have confirmed through ministerial ordination the caliber of the education received under his tutelage. But Doddridge was known for the degree to which he shunned classroom proselytism, and Anglicans trusted his educational integrity. In fact, so trusted was Doddridge that John Wesley, a prominent priest of the

Established Church, once consulted him on the matter of education. A. Victor Murray reports that Wesley, in 1746, was so concerned about the education of his preachers that he asked Doddridge to compose a reading list for his clergy; and from this list of texts, Wesley formed the idea of publishing *A Christian Library*, a compendium of the “best approved” English writers on matters of divinity (119). That Wesley trusted Doddridge to compile such a list speaks favorably of the catholic spirit with which Doddridge approached education, a spirit that he inherited from Jennings.

As a student of Jennings at Kibworth academy, Doddridge admired his mentor’s unique perspective towards theological study. It was a perspective that traversed sectarian boundaries, and a perspective that Doddridge would emulate at his own academy years later. Highlighting the details of Jennings’s methods in a letter to his brother, Doddridge writes the following:

I have almost finished Mr. Jennings’s system of divinity: and the better I am acquainted with it, the more I admire it. He does not entirely accord with the system of any particular body of men; but is sometimes a Calvinist, sometimes a Remonstrant, sometimes a Baxterian, and sometimes a Socinian, as *truth* and *evidence* determine him. He always inculcates it upon our attention, that the scriptures are the only standard of orthodoxy, and encourages the utmost freedom of inquiry. He furnishes us all with all kinds of authors upon every subject, without advising us to skip over the

heretical passages for fear of infection. It is evidently his main care to inspire us with sentiments of Catholicism, and to arm us against that zeal, which is not according to knowledge. (198)

The educational procedure that Doddridge describes above—and attributes to Jennings—is known as the “comparative method of instruction” (T. Miller 21). It is a method whereby teachers present students with multiple perspectives on issues. When practiced honestly and fairly, it gives students the opportunity to draw their own conclusions and form their own ideas, rather than simply adopt the findings of their teachers. The method represents a radical departure from that which it follows. According to Gordon, the “old method” was far more doctrinaire in its application and aim, as tutors would define propositions—generally those held by their churches—and advance one-sided arguments to defend the validity of those positions, all the while dismissing divergent opinions as aberrations and heresies (24). The value of the comparative method, as Doddridge practiced it, was that it made no attempt to suppress opposing ideas and that it openly addressed the controversies and difficulties confronting any given proposition. Consequently, it urged students to think through the difficulties surrounding an issue, to judge the merits of each argument, and to form their own opinions.

The comparative method of instruction that Doddridge inherited from Jennings parallels what Freire calls “problem-posing education,” a mainstay of twentieth-century critical pedagogy. The method flattens the vertical pattern of

traditional education and places students and teachers together on the horizon of free inquiry. Rather than inculcate knowledge by way of classroom authority, problem-posing educators create dialogical relationships with their students as they critically engage ontological and existential problems. As Freire explains, teachers and students alike benefit from the dialogue: teachers present material to students, encouraging them to engage the material not as passive and docile listeners but as critical co-investigators who equally reflect on the material through dialogue with their teachers; the teachers, in turn, having thus created the conditions for critical inquiry, re-consider their understanding of the material as students discuss their considerations (*Pedagogy* 61-61). In this model, all parties involved in classroom dialogue—regardless of vocational role—learn from and teach one another. “They become,” as Freire succinctly puts it, “responsible for a process in which all grow” (*Pedagogy* 61).

Intellectual growth, for Freire, is the means by which women and men fulfill their ontological purpose of becoming more completely human. It is the process of developing an awareness of our dialectical relationship with the world and living authentically through the creative transformation of reality. Traditional education—the method to which Freire applies his banking metaphor—obstructs the path to authenticity. It imposes upon students an oppressive hierarchical order whereby teachers didactically load knowledge into the (perceived) empty minds of students. This traditional educational model chokes the pursuit for authenticity and full humanity for two reasons: it strips students of their

fundamental human right to grow, and it promotes a view of reality that is permanent and complete. In other words, it obscures the notion that reality is a dynamic and unfinished presence over which human beings have transformative power. Accordingly, when students receive knowledge in the traditional classroom, they inherit a particular view of the world, one that does not always correspond to their experiences yet is presented as indisputable fact. To assert that objective knowledge exists independent of human cognition is to deny that men and women interact with the world and actively contribute to its configuration. A pedagogy that rejects the dialectical relationship between *knower* and *known* does not allow students to form their own conclusions because it places the world beyond their collaborative reach. That is to say, students can only access knowledge about the world but cannot participate in the making or remaking thereof. Accordingly, traditional education “regulate[s] the way the world ‘enters’ into’ the students” (Freire, *Pedagogy* 57) and consequently shapes their judgments, beliefs, and actions. Problem-posing education seeks to emancipate students from such repressive educational conditions. It empowers them to engage and challenge received knowledge through reflective action and dialogue and to unearth the “real” knowledge residing beneath and obscured by *doxa* (Freire, *Pedagogy* 61)—that is, popular opinion rooted in the appearance of things.

While Doddridge’s comparative method of instruction manifests the democratic characteristics and humanizing potential of Freire’s problem-posing

method, it is rather mathematical in its formulation, proceeding by means of proposition, demonstration, axiom, scholium, corollary, and lemma (A. Murray 105). At face value, this approach has very little in common with Freire's, which centers almost exclusively on class discussion. But a closer look at Doddridge's lectures reveals that he posed problems to his students by citing the common arguments in favor of various propositions and offering objections to those arguments. Such efforts condensed and approximated the discussions surrounding controversial topics and prompted students to form their own conclusions via dialectical involvement in the pseudo-dialogues. Lecture 200 ("Of Christian Baptism"), for example, begins with the proposition that "[t]he law of Christ requires that all who believe the gospel should be *baptized*; i.e. should be separated from unbelievers, and joined to the visible christian church, by being solemnly *washed with water*" (*Works* 316). His demonstration of the proposition consists of five arguments, all of which derive their justification through common interpretations of biblical passages. Seven corollaries—statements that readily proceed from the presumed truth of the proposition—follow the demonstration and conclude this first of two lectures on the necessity of baptism. Lecture 201 ("Of the Continuance of Baptism") begins where the previous lecture ended, with seven scholia that address Doddridge's earlier demonstration of the topic. The scholia offer divergent interpretations of baptism—proposed by biblical scholars and various denominational leaders—and are sometimes followed by Doddridge's responses. For instance, the



second scholium addresses the argument of Mr. Emlyn and other Socinians that baptism “was and is only to be used by those who are converted to christianity from a different profession, [and] all that descended from them after they were initiated into the christian church were to be considered as baptized in them” (*Works* 319). Doddridge responds to this scholium by noting that while the bible never explicitly mentions the baptism of Christian descendents, it nevertheless referred to all Christians generally as “baptized persons” (*Works* 320).

In the two lectures discussed and excerpted above, Doddridge occupies the center of the classroom, talking *to* students rather than *with* them. Typically, according to Freire, such one-sided conversations bespeak oppressive learning situations; however, such appears not to be the case with Doddridge, who relies upon his lectures not to inculcate specific judgments but to introduce students to different perspectives on a topic. Gordon explains that Doddridge used his lectures “to see that [students] were in possession, as far as might be, of the materials of judgment” (24). In other words, his lectures illuminated other possible paths in Plato’s dark cave of illusions and encouraged students to find their own ways to the light. Andrew Kippis, editor of the *Biographia Britannica* and former student of Doddridge at Kibworth academy, offers the following account of this method by which Doddridge prepared and encouraged students to make their own judgments on important and difficult issues:

He represented the arguments, and referred to the authorities on both sides. The students were left to judge for themselves; and

they did judge for themselves, with his perfect concurrence and approbation; though, no doubt, it was natural for him to be pleased when their sentiments coincided with his. Where this was not the case, it made not alteration in his affection and kind treatment, as the writer of this present narrative can gratefully witness. (280).

While Kippis and his peers found the features of the comparative method “useful” (280), conservative and evangelical dissenters criticized Doddridge’s approach for giving students “the impression that they were qualified to be judges” (A. Murray 105-06, Thomas 136). Such criticism manifests the view that students have no knowledge of their own, that they are empty containers that must be filled with information. This view of education is the same one to which Freire applies the banking metaphor. It is the same view that maintains a fixed distinction between human cognition and objective knowledge and that stifles creative and authentic engagement in the world.

Doddridge anticipates the contemporary understanding of language as an important element in the dialectical relationship between human cognition and the world. In a confession of faith at Northampton, he defines the role of language in shaping concepts and beliefs:

I have used some human phrases which seemed to me properly to express the sense of Scripture, yet I would by no means offer any of them as a standard by which opinions are to be tried, nor quarrel with any who may not be thoroughly satisfied with them, for it is

one very important article of my faith that I am bound in duty affectionately to esteem and embrace all who practically comply with the design of the revelation and love of our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, how much soever they may differ from myself in their language or their conceptions about any speculative points. (qtd. in Waddington 287)

Doddridge is very clear in his confession that the language he uses to express the truths of Scripture might not represent an accurate truth for others. He does not suggest that his expressions diverge from the revelation and love of Jesus Christ but that they simply diverge from other ways of expressing the same. Because words have complex social and historical meanings, a single expression can mean different things to different people. As Doddridge's good friend Watts explains in *Logick*, divergent meanings can arise from, among other things, the experiential associations and emotional prejudices of words (94-113). Accordingly, where one group has come to accept a certain interpretation or expression of Scripture as truth, another may reject it. Even though both expressions may attempt to capture the general sense of a specific scriptural passage, their different ways of expressing that sense betray their commonality. Doddridge's statement on phraseology may provide insight into his religious liberalism, for it hints at the notion that sectarian division is foremost a matter of language prejudice. In postmodern terms, the idea can be explained through the concept of discourse communities, where denominational boundaries are

drawn and distinguished by different ways of expressing scriptural revelation. Because the concept holds that language is the foundation of human thought and belief, different expressions denote different ways of knowing (and creating) the world.

Doddridge's idea that linguistic behavior shapes cognition and influences interpretation and understanding of the world anticipates modern cognitive linguistics, especially the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. In *Metaphors We Live By*, they argue that metaphors are not the exclusive ornamental property of literature and rhetoric but also play an indispensable epistemological role in everyday language use. According to the authors, human concepts are structured metaphorically. That is to say, we understand things in terms of other things. Whereas the traditional view of metaphor—as a literary and rhetorical device—centers on expression, Lakoff and Johnson's view centers on the degree to which metaphor structures reality. The authors do not maintain a distinction between word and world but establish unity between them. They argue that ways of talking are ways of knowing and that ways of knowing define reality:

Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely

metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and we do everyday is very much a matter of metaphor. (3)

Because different cultures and communities structure their concepts around different metaphors, a variety of realities and truths exist simultaneously in the world. As Lakoff and Johnson put it, “truth is always relative to a conceptual system that is defined in large part by metaphor” (159). This statement addresses the point that Doddridge makes about language, concept, and truth. It suggests that the elements cannot be divorced. And even though Doddridge seemingly subscribes to this epistemological view of language, he temporarily dismantles the relationship between expression and truth when he speaks of a “sense” of Scripture—that is, the general meaning of Scripture, unmediated by language. The significance of separating substance from style is that he can consider the possibility that sectarian disagreement is an apparition of language and not necessarily veritable theological disparity.

I agree with supposition that language can create a façade of disagreement where it does not otherwise exist, but only to an extent. Because there exists no prepackaged terminology for which to explain new and emerging concepts—especially the transcendental—we can only, as Lakoff and Johnson say, “get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms” (115). Of course, when different terms are applied to similar concepts, those concepts will no longer appear similar. What is more, as they are absorbed into the collective consciousness of cultures and communities,

awareness of their metaphorical nature eventually subsides. This is the point at which I cannot fully accept the possibility of disagreement as a manifestation of language, for if ways of talking about concepts shape those concepts, then linguistic difference *is* substantive difference.

From the position that language and thought are inseparable—a position that Doddridge hints at holding—the clearest path to free inquiry and the best way to think beyond dogma would be a new academic language, one whose expressions were not as fully associated with specific ideas and doctrines as Latin. During Doddridge's time, Latin had a strong presence in higher education. Of course, it was the primary language of learning at Oxford and Cambridge, where classical education was still the curriculum *de rigueur*; but it was also common in the dissenting academies, where practical education reigned supreme. "Up to the time of Doddridge," writes Gordon, "the lectures in divinity, philosophy, science, in all Dissenting Academies had been delivered in Latin" (23). Many tutors, including Watts, taught English composition in their schools, but they continued to use Latin for many subjects. Doddridge did not. According to Gordon, he found no use in Latin and abolished it from his academy, making him the first theology teacher to lecture in English, an innovation that signified a repudiation of ancient prejudice and an acceptance of a new approach to theological study (23). Because different ways of expressing Scripture could influence scriptural interpretation and shape sectarian dogma, English gave students an opportunity to study theology from a perspective that

was fresh and new. This is not to say that vernacular English sidesteps the potential for dogmatism. It harbors the same potential for dogmatism as Latin or any other language. However, as a newcomer to the intellectual study of philosophy and theology, English gave students and scholars greater opportunity to think beyond inherited theological traditions and to develop new ideas for a new age. In the following quote, Gordon explains the significance of Doddridge's decision to lecture in English, and though he speaks primarily of theology, his statement is applicable to all academic disciplines: "Theology, released from the trammels of unvarying technical terms, could take on new forms of expression; a living language is the only right vehicle for living thought" (23).

Just as Rowe and Jennings influenced the pedagogical visions of their students, Watts and Doddridge had a marked influence the teaching practices of their students, the future tutors of England's dissenting academies. Two tutors in particular illustrate Doddridge's influence: Caleb Ashworth and Samuel Clark, the junior. Both men were students of Doddridge and simultaneously filled the vacancy at Northampton when their teacher died in 1751, eventually moving the academy to Daventry. Ashworth and Clark respected their former teacher's critical approach to education and worked to employ Doddridge's comparative method of instruction and to welcome classroom debate. According to Gordon, lectures were structured such that Ashworth would argue the conservative side of an issue, while Clark argued the opposite (28). By way of their two-pronged

approach, Ashworth and Clark would eventually pass Doddridge's comparative method on to Joseph Priestley, who Thomas Miller claims is the "most broadly significant teacher of English in the dissenting academy tradition" (98). Much of Priestley's pedagogical success derives from the comparative method that he inherited by proxy from Doddridge. As Thomas Miller notes, Priestley's pedagogy centered on classroom discussion, student debates, and prepared arguments (100). Furthermore, much like Watts and Doddridge, he focused on practical learning, teaching courses that prepared students for clerical appointment in dissenting churches and for careers in business during a time when Oxford and Cambridge were still teaching the classics.

## **Conclusion**

While the dissenting academies, under the influence of tutors like Watts Doddridge, were well on their way to achieving their goal of political and social reform, they lost their direction by the end of the eighteenth century. While the academies were affiliated with ministers of various nonconforming churches—ranging from Baptist to Unitarian—denominational interests rarely trumped their commitment to education. When it came to choosing a school, the academic reputation of an academy would often overshadow commitment to religious denomination. In fact, many Anglicans sent their children to dissenting academies because they provided better education than the universities at Oxford and Cambridge. However, as sectarian competition in England grew



more intense near the end of the century, denominational organizations exercised greater authority over dissenting academies (MacArthur 277), and tutors began to require that all entering students subscribe to a definite creed (Parker 136). “This narrowing of their borders,” writes Parker, “was the cause of the decay of the academies as centres of general learning” (136). Because the dissenting academies offered the means to social and political change, the narrowing of their borders might also be said to have significantly obstructed reform efforts. Where the academies once fostered critical thought, they now promoted the orthodoxy of their governing bodies. This sectarian turn undercut the democratic approach to education that methodologically distinguished dissenting academies from the universities and once again silenced student voices in the classroom. From a Freirean perspective, that silence signifies a departure from the historical ideals of the dissenting academies, for they no longer provided education for citizenship.

The luxury of hindsight lets modern pedagogues assess the history of eighteenth-century critical pedagogy in the context of a similar educational endeavor unfolding today, the twentieth-century reincarnation of critical pedagogy. Because critical pedagogy is still practiced in American writing classrooms, its directions and future developments remain unknown. Such uncertainty, however, does not mean that teachers should blindly contribute to its developing narrative. By examining the circumstances and pedagogies of England’s eighteenth-century dissenting academies, writing teachers will be

better prepared to lead critical pedagogy to a successful future, achieving its ambitious goal of radical democracy. In this endeavor, writing pedagogues must eschew the tendency to define too narrowly their pedagogical boundaries. Such delineation can blind them to advancements in writing instruction and alienate pedagogues of a different theoretical constitution. When a sectarian agenda becomes more important than pedagogical advancement, teachers begin to work against each other in competition, often to the peril of students.

CHAPTER V  
CONCLUSION: CRITICALLY ASSESSING THE COURSE OF  
CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

This dissertation attempts to provide an alternative history to the practice of critical pedagogy in college writing classrooms. I have argued that the key principles of critical pedagogy, first articulated by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, were practiced by a number of pedagogues as early as the eighteenth century. I have examined the teaching methods of these men and argue that they anticipate the methods of critical pedagogy. My analysis spotlights the need to reinterpret the historical narrative of critical pedagogy and to select a wider lens through which to understand the current pedagogical scene.

My examination of critical pedagogy has centered on the three dominant characteristics that define Freire's critical methodology: decentered classrooms where students and teachers democratically engage course material through dialogue; the use of relevant discussion topics in which students have expertise, experience, and interest; and a focus on the generative power of language and its ability to create and transform reality. Contrary to most scholarship on critical pedagogy, I do not focus on the content of the critical classroom. Because Freire views education as the practice of freedom, he is more concerned with *how* teachers teach than *what* they teach. He is not interested in imparting a political agenda, as critics of critical pedagogy have argued, for such would

contradict his message of freedom and subject him to his own attacks against banking education. Freirean critical pedagogy opposes the model of instruction that Hairston says is dominant in freshman writing programs, “a model that puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the students” (“Diversity” 180). My historical examination preserves Freire’s emphasis on classroom practice and methodology.

Approaching critical pedagogy as practice, I have located several parallels between critical pedagogy and the process and expressive movements of the late 1960s and early ‘70s. Although some critics (e.g. Berlin and Berthoff) have drawn sharp distinctions between the pedagogies, I have shown that the work of Elbow and Murray anticipate many of the aims and methods of critical pedagogy. One of the most contentious points relates to epistemology. Berlin and Berthoff argue that expressivism takes a subjective approach to meaning that is incompatible with the social aspects of critical pedagogy. Accordingly, they dismiss the former as either solipsistic or not concerned with meaning. My analysis of the works of Elbow and Murray dispute these claims. Both pedagogues create writing laboratories where students interact and share their work with each other. This process gives writers an opportunity to gain insight into how their words are experienced by actual readers. When readers react, writers can see that their words are not always experienced as intended, that meaning resides within the social interaction between both parties. The process

embodies Freire's claim that humans exist with the world and with others. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to reflect upon and transform reality through dialogue. These opportunities are engendered by the student-centered classrooms and writing topics that process pedagogy and expressivism support. My interpretation of the teaching methods of Elbow and Murray suggests that they are not irreconcilable with critical pedagogy and other social-epistemic rhetorics and can be viewed as preludes to critical pedagogy. Accordingly, I revise the narratives that characterize the emergence of critical pedagogy in the 1970s as an evolutionary (or revolutionary) leap beyond the so-called subjective pedagogies of expressivism and process pedagogy.

I have also argued that the pedagogical advancements of I. A. Richards anticipated the principle teaching methods of critical pedagogy. My analysis of *Practical Criticism*, for example, suggests that Richards was an early proponent of democratic education. Richards believed that literary analysis developed the same skills that are necessary for interpreting experience and reality, and he developed a strategy for improving those skills. Noticing that his students often responded to the reputations of authors instead of texts, he began to remove identifying markers from works of poetry analyzed in class. He intended the strategy to elicit from students more authentic responses to literary texts. Nevertheless, the strategy was co-opted by a new wave of formalist critics, the new critics, who interpreted it as an affirmation that works of literature are best approached as self-contained artifacts. Such appropriation has long linked

Richards to New Criticism, causing him to fall out of fashion with the decline of literary formalism. My analysis of Richards's teaching methods and theories shows that he actually resisted the objective view of meaning that underlies literary formalism; it shows that he saw meaning, instead, as a triadic event in which subjects, symbols, and objects interact. Richards was hopeful that awareness of this dialectical process might provide a foundation for better communication between people and for the positive transformation of society. Accordingly, he tried to establish an educational environment where students could engage the meaning-making process. Such attempts, I have argued, situate Richards more comfortably among contemporary approaches to writing instruction like critical pedagogy than it does among formalist approaches like current-traditionalism.

Lastly, I have argued that Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge, two eighteenth-century English nonconformist educators, employed a number of teaching methods that parallel contemporary critical pedagogy. Within their classrooms, Watts and Doddridge created participatory learning environments that centered on practical subjects. They were among the first educators to teach in the English vernacular and to augment the traditional classical curriculum with new learning in science and reason. Watts, especially, encouraged participation in the classroom. He believed that students should *engage* lectures, rather than merely *attend* them. He encouraged students to ask questions during lectures and to enter conversation with their teachers and

fellow students. He viewed dialogue as an instrument for participating in education and for engaging knowledge, a process that parallels Freire's notion praxis. Doddridge's approach to learning was slightly different. He practiced a comparative method of instruction that embodied several features of Freire's problem-posing model. Doddridge would present students with multiple perspectives on controversial issues and urge them not merely to side with established positions but to enter into pseudo-dialogues with those positions, a process that prepared and encouraged students to form their own conclusions. My analysis and interpretation of the teaching methods of Watts and Doddridge revise the dominant narrative that portrays eighteenth-century writing instruction as exclusively current-traditional. I demonstrate that the pedagogies of Watts and Doddridge parallel critical pedagogy, to the extent that they embody Freire's emphasis on linguistic praxis, classroom participation, and practical learning.

### **Bridging Historical Contexts**

While the emphasis of my research is classroom practice, I am also interested in the contexts in which these preludes to critical pedagogy emerge. I, therefore, begin my chapters with an overview of the social, political, and economic situations that mark each time period, especially insofar as they shape the scene of higher education. My study reveals some commonalities between the contexts of these historical periods: antiauthoritarian movements shook the political establishments of England in the 1700s and of the United States in the

1960s and '70s, and underrepresented groups gained political power in England during the first World War and in the United States during the second World War and Vietnam Conflict. Although the details of these events and others vary, they nevertheless contributed to the changing scene of education in their time.

Specifically, they made higher education more widely accessible to men and women. I believe that the pedagogies of Elbow, Murray, Richards, Watts, and Doddridge developed in an attempt to deal with the diverse demographics of their classrooms.

The historical exigency of process pedagogy and expressivism is well established and documented. Scholars believe that these pedagogies emerged because current-traditionalism, the then dominant mode of writing instruction in the United States, was not capable of teaching diverse groups of students how to write. As I explain in Chapter II, a number federal and state policies initiated after World War II made higher education more accessible to a wider student demographic; at the same time, however, they also accelerated a pedagogical crisis in the composition classroom. Maxine Hairston echoes this common interpretation of policy and pedagogy in “The Winds of Change”:

[T]he external conditions which have hastened the crisis in teaching of writing are open admissions policies, the return to school of veterans and other groups of older students who are less docile and rule-bound [ . . . ], and the ever larger number of high



school graduates going on to college as our society demands more and more credentials for economic citizenship. (82)

Prior to these changes in student populations, American colleges and universities were limited to more affluent sectors of society. College-bound students, therefore, largely came from similar social, economic, and educational backgrounds. Current-traditional writing instruction was well-suited to this demographic because it “reinforced middle-class values, such as social stability and cultural homogeneity” (Burnham 22); however, it was not well-suited to the increasingly diverse student populations of the post-WWII era. Non-traditional students did not share the same values as traditional students, and the dominant method of teaching writing—reflecting and reinforcing, as it did, the hegemonic norm—could not effectively bridge the divide.

Finding the methods of current-traditionalism ineffective, Murray and Elbow led a movement of new composition pedagogies. Their methods opposed the controlling assumptions of traditional writing instruction and placed students at the center of the learning process. To the extent their methods foreground the experiences and insights of students, Murray and Elbow seem to have been trying to fashion an alternative approach to writing instruction that could more effectively address issues of diversity within in the classroom. While Murray’s and Elbow’s ideas about writing—particularly, that it is a recursive process beginning with the interests and knowledge of writers—might have seemed revolutionary at the time, their teaching methods are what posed the greatest

challenge to current-traditionalism. For as some scholars have pointed out, it is possible to teach the ideas of process and expressive writing in a manner that is as teacher-centered and rule-bound as the traditional paradigm of writing instruction. Consider the following anecdote by Lab Tobin, in which he recounts the story of a colleague who decided to embrace process pedagogy a decade after the movement had begun.

I remember being surprised and pleased that Evelyn had come over to the process side of the force, but not so surprised or pleased when the next week, from the other side of the partition, I heard her explaining her version of the method to one of her students: “You have not done any freewriting here. You can’t just jump from brainstorming straight to composing. You can’t skip steps.” (11).

As Tobin’s story demonstrates, the ideas of Murray and Elbow can become products themselves, static regimens imposed by the very teaching methods that process pedagogy and expressivism originally sought to critique and supplant. As such, they are no more able than current-traditionalism to deal with classroom diversity, at least not when teachers impose the ideas via the banking model of education. However, when a student-centered methodology, such as critical pedagogy, accompanies the ideas of process and expressive writing, as Murray and Elbow explicitly intended, then the pedagogies are able to deal more effectively with diversity in the classroom. The strength of critical pedagogy lies

in its ability to reflect (and empower) the diverse voices of students. Murray and Elbow developed their pedagogies in an effort to draw these voices out and to engage students in the making and remaking of knowledge.

The context in which the critical pedagogies of the 1960s and '70s developed is similar to that in which I. A. Richards developed his teaching methods in the 1920s. Like Murray and Elbow, Richards taught during a time of social change. By the early nineteenth century, industrialization and war had moved England toward greater social, economic, and political equality. This movement was accompanied by educational reforms that eliminated public education fees and increased the legal dropout age. As a result, a wider variety of young men and women stayed in school and were prepared to pursue higher education. By the time Richards began his teaching career at Magdalene College, Cambridge, the university was no longer an exclusive institution for upper-class Anglican boys. It had opened its doors to women, foreigners, and working-class scholarship students. This demographic expansion of student population revealed inadequacies in traditional pedagogies; hence Richards mission to find “educational methods more efficient than those we use now” (*Practical Criticism* 3).

Considered through the lens of the late-twentieth-century pedagogical crisis in the United States, Richards’s teaching innovations can be interpreted as an attempt to discover more effective ways of teaching diverse students. Like Murray and Elbow in their time, Richards found traditional teaching methods

incapable of addressing the learning needs of students. That the shortcomings of these traditional methods would surface in 1920s, after years of dominating higher education without significant challenge, suggests aggravation to the educational status quo. Because the most noteworthy change to the university environment in England in the early twentieth century was a shift in student enrollment demographics, it is reasonable to conclude that classroom diversity provided the exigency for Richards to develop new pedagogical methods. Furthermore, it is no coincidence that Richards's methods parallel those of critical pedagogy. Like Murray and Elbow, Richards pursued and found a pedagogy that could deal with diversity in the classroom, one whose methods establish learning environments where participants dialogue about differences in their perspectives and experiences, consider the extent to which their concrete situations shape their interpretations, and collaborate on the production of knowledge.

Diversity also suffused the educational environment in which Watts and Doddridge pursued their pedagogical advancements in the eighteenth-century. Whereas Oxford and Cambridge opened their doors to a very narrow demographic, the dissenting academies flung their doors wide open. They made it possible for students from a variety of backgrounds to pursue a higher education. Because the dissenting academies had no religious restrictions and their financial burden was minimal, dissenters from all ranks attended the academies. Moreover, because the practical curriculum of dissenting

academies was often more desirable than the classical curriculum of the universities, members of the establishment would also attend the academies. The result was a diverse student constituency of underprivileged and privileged, nonconforming and conforming young men of varied educational backgrounds.

Unlike their peers at Oxford and Cambridge, Watts and Doddridge could not take the one-size-fits-all approach to education. Their students came from a variety of backgrounds that shaped their perspectives, experiences, knowledge, and skills. To teach from a single position or viewpoint would be to ignore those differences. Given that Watts and Doddridge were both dissenters, it is not likely that they would look beyond diversity and promote conformity in the classroom, for their public identities centered almost exclusively on their own nonconformity. Just as they believed their voices mattered in the social and political world, they seem to have believed that their students' voices mattered in the classroom. Their pedagogies, thus, seem to reflect the view that discussions about difference matter, that dialogue provides a means for understanding and resolving social inequalities. Like Murray and Elbow in the twentieth century, Watts and Doddridge practiced a critical methodology that empowered their diverse students to transform the world.

Across the historical contexts of the various preludes to critical pedagogy lie a single constant: diverse student constituencies. Unlike their professional predecessors, Watts, Doddridge, Richards, Murray, and Elbow did not stand before homogenous groups of students in the classroom; they stood, instead,

before groups of students from myriad backgrounds. Histories of contemporary composition theory interpret the pedagogical revolutions of the 1960s and '70s as largely a response to changes in student demographics. Given the similarity of contexts, the pedagogical innovations of the 1700s and 1920s should be interpreted in the same way.

### **Bridging Sectarian Divides**

Whereas diversity appears to be the exigency behind the development of critical pedagogy in the eighteenth century, a desire to choke that diversity led to the eventual demise of the dissenting academies. One of the reasons that the academies had become popular sites of learning was that their commitment to education and social change surpassed their commitment to the sectarian interests of their respective religious denominations. Even though academies were affiliated with various nonconforming churches, their tutors provided an open-minded education. However, toward the end of the eighteenth century, sectarian competition grew more intense and dissenting academies began to impose religious tests. These limitations placed dogma before diversity and redefined the social and educational mission of the academies, which soon disappeared.

The decline of dissenting academies offers a lesson and warning to contemporary composition pedagogues: embrace difference and reject sectarian rivalry. Just as competition between the diverse factions of religious dissent in

England eventually undermined the nonconformity movement, competition between the diverse theories of writing instruction can undermine the field of contemporary composition studies. Many new teachers, following the lead of most introductory texts on composition pedagogy, conceptualize the diverse theories of teaching writing as non-overlapping and self-contained projects. They see each pedagogical theory as distinct from the others. This manner of distinguishing between various pedagogical approaches is useful, but it also has the tendency to make writing teachers feel as though they must choose and practice a single pedagogy. I witnessed such tendency in two graduate courses in pedagogical theory, where students often proclaimed, for example, that they liked the idea of freewriting but could not employ the strategy because they were self-identified rhetorical pedagogues. In one course, the professor agreed with students, saying it was important for teachers to remain consistent in their pedagogical choices; in the other, the professor offered a more inclusive response, saying that teachers should experiment with a variety of ideas and strategies from across theoretical boundaries. I think both responses are correct: instructors should think carefully about their pedagogical choices and how they fit into the framework of a course; but they should also not shy away from effective teaching methods just because those methods originate from within the established theoretical boundaries of rival pedagogies.

Despite the limitations of teaching within narrow methodological boundaries, such is encouraged by the abundance of pedagogical scholarship

that emphasizes pedagogical dissonance over harmony. Consider, for example, Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*, a staple in most graduate courses in composition theory: its primary objective is to create an epistemological taxonomy by which to understand and rank the dominant approaches to writing instruction. While I think Berlin's taxonomy is useful, I also think that he tries too hard to squeeze pedagogies into his epistemological categories. Case in point: his treatment of expressivism unfairly portrays the pedagogy as individualistic, as unconcerned with the social and material world. These efforts unequivocally designate expressivism as a subjective rhetoric, a category that it actually defies. Nevertheless, Berlin's characterization resonated within the field and divided teachers of composition. As a result, supporters of expressivism devoted great effort defending the pedagogy, while detractors devoted equal effort defending their critiques thereof (e.g. the Bartholomae/Elbow debate)

The rivalry that Berlin initiated between expressivism and social-epistemic rhetoric strikes me as unproductive. It encouraged sectarian division more than it did collaborative unity. This consequence is observed and epitomized in the legendary Bartholomae/Elbow debate, where Bartholomae is so attuned to the established differences between his social constructivist pedagogy and Elbow's so-called subjective pedagogy that he cannot see their similarity. Bartholomae says that college writing courses should be "academic" to the extent that they promote critical inquiry, perceive the classroom as real space, and challenge dominant forms of knowledge (483). Elbow agrees: these points do not run



counter to his pedagogy but actually find support in his work. Nevertheless, Bartholomae continues to charge that Elbow's classroom is a utopian creation that ignores the social and historical foundations of knowledge. Given Bartholomae's proclivity to foreground difference, as well as his inability to reconsider assumptions about rival pedagogies, no new pedagogical insights are gleaned from the debate. There is no guarantee that the establishment of common ground would have yielded more productive results; however, it would have provided a stronger foundation for authentic dialogue, the process through which, according to Freire, new possibilities emerge. Herein lies the danger of sectarian competition: when rival pedagogues do not dialogue *with* each other but *about* each other, they jeopardize their potential to make pedagogical progress and to achieve professional success.

Pedagogical sectarianism is not limited to competition between contemporary pedagogical theories; it also spans history and pits today's pedagogies against their predecessors. After the rhetorical renaissance of the late 1960s and early '70s, scholars largely portrayed writing instruction since the nineteenth century as current-traditional (e.g. Berlin, *Writing Instruction* 85). Because the new writing pedagogies had developed in response to the ineffectual methods of current-traditionalism, few compositionists were eager to celebrate the achievements of their generational forebears. As a consequence, important and progressive scholars were often ignored. I. A. Richards, for example, was pushed to the margins of legitimate scholarship because his

association with literary formalism, unwarranted though it was, represented the image of outdated literary and pedagogical theories. Since then, a few scholars have tried to revive an interest in Richards but have been unsuccessful. I believe that the characterization of Richards's ideas, as incompatible with contemporary theories of literature and pedagogy, is the reason that scholars refuse to re-engage his work. By emphasizing difference, contemporary composition studies will never know the extent to which Richards and other historical pedagogues can contribute to success of student writing. We must not simply read and study *about* our past; we must engage in dialogue *with* it.

I have attempted to apply the lessons eighteenth-century dissenting academies to my scholarly investigation of critical pedagogy. I have not allowed the established boundaries of history or theory to limit the scope of my research. As a result, I have argued for a revised narrative of the history of critical pedagogy in the writing classroom. I have also argued for a more inclusive view of pedagogical diversity. Just as the desire to bridge student differences in the classroom led to predecessors of critical pedagogy in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, our willingness to bridge pedagogical differences today can lead to greater pedagogical advancements tomorrow. Moreover, just as the social and political commitments of the dissenting academies strengthened the cause of dissent, our shared commitment to student writing will strengthen our discipline. However, if we become too rigid in our commitments to pedagogy, then contemporary composition studies may travel the same fateful arc as the

English dissenting academies. We must always remember that transformative potential resides within the interaction of the diversity of our discipline.

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