Critical Pedagogy: Dreaming of Democracy

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In two weeks, classes will begin at the small, private Texas university where I now teach. The tapes of vigorous, radical class discussions that I’ve played in my head all summer mysteriously begin to fade as I struggle with the syllabus for my first-year composition course. Like many writing teachers, I am attracted to the student-centered pedagogies and themes of social justice it has become fashionable to espouse; I want to empower students, to engage them in cultural critique, to make a change. But as Ira Shor remarks in Empowering Education, the start of a new semester is both “rich in possibilities and cluttered with disabling routines” (200), and as I plan my fall class, I am reminded that, despite my subversive intentions and the liberatory rhetoric of my course descriptions, my teaching often retreats to the level of sporadic creativity or, worse, to rather predictable English-teacher experimentation and circling of the bladder. I fear that I am, in Peter Elbow’s phrase, “bamboozled”—that is, I “call things by the wrong name .... things by the wrong name .... things by the wrong name ....” (Embracing Contraries 92, 98). I write this essay, then, in hopes of reducing the bamboozlement of compositionists everywhere (including myself)—if that is, indeed, what we suffer from—by examining the goals, the realities, and the controversies of critical pedagogy.

“To propose a pedagogy,” says Roger Simon, “is to propose a political vision,” a “dream” for ourselves, our children, and our communities (371). Critical pedagogy (a.k.a. liberatory pedagogy, empowering pedagogy, radical pedagogy, engaged pedagogy, or pedagogy of possibility) envisions a society not simply pledged to but successfully enacting the principles of equality, of liberty and justice for all. “Dedicated to the emancipatory imperatives of self-empowerment and social transformation,” (Pedagogy of the Oppressed 163) in this, as in the controversy it has generated, critical pedagogy closely resembles and often overlaps with cultural studies and feminist pedagogies (see essays by Diana George and John Trimbur and by Susan Jarratt in this volume). However, critical pedagogy can be distinguished from these two pedagogies by its usually Henry Giroux, arguably the foremost American theorist of radical education, claims that the task of critical pedagogy is nothing short of “reconstructing democratic public life” (“Liberal Arts Education” 120). McLaren, Giroux’s former colleague, asserts that the commitment of critical pedagogy stems from the moral choice put before us as teachers and citizens, a choice that American philosopher John Dewey suggested is the distinction between education as a function of society and society as a function of education. We need to examine that choice: do we want our schools to create a passive, risk-free citizenry, or a politicized citizenry capable of fighting for various forms of public life and informed by a concern for equality and social justice? (158)

To create this “politicized citizenry,” critical pedagogy reinvets the roles of teachers and students in the classroom and the kind of activities they engage in.

At the center of critical pedagogy scholarship, ironically—though, perhaps, given current gender configurations within the academy, not too surprisingly—is a group of mostly white, middle-class men: Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, Stanley Aronowitz, Donaldo Macedo, Peter McLaren, and Roger Simon, with Freire, Giroux, and Shor constituting a kind of “Big Three” in the field. The “ur text” for critical pedagogy is Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) lays out many of the terms, assumptions, and basic methods that still define the project of critical pedagogy today. Freire’s educational philosophy is grounded in his conviction that oppression “interferes with man’s [sic] ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human”—that is, to know oneself as a subject in history capable of understanding and transforming the world (40-41). In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire presents his well-known critique (often excerpted in first-year readers) of the “banking” concept of education, in which students are seen as “receptacles” waiting to be filled with the teacher’s official knowledge; education thus becomes little more than information transfer, “an act of depositing” (58). Instead, Freire practices what he calls problem-posing or dialogic education, in which teachers work with students to develop conscientização or critical consciousness—the ability to define, to analyze, to problematize the economic, political, and cultural forces that shape but, according to Freire, do not completely determine their lives. Hence, the content of problem-posing education is material from students’ experience; dialogue among students and teacher revolves around “generative themes”—domination, marriage, or work—that represent students’ perceptions of the world. This pedagogy, Freire writes, “makes op-
pression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation” (33). This relationship between reflection and action is what Freire refers to as “praxis,” and it is essential for Freire: “neither critical consciousness nor unreflective action alone will enable people to transform the world.

Critical theorists and teachers have found Freire attractive for a number of reasons, not least of which is his radical analysis of schooling as an instrument of domination and his understanding of the situatedness of all theory and practice. Shor’s volumes Freire for the Classroom (1987) and Empowering Education (1992) illustrate the interdisciplinary appeal and applicability of Freirean pedagogy; teachers from disciplines such as history, media studies, and women’s studies as well as some from departments we might not expect like architecture, the life sciences, and mathematics are implementing critical pedagogy in their classrooms. However, as James Berlin suggests, Freire has become especially interesting to scholars and teachers in English studies and literature in their classrooms. However, as James Berlin suggests, Freire has become especially interesting to scholars and teachers in English studies and literature.

Freire’s belief in the possibility of reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation are socially constructed, linguistic products: “language—in its mediation and practice. Shor’s volumes Freire for the Classroom (1987) and Empowering Education (1992) illustrate the interdisciplinary appeal and applicability of Freirean pedagogy; teachers from disciplines such as history, media studies, and women’s studies as well as some from departments we might not expect like architecture, the life sciences, and mathematics are implementing critical pedagogy in their classrooms. However, as James Berlin suggests, Freire has become especially interesting to scholars and teachers in English studies and literature in their classrooms. However, as James Berlin suggests, Freire has become especially interesting to scholars and teachers in English studies and literature.

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If all of this is not political in purpose and result, if it is all a matter of “defective methods,” of “inadequate technique,” it is remarkable with what sustained coincidence we have assigned the worst techniques, the least efficient methods, to the poorest people in our nation. But we know well that none of this is true. It isn’t coincidence. It isn’t technique. It is, in William Berkeley’s terms, precisely the right method. It is a method that assures perpetuation of disparities in power and of inequities in every form of day-to-day existence. (Kozol 93)

Kozol’s now familiar claim that cultural institutions function to reproduce the ideology and power of dominant groups was seconded by many radical educators during the 1980s when conservative administrations in both England and the United States prompted increased response from the left.

Indeed, although American critical pedagogy has roots in the turn-of-the-century progressive educational reform movement, the 1980s marks the contemporary rebirth of the project. One look at this essay’s bibliography reveals the boom in critical pedagogy during the Reagan-Bush years, as radical educators responded to a host of conservative reports on education released beginning in 1983, the two most influential of which were A Nation at Risk (produced by Secretary of Education T. H. Bell’s National Commission on Excellence in Education) and Action for Excellence (written by the Education Commission of the States). These reports announced a crisis in American education, a system围墙ions that crippled America’s ability to compete in the world economic market; they proposed an authoritarian, back-to-basics, teacher-proof curriculum to restore excellence to the schools. Giroux argues that the 1980s signaled a “major ideological shift” (Schooling 16) in public education as conservatives worked to undo reforms of the 1960s and to redefine schools not as sites for civic education and social justice but as “company stores” in which good citizenship is equated with economic productivity and “cultural uniformity” (Schooling 18). The popularity and success of conservative educational reform suggested to radical educators that the country was experiencing not just a crisis in education but, as Giroux and McLaren argue, “a crisis in American democracy itself” (216).

Hence, in Critical Teaching and Everyday Life (1980), Shor presents a blistering Marxist critique of the community college system, developed during the late 1950s and bulging by the late 1970s, as a warehouse for surplus workers. Community colleges, Shor argues, simultaneously feed off the American Dream and shortcircuit it by building a large pool of skilled workers for a shrinking number of increasingly deskillled jobs. Unlike elite liberal arts colleges, which prepare students for roles as future problem-solvers and decision-makers, community colleges with their vocational curricula train students to follow orders and accept subordinate roles in society: “mass colleges were not to be Ivory Towers or ‘the best years of your life’ or homecoming parades on crisp autumn afternoons. They were from the start shaped outside the elite traditions of the academy, by the state for the masses, in the genre of public housing and the welfare bureaucracy” (13). Given American mass culture and mass education,
Shor suggests, it is hardly surprising that ours is a country in which "freedom" is not the practice of democracy but rather the practice of shopping, casual complaining, and individualism, in a society which offers wide license for knowing or behaving. For Giroux, then, it is crucial that radical educators contest the ironic equation of education with citizenship. Like Shor, Giroux explores the "hidden curriculum," the subtle but powerful ways schools construct students' and teachers' knowledge and behavior, validating positivism and competitiveness over other forms of knowing or behaving. For Giroux, then, it is crucial that radical educators contest the pernicious equation of education with citizenship in the interests of "naming and transforming those ideological and social conditions that underpin and reproduce dominant culture, gives radicals a language of critique but not the tools of intervention. At the risk of oversimplifying, if schools simply reproduce dominant ideology, students and teachers alike become victims of false consciousness because things are as good as it gets. Schools are arenas characterized by struggle between competing ideologies, discourses, and behaviors and which, thus, include spaces for resistance and agency. Hence, Giroux writes of "cultural production" rather than degrees of accommodation and resistance (Schooling 136).

In calling for schools constituted as public spheres, Aronowitz and Giroux seek to recover the nearly forgotten American tradition of radical education found in the work of John Dewey and his fellow progressives such as George Counts, John Childs, and William Kilpatrick. Dewey, whom Shor dubs "the patron saint of American education" (When Students Have Power x), pioneered experiential, student-centered learning that aims to integrate education with home and public life as well as develop the "free and equitable intercourse" characteristic of democratic public discourse. Like Giroux, Shor describes students not as dupes of dominant ideology but as people fighting for their humanity without quite realizing how they might reclaim it:

Beneath the hesitancy, the doubt, and the rigidity of my students, there remain stores of intellect, emotion, comedy, and Utopian needs, waiting to happen. They have fought the robotizing of their characters to a kind of stand-off. In class or on the job, they know how to sabotage any process which alienates them. They have ways to set limits on their own dehumanization. Still, they have been invaded and distorted by machine culture. While they limit their cooperation with the corporate order, they don't have a vision of alternatives. They learn how to break the rules and get away with it, but they don't yet assume the responsibility of being the makers of the rules, together. (Critical Teaching 53)

This, then, is the aim of critical pedagogy—to enable students to envision alternatives, to inspire them to assume the responsibility for collectively recreating society. To do this, Giroux and McLaren argue in "Teacher Education and the Politics of Engagement," critical teachers need to conceive of schools as democratic public spaces: "schools can be public places where students learn the knowledge and skills necessary to live in a critical democracy." In these schools-as-public-spheres, "students are given the opportunity to learn the discourse of public association and civic responsibility" by doing—that is, by participating in democratic dialogue about lived experience, including the content and conduct of their own education (224).

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can be is not always readily apparent, however, in stories by critical teachers which, as Knoblauch and Brannon point out, tend to represent the teacher as classroom superhero (67-68). (Brannon rightly singles out Shor as the most heroic—it's no accident that in those imaginary tapes of successful classes I've played all summer in my head, I resemble some sort of Ira Shor in drag.) Shor's two most recent accounts of his teaching experiences, Empowering Education (1992) and When Students Have Power (1996), are frankly inspirational and provocative and so full of handy tips and interesting assignments that even the most bemuzzled among us will be reassured that we, too, can be effective critical teachers. Empowering Education is quite simply the most compelling book on education I've read since Mike Rose's Lives on the Boundary. From the first day of class, Shor foregrounds student writing and student voices as he poses questions that ask students to critically examine course material and institutional power: "What is good writing?" "How do you become a good writer?" "What questions do you have about good writing?" "Why are you taking this course? Why is it required?" (37). Shor encourages students to talk to each other by backloading his comments and breaking eye contact when students speak only to him. Students in Shor's classes negotiate grading contracts, write classroom bylaws, choose reading materials and paper topics. When Students Have Power is, in part, a cautionary tale: Shor tells the story of one group of students who very nearly used their authority to negotiate the class out of existence. Despite Shor's encountering such difficulties, however, everything comes right in the end.

Similarly, Alex McLeod's "Critical Literacy: Taking Control of Our Own Lives" recounts the work he and John Hardcastle did with teens from one of London's most impoverished districts. Hardcastle's class of disruptive students, many of whom spoke nonstandard dialects or had serious difficulties writing, reportedly produced remarkably improved writing on topics such as the Falklands War, Nigerian history and culture, and the myth of objectivity of taking control of our own lives, our own education, and becoming our own experts, is extremely exciting" (49). I do not mean to be flip or to devalue the efforts of these talented teachers: writing instructors, especially those teaching against the grain, need the reassurance these success stories provide. But we need stories of failure, too—stories that keep expectations realistic, stories that enable the ongoing self-critique essential for sound pedagogy. And those are hard to come by.

Of all the examples of liberatory pedagogy I've read, Composition and Resistance (1991), edited by Mark Hurbert and Michael Blitz, is one of the few that clearly illustrates the difficulties of implementing—or even defining—critical pedagogy. This collection contains some interesting pieces by John, Knoblauch (who tells a failure story), Stephen North, Kurt Spellmeyer, and James Sledd and a wonderful essay by Marian Yee on resisting, reevaluating, and recovering cultural narratives. But the real bonus in this volume is transcripts from round-table discussions at three CCCCs and NCTE conventions that contributors attended as part of the process of writing their essays. In these transcripts, participants interrupt each other with claims and counterclaims and generally disagree on everything from the meaning of resistance to the viability of the whole project of critical pedagogy. So, Donna Singleton challenges students to write complaints about campus problems to university officials, but Joe Harris calls the urge to validate discourse only when it moves beyond the classroom a "trap"; he argues that academic work can be resistant in and of itself, regardless of its "real-world application" (Composition and Resistance 152-53). So, Knoblauch argues that the classroom can be a site for social change—that human agency does exist. Nancy Mack agrees, claiming that students already have the power to "intentionally [author] their lives," but they don't realize it, don't use it; according to Mack, the job of teaching writers is to make students aware of their power. But Jeff Golub suggests that not recognizing one's power might be the same as not having any and, further, that Mack's reasoning makes social change too easy: all we do is show students their power, and, poof, the revolution will begin. Singleton says that her inner-city students, who may truly be powerless, often see education as their only hope. Mack warns that "we have to be really careful that we aren't selling that—a college education gives you power" (Composition and Resistance 150-51). Here, we finally get a glimpse of the "tricky business" of liberatory teaching, of defining means and ends.

It is interesting to see, then, how slippery discussions of the means and ends of democratic education become when we turn to some of the more noted critiques of critical pedagogy. In "Considerations of American Freireistas," for instance, Victor Villanueva argues that while he shares the Freireans' revolutionary goals, he thinks their strategy of turning the classroom into a "political arena" is precisely the wrong means for the end. Villanueva reports on an ethnographic study of Floyd, a Freirean-trained teacher working in a Writer's Project for low-income, primarily black youths. By Freirean standards, Floyd seems perfect for the job: he's a talented black teacher and poet who grew up in the neighborhood where the project is located. He's overtly political, has participated in literacy campaigns in Nicaragua and Grenada (where he even met Freire). He taught the Writing Project students about black history and culture, about ideology and oppression. He encouraged them to become radical intellectuals: they wrote; they participated in antiracism demonstrations. And yet, in the end, although Floyd's political message reached only those already predisposed to accept his revolutionary agenda. Why would such a talented teacher fail? Because in America, Villanueva says, "counterhegemony cannot be easily sold" (251):

Floyd's students... were in school to fulfill a dream, a longtime American dream of success through education. They were not in school to have their dreams destroyed. They would naturally resist any such attempt. Floyd's students could reason that no matter how slight their chances of getting into col-
lege or the middle class, they did have chances, maybe better than most. . . . Floyd himself made it through college, was a teacher, a published poet, a world traveler to pan-African conferences. In the students' eyes, Floyd made a better model of the bootstrap mentality than he made a model of the revolution. (256)

A more successful strategy, Villanueva claims, is based on the dialectic between hegemony and counterhegemony, between tradition and change. Arguing that hegemony underlies students' willingness and ability to change both themselves and their world—in practice such a pedagogy merely reaffirms the authority of the teacher who has the "political clairvoyance" (the term is Freire's) and the community into a world traveler to pan-African conferences. In this polemic, Hairston's argument seems to me much that the means of critical pedagogy are ineffective but that they are un-ethical—that is, undemocratic. Jay and Graff argue that although, in theory, critical pedagogy speaks of dialogue and students' authority to initiate and freely pursue critical analyses, in practice such a pedagogy merely reifies the authority of the teacher who has the "political clarity" (the term is Freire's) students lack. "How real can the Freirean dialogue be," Jay and Graff ask, when "the proper outcome of critical pedagogy is already predetermined .... Who can be easily co-opted by the radical left, coerced into acquiring to methods that we abhor because, in the abstract, we have some mutual goals" (187). But, in addition to attacking the methods of radical teachers, Hairston also clearly defines different goals—for instance, her insistence that writing instructors "stay within [their] area of professional expertise" (186). Hairston argues that if compositionists try to teach students about complex socioeconomic or racial issues, they will all get into a terrible muddle. In doing so, Hairston ignores the fact that citizens in a democracy constantly need to make decisions about just such complex issues. In the final analysis, Hairston's argument seems as much about her desire to guard the independence of composition studies from critical theorists and "political zealots" as her goal to meet the needs of students living in an increasingly diverse society (192).

Oddly enough, it's the argument that seems to distance itself farthest from critical pedagogy—that criticizes both its means and its ends—that I find to be the most compelling challenge. Although not targeted specifically at critical pedagogy, Jeff Smith's essay, "Students' Goals, Gatekeeping, and Some Questions of Ethics," argues that radical teachers often willfully confuse means and ends, most obviously by their refusal to acknowledge that they function primarily as means to students' ends. If writing teachers are serious about being democratic, if they are serious about letting students set the agenda for their own education, then they should honor students' professed desires to get the credentials needed to secure professional-managerial jobs. "To do otherwise," Smith claims, "is undemocratic at best, if not infantilizing and frankly oppressive" (317). "We are ethically bound by students' own aims," he continues, "even if those aims seem uncomfortably close to elite values. Our distrust of such values does not permit us to tell students what they 'really' want, or should want" (317).

Hence, Smith accepts the obligation to be useful to students, teaching the grammar and generic conventions they will need to succeed. My sympathies for Smith's argument stem, in part, from a similar uneasiness with some of what I read in critical pedagogy texts. Hurlbert and Blitz, for instance, celebrate a student who "resisted composure" by ignoring the conventions of an assigned research paper and turning in, instead, a series of quotations followed by a series of reflective paragraphs. The authors suggest that one thing composition teachers can do to subvert dominant ideology is "to stop teaching students to underwrite the university, to stop demanding written material which can be "easily gathered and assessed" (Composition and Resistance 7). Now I am not a great fan of wrapped-in-a-tidy-package-with-a-bow papers, but such complaints make me nervous, for while students benefit from having both the impulse and the rhetorical wherewithal to "resist composure," there is work in the world (quite often the kind that pays the rent but also various forms of political activism) that requires them to be proficiently, even eloquently composed.

What interests me about Smith's position is that in some ways it is much closer to Freire's or Shor's than readers might initially imagine. First of all, allowing students to direct their own education, as Smith says instructors should, is a cornerstone of critical pedagogy. In addition, Freirean teachers believe, as
does Smith, in providing students with useful education, for although Freire argues in *A Pedagogy for Liberation* that he's not doing his duty if he doesn't try to move students beyond purely vocational goals, the idea of not training them well for their chosen careers is, he says, "an absurdity.... What is impossible is to be an incompetent educator because I am a revolutionary" (Shor and Freire 69). According to Freire, the liberatory teacher will, thus, train students yet simultaneously problematize that training—will, for instance, teach standard English and correct usage while also problematizing their status as inherently superior to other dialects or grammars. Finally, although Smith says a teacher's role is to provide means, not to have ends, Smith, like critical teachers, has his own ends for students and for the larger society—ends that constitute part, if not all, of what critical pedagogy seeks: "I want the world that I and those I care about are going to live in to have capable people doing the kinds of jobs students say they're looking to do.... I want what I teach to be good not just for people, not even just for citizens, but for future doctors and lawyers and organic chemistry majors" (318–19).

The difference, then, between Smith and practitioners of critical pedagogy is not a simple one of opposing means and ends, for Smith says the instructor is the means expert, and Smith presumably would approve of any means that produce "capable people." Rather, the essential differences may stem from Smith's insistence that means can be separated from ends—"good things are learned even by less than ideal means" (310)—and that students have sole responsibility for setting the goals of their education without any input from instructors. Nevertheless, Smith, the critic who seems least interested in Freirean education, and students' needs, comes closer to Freire's position than some avowedly leftist instructors. Shor is right; this is a tricky business.

> "WHO IS TO BE LIBERATED FROM WHAT?"

When Gregory Jay and Gerald Graff complain that Freire's pedagogy closes off disagreement over key issues such as the identity of the oppressed and of their oppressors, Freire is impatient with what he sees as Graff's "misguided relativism" (Freire and Macedo, "A Dialogue" 386); especially in Brazil, but even in the United States, Freire argues, it is easy to identify the poor, the hungry, the homeless. Nevertheless, when American writing teachers step into the classroom—or look into the mirror, for that matter—identifying the oppressed and the oppressors can become a task fraught with difficulties. As in *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy*, Knoblauch and Brannon wonder whether the traditional goal of liberatory pedagogy to empower "outsiders" fits the complexities of American society, leaving all sorts of bewildering questions:

Who is to be liberated from what? Who gets to do the liberating? Is the U.S. government an oppressor in the same sense that the South African government is? Are middle-class black persons as "outside" as underclass Hispanic? Is Eliz-

And for the large number of writing instructors like me who walk into classrooms filled almost entirely with white, middle-class students who will likely fare very well in the system, it can be pretty hard to see their work as liberating oppressed students. In fact, radical American teachers often seem to assume just the opposite—that students belong to the oppressor group. What can liberatory pedagogy possibly mean under these circumstances? Knoblauch wonders, for instance, if liberatory teaching is even plausible, given the self-interest that stands in the way of students' critical examination of their status: "Is critical teaching anything more than an intellectual game in such circumstances?... What do my students have to gain from a scrutiny of values and conditions that work to ensure their privilege?" (60, 64).

Linda Finlay and Valerie Faith offer an answer in their essay "Illiteracy and Alienation in American Colleges: Is Paulo Freire's Pedagogy Relevant?" which reports on their work with upper-middle-class university students in remedial writing courses. Using keywords to uncover their students' generative themes, Finlay and Faith found that their students felt a gulf between their public (institutionally controlled, inauthentic) and private (emotionally satisfying, free, "real") lives, a gulf that caused them to feel oppressed despite their acknowledged economic privilege. Their students believed, Finlay and Faith explain, that their education was nothing more than a means to funnel them into appropriate middle-class jobs; it would not enable them to either enlarge the private realm or challenge the public. Finlay and Faith also learned that their students' resistance to writing—part of their public life—was linked to this sense of domination; once students connected language use to their private lives, their writing improved dramatically. Students' literacy, then, is intimately connected to what Freire has called "the world"; furthermore, students occupy multiple and often contradictory positions in relation to dominant culture:

[they] fear and distrust the culture that runs the schools, a culture that they perceive as subordinating individual activity to the needs of a consumer economy. Since our students are not children, however, their education is complicated by their awareness that they have become accomplices in maintaining this culture and its values. They want those consumer goods, they want the college degree for earning power, political power, social power of many kinds. We and our students had to face the contradiction between the values of the consumer society—the products of which they enjoy—and their "childlike" instinct for personal determination. (82)
If students present untold complexities for critical teachers to sort out, teachers need to examine their own positions no less critically. Knoblauch and Brannon ask:

What is the meaning of "radical teacher" for faculty in . . . privileged institutions—paid by the capitalist state, protected from many of the obligations as well as the consequences of social action by the speculativeness of academic commitment, engaged in a seemingly trivial dramatization of utopian thought that the university itself blandly sponsors as satisfying testimony to its own open-mindedness? (60)

Questions such as these cause Stephen North ("Rhetoric, Responsibility, and the 'Language of the Left'") to refuse to adopt the language of critical pedagogy although he admires many of its advocates. One sticking point for North is what he sees as a mismatch between the revolutionary pedagogy he'd advocated and the American mainstream life (North 132). If he were truly to commit himself to radical teaching, North argues, he'd feel compelled to change his lifestyle.

It's a point that should perhaps worry more radical teachers than it does. Freire quips about this inconsistency, noting how many American Marxists "have never drunk coffee in the house of a worker!" The distance between our academic lives as compositionists and our everyday, concrete experience, he says, makes us more able to play around it: "without authority it is very difficult for the liberties of the student to be shaped. Freedom needs authority to become free. Authority is the radical, democratic classroom? Freire says there's no getting around it. "if there is no get­ting around it "without authority it is very difficult for the liberties of the student to be shaped. Freedom needs authority to become free. It is a paradox that perpetuates such suffering" ("Literacy" 21).

But at numerous points in their arguments, critical educators have backpedaled from this too-easy equation of dialogue and democracy. Hence, Freire insists, "The dialogical relationship does not have the power to create such an impossible equality" between teachers and students (Shor and Freire 92). In fact, he says that it's the difference in students and teachers that makes the liberatory project possible—"no one liberates himself by his own efforts" (Pedagogy of the Oppressed 53); in other words, transformation depends on differentiation and, often, unequal voices interacting, and the primary source of that superior voice, Shor suggests, is the more knowledgeable, more analytical, more powerful teacher. So, because dialogue is a means toward an end (it is not, Freire and Macedo and Shor insist, just talk, not aimless blah-blah-blah), it is directed activity. Freire says, "Dialogue what you want. Dialogue takes place inside some kind of program and con­text and liberty." (Shor and Freire 102).

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these. His power-sharing moves include authorizing students to negotiate grading contracts right down to the attendance policies, to help develop the syllabus by bringing in readings and voting on unit themes, and to write bylaws for classroom behavior. In *When Students Have Power*, Shor also describes length about the after-class group: he and a small group of students met to evaluate the day's session and to plan future classes and projects. Shor's students offered up a tremendous amount of feedback including some scathing criticisms of his choice of texts and time management; the result was a remarkable redistribution of power, knowledge, and responsibility. Shor's power and knowledge had not been erased; instead, another avenue of power had been explicitly constructed—it was now, as Shor says, a two-way street: "I found myself immediately and continually accountable to students" (125). Perhaps more than any other aspect of Shor's pedagogy, the after-class group undercuts complaints that critical pedagogy is all about teacher's imposing themselves on students, for within this space, students can take responsibility for the means and ends of the course. My own experience with an after-class group has convinced me that it can provide invaluable information for writing instructors, critical or otherwise, about students' interests and needs, about what's getting through and what isn't; more important, though, an after-class group can create a sense of enlarged possibilities for students and instructors as they tackle together the difficulties inherent in classrooms. My group was less brutal and less assertive than Shor's—they still tended to see their feedback as serving me rather than serving themselves—but they clearly wanted interesting, challenging work, and they pushed me and the other students to raise the level of discussion and to expand their options for writing and learning.

Behind Shor's power-sharing practices lies his realization that "both teachers and students start out at less than zero and more than zero simultaneously. . . . Both bring resources and obstacles to class" (Empowering Education 201). Students' absorption in mass culture hinders their critical study, but Shor argues, teachers' culture of schooling equally hinders learning—and that's assuming teachers aren't otherwise caught up in mass culture (don't we faithfully watch ER or The X-Files?). When Students Have Power, Shor also talks at length about the after-class group: he and a small group of students met to evaluate the day's session and to plan future classes and projects. Shor's students offered up a tremendous amount of feedback including some scathing criticisms of his choice of texts and time management; the result was a remarkable redistribution of power, knowledge, and responsibility. Shor's power and knowledge had not been erased; instead, another avenue of power had been explicitly constructed—it was now, as Shor says, a two-way street: "I found myself immediately and continually accountable to students" (125). Perhaps more than any other aspect of Shor's pedagogy, the after-class group undercuts complaints that critical pedagogy is all about teacher's imposing themselves on students, for within this space, students can take responsibility for the means and ends of the course. My own experience with an after-class group has convinced me that it can provide invaluable information for writing instructors, critical or otherwise, about students' interests and needs, about what's getting through and what isn't; more important, though, an after-class group can create a sense of enlarged possibilities for students and instructors as they tackle together the difficulties inherent in classrooms. My group was less brutal and less assertive than Shor's—they still tended to see their feedback as serving me rather than serving themselves—but they clearly wanted interesting, challenging work, and they pushed me and the other students to raise the level of discussion and to expand their options for writing and learning.

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How to think about and deal with barriers between students and teachers—with student resistance to leftist politics—is an especially vexed question for critical teachers. Freire asks, "What kind of educator would I be if I did not feel moved by a powerful impulse to seek, without lying, convincing argu-

ments in defense of the dreams for which I struggle?" (Pedagogy of Hope 83), but with his next breath, he insists that a critical teacher must never impose topics or politics on students. Except, of course, we do impose, after-class groups notwithstanding, especially when students enroll in a required writing course only to find a liberatory teacher greeting them from a back-row seat. She says that he never forces critical pedagogy on a class; when enough students voice discomfort with the instruction, he reverts to the role of traditional teacher for that course. But even he admits to asking several oppositional students every semester to leave the class. BerlinerCuquila, when his students resisted a course in cultural critique, he finally "decided that was a victory because it would have been easy for them to play along with me" (Hurlbert and Blitz 9); how ever, Knoblauch puts such student resistance in a different light: "Well, you know 'resistance' may characterize in one way or another our relationship with some social reality but I wonder what words characterize our implicating of our students in our resistances. You know, they're not resisting, except maybe us" (Hurlbert and Blitz 9).

**CONCLUSION: TEACHING WITHIN PARADOX**

Patricia Bizzell's *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness* (1992) traces her search for means by which writing teachers might foster democratic discourse and social justice. It is a book I admire tremendously. It's not just that I like ingenuity to abandon old positions and allies (Freire is one such), admire the fact that she keeps growing. Writers on all sides of the critical pedagogy debate often seem just a little too sure of themselves: Bizzell can reach a position, argue for it passionately, and still admit doubt.

In the book, Bizzell describes her early attempts to promote social equality by teaching academic discourse. She did so believing that "the cultural critique, he finally decided that was a victory because it would have been easy for them to play along with me" (Hurlbert and Blitz 9); however, Knoblauch puts such student resistance in a different light: "Well, you know 'resistance' may characterize in one way or another our relationship with some social reality but I wonder what words characterize our implicating of our students in our resistances. You know, they're not resisting, except maybe us" (Hurlbert and Blitz 9).

As I've noted, Hairston attacks Bizzell's decision to use her power, rhetorical or otherwise, to argue political issues in composition classes. "By the logic of the cultural left," Hairston reasons, "any teacher should be free to use his or her classroom to promote any ideology. Why not fascism [sic]? Racial superiority? Religious fundamentalism? Anti-abortion beliefs? Can't any professor claim the right to indoctrinate students simply because he or she is right?" (188). But Bizzell's argument and practice are not so much about her personal...
agenda (although Bizzell is quite clear about her personal and passionate commitment to it) as they are about what Dennis Lynch calls "the political values and agendas we share by virtue of living in a democracy" (353)—those values that Hairston, herself, says "all of us" share: respect for difference, fairness, a forum for the free exchange of ideas. Disavowing any foundational grounds for establishing her authority as a speaker, the central question for Bizzell becomes, "What is the legitimate authority of teachers, or any other orators?" (273). (That equation may give readers pause.) Her answer, following Isocrates, is that authority "would be established rhetorically" (283). That is, making arguments in the classroom (or anywhere else) is not simply a matter of a teacher imposing her beliefs on students; rather, she can persuade only insofar as she builds her case on the values her students already hold. For example, Bizzell might argue against sexism by appealing to the American desire for equality, a value embedded in our founding documents as well as our current communal discourse.

That having been said, however, Bizzell still worries that her practice may violate the very democratic values she is trying to instill. Her hedges against this are, first, to help students develop their own rhetorical authority to persuade others in the class, including her, and, second, to highlight through her course materials the commonalities among Americans, not by glossing over difference but by emphasizing that Americans are "united by a common experiment in negotiating difference" (293). These materials, collected in the textbook she and Bruce Herzberg produced called Negotiating Difference, are designed to enable students to investigate historical instances when groups negotiated differences in the search for social justice, to discover interests they share with other groups, and to learn that some past movements toward greater equality have, indeed, been successful.

Given the difficulties Bizzell faces in imagining and enacting her practice as well as the controversy her work has provoked, two points suggest themelves to way of closure. The first is the difficulty of generalizing about or judging the overall project of critical pedagogy. It seems certain that some radical teachers do abuse their authority, attempting simply to indoctrinate students. But, as in all aspects of education, so much depends on the instructor, the students, the physical classroom space and available resources, the curriculum, the school, the community (and the list goes on) that it strikes me as foolhardy to pronounce as, for instance, Jay and Graff do, that "it is just such notions of respect, trust, and faith that critical and oppositional pedagogies reject" (208), as if "critical pedagogy" were a monolith, as if it were "pedagogies" and not individual teachers and students together in a classroom who create or reject respect and trust.

Second, if critical pedagogy is plagued by bamboozlement or ambiguity, I'd suggest that this is not simply due to the inadequacies of its theory and methods. Rather some complications result from the inevitable presence of paradoxes, from having to live and teach with the knowledge that "human action can move in several directions at once, that something can contain its opposite also" (Shor and Freire 69). So, we train and problematize; we create freedom with authority; we teach resistance and hope for cooperation. These paradoxes are neither solvable nor necessarily debilitating. They keep with Gary Olson, Freire notes the complicated position of the radical writing instructor who stands with one foot in the system, the present, today's reality, so difficult . . . for us to walk: we have to walk like this. [With a playful smile, history] (163).

Notes

1. For ease of reference, I use the term critical pedagogy to denote this whole group of teaching praxes, but it's important to note that although these pedagogies share assumptions about dominant culture as well as egalitarian goals, they often have differing stances than critical pedagogy: she insists that teachers can emancipate students only by themselves actively pursuing "self-actualization," a well-being springing from the union of mind, body, and soul (15). hooks's praxis thus emphasizes the role of the body, of pleasure and desire in learning.

2. Freire began his eighteen-year exile working in Chile as a UNESCO consultant on adult education for the Agrarian Reform Training and Research Institute; in 1969, he received an appointment to Harvard University's Center for the Study of Development and Social Change, and the following year, he accepted a position in Geneva as a consultant to the Office of Education of the World Council of Churches, where he led literacy programs for Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau (an account of which is recorded in Pedagogy in Process: Letters to Guinea-Bissau). In 1981, he returned to Brazil, teaching at universities in Sao Paulo until his death in 1997.

3. Freire's later texts avoid this sexist language, a topic he addresses in his final book, Pedagogy of Hope. Freire has been criticized, even rejected, by some feminist scholars who find his language problematic. bell hooks writes in Teaching to Transgress that she once publicly confronted Freire about his sexist language, but she nonetheless defends his work as vital to the project of radical education.

4. Freire stresses the need for teachers to conduct extensive ethnographic research about their students' lives rather than guessing what might be important to the class. For Freire, this involved lengthy, multilayered study: an investigative team, which in of people in the community where a literacy program was to be set up. These data were then further developed by a larger team of educators, disciplinary experts, and sociologists who, in consultation with community members, generated a set of themes which Freire has been described in the press as "re-present... to the people from Whom [they] first received it" (Pedagogy of the Oppressed 101). For a more detailed account of this process, see chapter 3 of Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

5. Interested readers can find provocative analyses of the 1980s debate over the crisis in education in Arnowitz and Giroux, Shor (Freire for the Classroom and Culture Wars), Donald Macedo, and Knoblauch and Brannen.
6. The parallels between Dewey and Freire are sometimes astonishing. For instance, Dewey's critique of the banking model of education in which students are seen as receptacles waiting to be filled echoes Dewey's criticisms of "teaching by pouring in, learning by passive absorption." Dewey continues, "Education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process" (Democracy and Education 56). In addition, when explaining the centrality of dialogue for critical pedagogy, Freire asserts that "only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (Pedagogy of the Oppressed 81). Similarly, Dewey establishes the necessity for dialogue in education and communal life, claiming that "society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication." 

7. For the record, it's not clear that Jay and Graff have ever participated in or even observed a Freirean classroom, nor (and this is true of many arguments against critical pedagogy—a point not lost on Freire) do they cite any of Freire's texts besides The Pedagogy of the Oppressed which, by the time of their writing, was twenty-five years old and which had been further developed and qualified. It is also ironic that although Jay and Graff advocate helping students become "active participants" rather than "passive spectators," the example of democratic pedagogy they present involved a faculty symposium in which Graff and two other instructors debated revisions of Chicago's general education humanities course before a two-hundred-member student audience.

8. It's hard to not see parallels between this early version of Shor's pedagogy and Peter Elbow's "writing without teachers." Indeed, Knoblauch and Brannon argue that despite radicals' attacks on expressivism as "solicipstic" and "politically disengaged," expressivist pedagogies should be recognized as the "precursors" of critical pedagogy (126). "Expressivist and critical pedagogies, they claim, share the goal of empowering students working within a narrow, authoritarian system; furthermore, Knoblauch and Brannon point out that, methodologically, "arguments for critical teaching have tended largely to reiterate the tactics of whole language and writing process classrooms"—decentered classrooms and emphasis on dialogue; use of small, collaborative groups; and attention to nonanalytic forms of expression such as narrative (129).

9. Elizabeth Ellsworth's article, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?: Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy," discusses her experience trying to work with and through this sometimes idealistic or befuddled language in a graduate education course she taught called "Media and Anti-Racist Pedagogies." Ellsworth's course attracted an ethnically and religiously diverse group of men and women from the United States as well as international students, all of whom were committed to combating campus racism. Despite their apparently common goal, however, the group soon fractured into smaller "affinity groups," each with its own agenda and methods. Additionally, Ellsworth claims that the vision of the classroom as safe space emphasized in critical pedagogy scholarship made her and her students reluctant to jettison the dialogic method even though it was proving counterproducive: her students did not feel safe to speak nor did members of minority groups want to dialogue about their oppression; they wanted to talk back or present monologues. Further, she felt that her position as a white, middle-class professional woman left her with little authority, emancipated or otherwise, to help liberate her often marginalized students. Ellsworth argues, in short, that notions of dialogue, solidarity, and authority in critical pedagogy theory were inadequate for dealing with the power dynamics of the class; hers is one of the most extensive critiques to come from within the ranks of radical teachers.

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Feminist Pedagogy

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Feminist pedagogy in composition emerged out of the women’s movement of the 1970s, which itself grew out of the civil rights and antiview movements beginning in the 1960s. Groups such as Students for a Democratic Society, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Black Panthers, and others connected with the New Left involved men and women who based their activism on an analysis of class and race oppression. Women in these groups began to apply the same analysis to sex difference, recognizing the unequal treatment of women worldwide as a parallel phenomenon (Morgan). They observed that we live in a patriarchy—meaning literally “rule of fathers” but more analogically that men lead and thus essentially control the most important functions of our society—legislatures and courts, businesses, schools, and families—and often that control is not benevolent: that is, it is accompanied by the physical, cultural, and spiritual subordination of women as a group and the closing off of opportunities for full humanity to them. Rejecting the old rationale of separate spheres, women began to explore these new revelations in consciousness-raising (cr) groups, sitting in someone’s living room, talking about their experiences as women—at home, at work, in bed, in the doctor’s office—that they had never before shared. They were giving words to what Betty Friedan called “the problem that has no name.” One of the most influential books of this early period was a doctoral dissertation by a literature student, Kate Millett. Sexual Politics offered a bold analysis of sexism in canonical male-authored literature. Alice Echols’ Daring to Be Bad offers a detailed historical review of the beginnings of the women’s movement, including sometimes gossipy interviews with many of the women involved in radical groups.

This movement was called the “second wave” of feminism, in reference to the first wave of nineteenth-century women’s activism, which brought together black and white women in political groups working for the abolition of slavery and for women’s suffrage. Angela Y. Davis’ brilliant and very readable Women, Race, and Class tells stories of the inspiring but sometimes painful struggles of that time, including references to women’s education, writing, and public speaking. This book provides excellent background, works very well with