

Class Indifference

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CLASS INDIFFERENCE – A DIVIDED NATION: FINDING COMMON GROUND
THROUGH AMERICAN PRAGMATISM AND DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES IN THE
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

A THESIS

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On August 29th, 2005 Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of the United States. The devastation to the area is, of course, well-known and well-documented. But the catastrophic event caused more than the terrible toll of death and destruction. It swept in a tide of change. It can reasonably be argued that the poor response of the federal government changed the minds of the American public about the Bush administration. George W. Bush's poll ratings never recovered and a Democratic majority took both the House and the Senate for the first time in eight years in the year following the disaster. For many people, including myself, Hurricane Katrina illuminated much more than the poor disaster relief response; it has shed a blinding light on class difference and indifference in America.

New Orleans, Louisiana is a microcosm of some of the worst inequalities in our nation, and particularly in the American education system. In *The Great Deluge*, historian Douglas Brinkley describes a city with such a short-sighted view of the future, from the economy to the environment to the levee system, that it led to the slow decline of a major city and eventually to one of the nation's worst disasters. New Orleans lost over 150,000 people starting in the 1960s as corporations left, service-oriented tourism became a mainstay of the city's economy, and oil interests moved to Texas. Though a small old blue-blood upper class still continues to exist in what locals call "the sliver by the river", which includes the French Quarter, Uptown and the Garden District, increasingly the pre-Katrina city had become populated by the poor, African-Americans, and the elderly. Douglas states:

New Orleans had a higher proportion of people living below the poverty line (27.9 percent in 1999) than similar-sized citiesOnce whites left for the suburbs, public schools became an abomination. Intertwined with the city's poverty rate was its racial composition. African Americans constituted 67.3 percent of the population,

whites 28.1 percent....The core of the city, built geopolitically in concentric circles around the mansion residents, the tourism world, and the shipping industry, rarely took the poverty stricken neighborhoods into account.

Brinkley describes the bleak lives of the under-educated working class and poor, those who would be trapped in New Orleans with no way out once the levees broke. He writes, "Even outside of the projects, there was an imprisoned quality to life for the poor blacks. Housing was relatively inexpensive in New Orleans...but it tended to be flimsy wood-frame construction that would be considered substandard in other cities (47). Brinkley quotes Eric Dyson's post-Katrina study on race relations, Come Hell or High Water": "New Orleans has a 40 percent literacy rate; over fifty percent of black ninth graders won't graduate in four years (qtd. in Brinkley 47)."

With a government founded on a democratic belief system that encourages ambition, champions the underdog, and propagates the idea that anyone can succeed, how is it that such a large number of citizens in a major American city are so poorly educated and living at subsistence level?

The message of Spike Lee's HBO documentary *When the Levees Broke* or Douglas Brinkley's epic book The Great Deluge is that the magnitude of the disaster, the sheer horrific scope of the human cost in lives and suffering was man-made, a result of greed, short-sighted planning for personal political gain, and above all, indifference: indifference by an African-American former-businessman mayor, indifference from a new and insecure female governor, and indifference from a federal administration and their arm FEMA that was all media manipulation and spin and very little actual help. The print and television

medias, which have been neutered by the current administration, and largely silenced during the unpopular Iraq war, escaped the usual government blocking of information and access, did their jobs and moved a nation; in part, because the indifference of the federal government was so great that **they** didn't see this story coming. They hardly imagined anyone would care. Could it be that the Bush administration actually overestimated American middle-class **distain** for poor black people, and underestimated the American people's solidarity with their fellow Americans?

Comment [1]: unclear referent

Comment [2]: disdain

It seems to me that we have fundamental social, cultural, and philosophical problems as a result of being a country that worships both democracy and capitalism. We are a conflicted people and these conflicts threaten to tear us apart. Our cultural differences and our indifference to honoring those differences, which are seemingly small in comparison to what we hold sacred and in common, **threatens** to compromise our ability to teach and our students' abilities to learn. These problems manifest themselves socially in the classroom **or** the workplace and politically as the country now sees itself divided between red staters and blue staters.

Comment [3]: threaten (plural noun)

Comment [4]: and?

A nation founded on the rights of the individual, we are fascinated by our identity as a nation, constantly creating and re-creating a shifting mythology championing both our democracy and capitalism. Yet as a country not yet 250 years old, one with so little history even pre-dating the birth of the nation, we have based our culture almost entirely on the love of our own image, our own powerful shining immutable symbolism as the birthplace of democracy and freedom. We are a country that not only rejected European ruling class hierarchies, but much of European culture, modeling itself after the Ancient Greeks, the original democracy. As a nation founded on the idea of religious freedom and a need to

escape tyranny, America has defined itself by written law, law bound to the documents that define our democracy and our most fundamental beliefs: The Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and The Holy Bible. Moreover, the nation is defined by the words of the founding fathers. The foundation of our nation lies in the writing of Thomas Jefferson. Therefore, it cannot be overstated, the importance of the written word in our democratic society, despite a new technological age or even because of it. We live in an era where information is power and information is readily available to the literate and those educated enough to interpret the information and news available from the television to the internet. The importance of the written word lives on in America, as the voice not only of the nation, but as the embodiment of the individual and his/her freedom to speak.

However, though we tell ourselves that “all men are created equal,” enthusiastically embracing our democratic principles, we blindly refuse to see that we may have escaped the class systems of Europe, only to have invented our own forms of class, in which people are judged by race, ethnicity, education, cultural identity, and most of all, by money or the lack of it. Armed with the mythology of America as a land of equal opportunity for all, we harshly judge those who are not monetarily successful or who choose not to make the pursuit of wealth as their highest priority in our competitive economy. And we deify those who achieve financial success. Innovative educator Paolo Freire writes:

It is necessary for the oppressors to approach the people in order via subjugation, to keep them passive...It is accomplished by the oppressors' depositing myths indispensable to the preservation of the status quo: for example, the myth that the oppressive order is a “free society”...the myth that anyone industrious can be an entrepreneur...the myth of the industriousness of the oppressors and the laziness and

dishonesty of the oppressed, as well as the myth of the inferiority of the latter and the superiority of the former (121).

Americans typically dismiss class as a problem, the reasoning being that anyone can become Donald Trump or Tyra Banks, famous and rich, but this the strength of these powerful myths.

In The American Evasion of Philosophy, Cornell West situates our collective sense of American identity as starting with Ralph Waldo Emerson. He argues that cultural criticism, the embracing of change and fear of stagnation, and the myth of Americans as a chosen people all began with Emerson, arguably the father of American pragmatism, an anti-philosophy that abhorred the epistemological focus of the European philosophical tradition. This theory is most interesting if we consider again the nature of New Orleans itself. One of the oldest cities in our nation, the Crescent City is arguably more European than any other American city, both in attitude and architecture. Perhaps the federal government saw New Orleans' impending plight, as Hurricane Katrina bore down upon it, as just deserts for a decidedly un-American, unprogressive city. As Douglas Brinkley writes:

In metaphor, the city was a legendary beauty but one that had refused to look in the mirror for a long, long time. Selling the world on the historic stage set that was so much of picturesque New Orleans, the city seemed not to care about its other decaying side. Citizens enjoyed being dubbed "the Capital of the Caribbean" and the "City that Time Forgot." But such a laissez-faire attitude toward civic improvement was loaded with unhappy consequences"(33).

Comment [5]: I'm moving along without criticism. Following, and enjoying myself. Now I'm wondering--not sure--if you need to briefly say why it is that we can't all be Donald Trump or Tyra Banks.

Comment [6]: define american pragmatism a bit more. I hear what it's not, but what is it? Quote from West? Or summarize for ourself. I get that American pragmatism rejects focus on knowledge, but what does it instead embrace? Or you may not need this bit on West and pragmatism. It's not clear that that's where you're going in what follows, in terms of seeing New Orleans as an unAmerican city, in a way. Somehow the transition is a bit of a distraction at this point.

And one of the unhappy consequences of both local and federal benign neglect was the New Orleans public school system. In Come Hell or High Water, Eric Dyson writes about the state of pre-Katrina education in Louisiana:

Louisiana spends \$4,724 per student and has the third-lowest rank for teacher salaries in the nation. The black dropout rates are high and nearly 50,000 students cut class every day. When they are done with school, many young black males end up in Angola prison, a correctional facility located on a former plantation where inmates still perform manual farm labor, and where 90 percent of them eventually die. New Orleans employment picture is equally gloomy, since industry long ago deserted the city, leaving in its place a service economy that caters to tourists and thrives on low-paying, transient, and unstable jobs”(qtd. in Brinkley 47).

By comparison, according to UNESCO’s literacy website, half the world’s illiterates live in South and West Asia. Per the site’s latest statistics, circa 2000, the literacy rate for adults in South and West Asia was 48 percent, 62 percent for youths 15-24 years of age. Effectively this means that in South and West Asia, one of the world’s most poverty-stricken regions, more young people can read and write than in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA.

The aftermath of Katrina was a rude awakening for the country. We were a startled and horrified nation as we watched Anderson Cooper’s CNN reports from New Orleans after the levees broke and the water flooded the city. We were seeing for the first time that New Orleans was as poor as any “developing” nation. “Why didn’t these people leave?” some of us asked innocently from our comfortable middle-class homes in New Jersey. In the Great Deluge, Brinkley, a history professor at Tulane, writes:

These powerless city poor were what sociologist Michael Harrington once called 'the Other America' – those living in desperate poverty, living on minimum wage or welfare checks, hidden from the view of the mainstream, and often denied basic services like proper sewage, reliable electricity, or decent schools... They didn't hear about Katrina on television because they didn't own a set. Even if they did hear about the storm, they didn't have the money to leave. They had no credit cards with which to rent a car and reserve a motel room in Dallas, Memphis, Little Rock, or Baton Rouge. Poorly educated and often illiterate, they couldn't figure out what all the evacuation commotion was about. With no driver's license or other form of identification, some were afraid the NOPD would arrest them at city-run shelters or handcuff them for hitchhiking on I-10 (53-54).

This is the reality of the under-educated, the poor and working-class in America, racism often intersecting and contributing to the problem of the alienation of the poor. Class, as much as race, contributed to the neglect and abandonment of so many people in New Orleans, as filmmaker Spike Lee said in an interview on Bill Maher's HBO show *Politically Incorrect*, one year after the hurricane. In his documentary *When the Levees Broke*, Lee filmed a broad spectrum of Katrina victims, including the blue-collar inhabitants of St. Bernard's Parish, traditionally Caucasian neighborhood, an area heavily populated by many of the city's first-responders, police officers and firemen. Like many of the poor homeowners of the mostly African-American Ninth Ward, these people were deeply reluctant to abandon their sole source of hard-earned wealth, their homes. In other cases, they were tied to their homes by

elderly or infirmed relatives and unable, due to financial and physical constraints, to move them.

My family, living in the heart of New Orleans known as Mid-City, was trapped as well during Katrina. With no reliable car, having waited too long, in part due to a working class mistrust of the authorities and the media, they refused to believe that the evacuation was necessary. Like many working-class people, my family waited too long to evacuate, until there was no means, despite the fact that my mother had a credit card and a driver's license, better off than many in the city. After a six-day ordeal that nearly cost my grandmother her life, my brother found someone wealthier to drive them out.

Comment [7]: change phrase, "waited too long" just repetitive

Comment [8]: "wealthier" necessitates a comparison, as in, wealthier than they. or could change the wording around.

A week later, after their arrival in my home in New Jersey, an old friend who knew my family, someone we had lost touch with, a federal agent who I would learn was residing in Corpus Christi Texas, contacted me. He later explained that he would have called and tried to help, but he knew my family was middle-class. He was sure they had gotten out. He used that term specifically – “middle-class”. I thought about that long and hard. It begs important questions that we must try to answer. What is working- class? What is middle-class? Are these defined purely by income level? What do these labels mean in terms of beliefs and attitudes; how does class identity affect one's understanding of the world? These are important politically charged questions, especially when it comes to education and literacy.

Comment [9]: do we need that info? This paragraph works very well as a transition. good. all good through here.

The U.S. Census Bureau defines working-class as the rung above poverty level in a five-rung system of salary assessment, with middle class, upper middle class, and upper middle class above it, while others have come to base it on lack of personal freedom in the job place (Bioarsky 8). . In Academic Literacy in the English Classroom: Helping

Comment [10]: did you mean to say upper class? clarify. very interesting. and does bioarsky cover the Census data info as well as this other definition>

Underprepared and Working-Class Student is the Classroom, Carol Bioarsky and her fellow contributors, Julie Hagemann and Judith Burdan, cite Elizabeth Fay and Michelle's Tokarczyk's work on the subject: "Working-class positions are largely differentiated by their lack of autonomy. Clerical workers, factory employees, and other "workers" are all closely supervised; management and professionals do the supervising or work within a peer system"(9). Others define it by lifestyle. Boiarsky refers to a 1983 study by sociologists Jackman and Jackman, which defines the working-class first by cultural factors such as "lifestyles, beliefs, and feelings"(8). As a result of these competing definitions, Bioarsky and her fellow contributors arrive at the following definition for working class in their work with college freshman:

In an effort to take into account the various inconsistencies...we would like to suggest that the working class is composed of two tiers – those who fall into the traditional category of physical laborers, who earn little money and have minimal decision-making authority; and Rogers and Teixeira's "working middle-class," composed of nonprofessionals who do not have a four-year college education. It is the children of these two subclasses, those who are the first generation to attend college, to whom we refer in our discussions of working-class students (12).

Comment [11]: formatting problem.

The National Center for Education Statistics, in its statistical breakdown of college freshman student enrollment and retention, defines the classes very simply, in terms of economic power: lower- class meaning families in the lowest 20% of national income, high-income students referred to families whose income was in the national income level of the upper 20%, and middle-class was anything in between (<http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts>).

Comment [12]: do you want to comment on this method? Do you like it? Is it useful? If not, pull out. I mean, make a point about this data or you don't need it.

In his 1995 essay “Complicity in Class Codes: The Exclusionary Function of Education”, Irvin Peckham, like Boiarsky, defines working-class students as being first-generation college students, but Peckham adds a social and cultural aspect, noting that an authoritarian family household **as** a marker of the group, as well as a separation from the middle-class by the fact that their work is non- managerial, and instead, labor-oriented.

Comment [13]: is? clarify sentence.

Ethnographer, linguist, and author Julie Lindquist defines it as decidedly a matter of social structure and culture. And this may be the best context to view the class issues of the classroom, the seeds of class cultural difference affecting communication and learning. She writes:

Yet the idea of social class is no less theoretically problematic than the concept of culture. Generally speaking, however, “class” can be said to refer to the systematic products of a social hierarchy sustained by unequal access to resources. For Marx, these resources are material....Bourdieu (1984) has claimed that the practices of a given social group are motivated by its place in a larger system of relations in the socioeconomic hierarchy.(Lindquist 6)

Most importantly, for the purpose of studying rhetoric in order to teach college English composition, Lindquist states this: “To do ethnography of working-class rhetoric is to commit to the idea that class is a function of culture, and culture, a function of class”(6).

This last point is well-made in terms of the study of literacy. Income is not a fair assessment in and of itself, since skilled laborers often make more money than college-educated occupations, such as many poorly paid service industry jobs, a mainstay in New Orleans, for example. **It is the social and cultural elements of working- class identity that**

shapes class attitudes about authority, learning, the purpose of formal education, and writing.

And it was those same class system of beliefs and values that put so many people in harms way during the Katrina crisis, leaving them stranded, literally in the way, like many working-class people, consistently being left behind in terms of education.

Professor Peckham illustrates this point in describing his own childhood. His working-class upbringing in Wisconsin included a strict but close family whose language use was limited primarily to imparting information and implied unspoken understanding. Argument and questioning within the family were not commonplace in his upbringing, and indeed, this too seems to be a marker of working-class language use. Where obedience to *outside* authority is not necessarily a value of the working class, obedience *within* the family, and humility, ranked high in his household. Unfortunately, the price of his “border-crossing,” his entry into the middle class as a professional, was/is a denial of his past and a recreation of his identity. “I erased my incorrectness by infrequently going home. In time, I more or less forgot who my parents and siblings were...that’s called erasure”(Peckham 274). And this may well be one of our leading issues in the classroom and indeed in society itself, a working class suspicion of authority and education due to a fear of gaining increased economic and social status at the cost of class values. The working-class social values often lean toward the conservative. One of these values is family cohesion, family values, which blue staters are frequently accused of undermining and not understanding – blue staters representing the educated often more liberal middle-class, while red staters represent the working man and his family, even if they themselves consider themselves to be middle - class.

Comment [14]: This is an important sentence. Say it even louder, with more emphasis. Or come back to it. I think this is the crux of where you're going with class. explain the definition even more.

Comment [15]: and literally, losing on'es family.

Comment [16]: You don't have to have it, but do you have any back up on this definition of the difference between blue and red staters? You don't have to, but if others hvae seen it his way too, that's be interesting and helpful.

Peckham's recollections of his mid-west childhood also suggest a deeply affecting fundamental difference in language usage between the classes, long established before formal schooling. His personal anecdotal evidence about daily language use in his family agrees with British researcher Basil Bernstein's revolutionary 1972 essay, *Social Class, Language, and Socialization*. In studying working-class rhetoric in Britain, Bernstein determined that language use in working-class homes was substantially different from those of middle-class homes. He argues:

Forms of socialization orient the child towards speech codes which control access to relatively context-tied or relatively context-independent meanings...elaborated codes orient their users towards universalistic meanings, whereas restricted codes are less tied to a given or local structure and thus contain the potentiality of change in principles"(165).

Bernstein refers to previous work by Sapir, Malinowski, Firth, Vygotsky and Luria, in order to justify his claim that the language of speakers becomes very specific in form amongst closely-knit groups of people. Bernstein's exhaustive research validates Peckham's assertion that the language of the university is a direct progression of the socialization of the middle-class who use elaborated codes, whereas the language of the working-class is different, limited restricted codes of expression, putting poor and working-class students at a fundamental disadvantage.

Further, in this iconic essay, Bernstein cites linguistic researcher Geoffrey Turner's conclusions from his examination of the linguistics of five-year-old British working class and middle-class children. Turner found an important difference in their use of language, summarized by Bernstein as follows: "Working-class children have access to a wide range

Comment [17]: supports? conforms with?

Comment [18]: among works too. don't need the st.

Comment [19]: a little unclear here. progression?

Comment [20]: make this idea a separate sentence. it's powerful. very good.

Comment [21]: Maybe "speech" or "language use" – just for variation of linguistics in sentence.

of syntactic choices which involve the use of logical operators, ‘because’, ‘but’, ‘either’, ‘or’, ‘only’. The constraints exist on the conditions for their *use* (168). The working-class children demonstrated in storytelling exercises, a reluctance to find “alternative meaning and so there is a reduction in the linguistic expressions of uncertainty”, while middle class children exhibited a tendency to be “dominated by what they took to be the *form* of a narrative and the content was secondary”(169). Even at the young age of five, the children of Turner’s research demonstrated the divergence of language use based upon class socialization (168-9). From this evidence, Bernstein concludes “that restricted codes draw upon metaphor whereas elaborated codes draw upon rationality. That the codes constrain the contextual use of language in critical social contents...change in habitual speech codes involves change in the means by which object and person relationships are realized” (164-5). This conclusion has enormous significance. It suggests that learned speech codes, determined by class, shape the type of rhetoric an individual uses; for instance, dictating a preference for personal story-telling narrative over persuasive formal logic-based written argument. And the individual’s use of class-based rhetoric, in turn, **naturally** impacts his/her writing because it may be so fundamental, so ingrained, that it actually affects the thinking of the participants, potentially limiting critical thinking in the working-class student and possibly inhibiting story-driven narrative and creativity in the rhetoric and composition of the middle-class student, with his prioritizing of form over **content**.

Very similar findings are echoed in Paul Tough’s recent *New York Times* article, *What It Takes To Make a Student*. In an attempt to examine the enormity of defeating illiteracy in America and the obstacles facing the “No Child Left Behind” program of the Bush administration, Tough described recent American research that came up with findings

Comment [22]: Word choice. Not natural, actually. Social. You’re using natural colloquially. How about delete.

Comment [23]: This is an important paragraph. It’s not such an unexpected case. It’s the basic idea that language makes knowledge and is not just a means to express what we know. This is almost like Foucault, though if you’ve never read him don’t bother to reference him. But his basic idea was that language creates knowledge. Enough to say that readers are prepared for this conclusion. Another point: in this paragraph you need more of your analysis. I suggest another paragraph in which you spin out the researchers’ ideas in your own thinking or experience with students and people. Explain how you see this working, perhaps. When you read this it made sense to you, I think, because it connected with some experiences or observations you’d already made. Explaining that would help you own this material more, make it less of a presentation of others’ ideas alone.

similar to Turner's. In 1995, child psychologists Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley of the University of Kansas created a language acquisition research project involving forty-two families with newborn children, families that they carefully monitored over a three-year period. Tough writes:

By age 3, children whose parents were professionals had vocabularies of about 1,100 words, and children whose parents were on welfare had vocabularies of about 525 words. The children's I.Q.'s correlated closely to their vocabularies. The average I.Q. among the professional children was 117, and the welfare children had an average I.Q. of 79.

The researchers concluded that the reason for this was "one simple factor: the number of words the parents spoke to the child...and again, it varied by class. In the professional homes, parents directed an average of 487 "utterances" – anything from a one-word command to a full soliloquy – to their children each hour. In welfare homes, the children heard 178 utterances per hour." On the most basic level, this supports Basil Bernstein's English studies of three decades earlier. **But this American research does not span the breadth of Bernstein's, which found that language acquisition evolves further into speech codes that divides the classes in a way that does not clearly imply superiority of upper class rhetoric but difference, difference that is rewarded socially and culturally.**

Tough further investigates the discrepancies in academic achievement, based on class by drawing on the work of anthropologist Annette Lareau. In her 2003 book Unequal Childhoods, Lareau studies parental nurturance in American families of different classes and determines that middle class families encourage their children through activities, conversation, and approval of questioning behaviors. She names this "concerted cultivation."

Comment [24]: Interesting. But unpack this sentence. Slow down, spend a few. What are you saying here?

Per her findings, lower class families allow more free play but insist on parental obedience and respect. Say a little more here about the differences.

To her credit, Lareau takes an unbiased approach to her research, seeing the value in each method. She labels the working class parenting as “accomplishment of natural growth.” She concludes that the working class, “learn how to be members of informal peer groups. They learn how to manage their own time. They learn how to strategize” (Lareau qtd in Tough). But Tough, paraphrasing Lareau, concludes that “in public life, the qualities that middle-class children develop are consistently valued over the ones that poor and working-class children develop. Middle-class children become used to adults taking them seriously, and so they grow up with a sense of entitlement, which gives them a confidence, in the classroom and elsewhere...”(Tough). ||

Comment [25]: Good. Now say a little more about how you digest this, how this fits in with your thinking.

This brings us to the more common approach to pedagogy, an attempt to empower the student within the context of the dominant ideology. It involves “code-switching”(Gilyard 31). “Code-switching” is a common language adaptation, among ethnic and racial groups that do not speak standard English at home. In Voices of the Self, Keith Gilyard explains how his mother spoke one way to the doctor (Standard English) and one way at home (Black English dialect). He describes himself as bi-dialectal and contends that though most African-Americans are bi-dialectal, one dialect usually is favored over the other (31). In America, in business and in education, the dialect of the white middle-class is favored over language use that is a result of ethnic, racial, or class identity. Therefore, poor and working-class students, many of whom come from minorities in our culture, struggle with a basically new “language” that they may have had little exposure to in their own communities.

Comment [26]: More common than? You're jumping here, and I need more transition. Just slow down and tell me what you're thinking.

Comment [27]: Clarify what you mean here.

Comment [28]: Good. This is a crucial point, and as I said before, good to underline with observation, another connection to the “translation” required of New Orleans working-class folks, or somehow to underline from your point of view.

How severe are these rhetorical challenges for working-class students and how do they manifest themselves in learning and particularly in literacy and composition? If we accept that working-class students (a large group inclusive of diverse social, cultural, and racial difference but markedly different from the middle-class) bring diverse rhetorical and cultural heritage to the classroom, how do we teach them? How do we teach working-class students to **write better** without being didactic, condescending, or adopting false assumptions about their capabilities or limitations? And how do we do this with a clear sense of our *own* motives as instruments of a power structure?

After careful consideration of Basil Bernstein's research and his own personal experience, Irvin Peckham comes to this bleak conclusion about formal education:

Working-class children learn that their usage of language is incorrect, while the language usage of middle-class children, replete with its own particular limitations, is supported, thus "the unacknowledged purpose {is}...the exclusionary function of writing instruction...by screening out students of the working-class and consequently reserving for the children of the professional and managerial classes the privileges that attend academic success(263). ||

In an effort to combat this "exclusionary function of writing instruction," recognizing the power of the dominant ideology and the education system that comes from it, Lisa Delpit, author of *The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children*, not only sympathizes with the pragmatic concerns of working-class parents and students, but she sees it as her responsibility to educate her students in the language of the dominant culture, thereby enabling them from a practical standpoint. She writes:

Comment [29]: Great Paragraph. Now, somewhere you have to deal with write better. Expand a little. At some point some of the issue of "writing better" comes down to writing more-middle-class, right? In which case there's a real, not just rhetorical, conflict between working and middle-classes. But there's also more than that—some of what we have to teach about writing doesn't have to evoke or involve class values, and it's probably this stuff that we have to teach that we need to do better.

Comment [30]: Follow quote with your own words – and transition to Delpit

Many liberal educators hold that the primary goal for education is for children to become autonomous, to develop fully who they are in the classroom setting without having arbitrary, outside standards forced upon them. This is a very reasonable goal for people whose children are already participants in the culture of power and who have already internalize its codes. But parents who don't function within that culture often want something else. They want to ensure that the school provides their children with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society" (571).

Comment [31]: Are Delpit and Peckham in conflict? In some ways yes. You need to deal a bit with this conflict. At least acknowledge it.

An English professor recently said to me that the choice to enter college is the choice to leave the working class and enter the middle class. I agree that this is certainly the reason that higher education has become so important in America. It is the pushing of their children into higher education that has caused the influx of college students from the working-class. In Academic Literacy in the English Classroom: Helping Underprepared and Working-class Students in the Classroom, the historical journey of the working-class into the college classroom is clearly explained:

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, universities were mainly the prerogative of the wealthy and of those who wanted to enter the ministry...the Civil War became a turning point in universities' democratization...although the various legislative acts along with the growth in state, land-grant and metropolitan colleges provided opportunities for working-class students, only a small percentage were able to take advantage of them" (Bioarsky et al 4-5).

Comment [32]: I'd cut this quote. You have it well explained in the next paragraph.

That is, only a small percentage of working-class were able to take advantage of these advances in funding until post-war conditions affected the nation. “Worried about employment problems caused by the huge influx of returning GIs, the federal government encouraged them to use their benefits to attend local colleges” (Boiarsky 5). As a result, of the passing of the GI Bill in 1944, the war veterans had access and reason to attend college or to send their children (Boiarsky 6). This occurred again, following the Vietnam era, along with civil rights reform:

The Civil Rights movement propelled many universities to initiate a policy of open admission, [and] the federal government passed a series of bills providing for student loans and scholarships based on need. Many colleges switched from scholarships based mainly on merit to those based mainly on financial status. In addition, colleges increased the number of students they hired to work while attending classes. The number of working-class students, especially minorities and women, skyrocketed. (Boiarsky et al 6)

Thus, those of lower economic status, became a large body of never-before-attending students in institutions of higher education in the post-Vietnam, post Civil Rights era. The increase in federal spending for higher education grants and federal education loans, as well as increases in private banking loans for the purpose of education, opened the doors of education in a way not seen since primary education became a public institution. Naturally, as higher education became more available, the definition of an educated adult became more tied to certifications, degrees, and licenses than ever before. This did not escape the American working public who saw upward mobility, a better life, and financial rewards as attainable through higher education. In the 1970s, universities like City University of New

York, with its new democratic open admissions policy, found itself struggling with droves of under-prepared students who would never have entered a college classroom only ten years earlier. For the first time, many of the college freshman in freshman composition classrooms, like Mina Shaughnessy's classroom, were unable to write at the level, or in the manner, previously expected of college level work

Mina Shaughnessy, then professor at CCNY, became one of the pioneers of teaching basic writing. The Open Admissions policy of City College of New York, which started in the spring of 1970, enabled any willing student with a high school diploma to attend college. Enrollment at CCNY "jumped from 174,000 to 266,000 in 1975 "(Shaughnessy 1). The teachers were faced with a huge body of students whose scholastic preparation and traditional academic knowledge were limited. Yet, as Shaughnessy explains it, these students were eager to achieve, so "that their lives might be better than their parents', that the lives of their children might be better than theirs so far had been"(3).

It became the goal of Mina Shaughnessy and her fellow instructors at CCNY to "even the playing field" for these students. Shaughnessy's appreciation of her students shines through the text when she describes them as: "the sons and daughters of New Yorkers, reflecting the city's intense, troubled version of America." Her basis for the book was simple: "that BW (basic writing) students write the way they do, not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners, and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes"(5). Interestingly, she recognized components of working-class culture, without ever framing them as class issues, that were hindering her students from learning the traditional codes of academic writing. She writes:

For the BW student, academic writing is a trap, not a way of saying something to someone. The spoken language, looping back and forth between speakers, offering chances for groping and backing up and even hiding, leaving room for language of hands and faces, of pitch and pauses, is generous and inviting. Next to this rich orchestration, writing is but a line that moves haltingly across the page, exposing as it goes all that the writer doesn't know, then passing into the hands of a stranger who reads it with a lawyer's eyes, searching for flaws. (7)

Errors and Expectations is a good manual on how to improve student academic writing through the use of basic style and grammar precepts and attention to common difficulties that working-class writers have with standard academic, read "middle class" writing, particularly persuasive writing..

There has been considerable argument over this type of pedagogy, vehement proponents of Shaughnessy's techniques and motives (see Graff) and vicious critics who describe her teaching as a form of colonialism (see Rouse). This is a result of two diametrically-opposed camps in the battle to teach working class students, particularly at the college level. This is not to say that there is no compromise or that there are no teachers embracing methods that incorporate ideas from both sides. However, a clear distinct separation has emerged and widened since the late 60s and continues today, particularly in publicly-funded state universities like City University of New York or Montclair State University, where I taught as a graduate assistant. The two sides are these: the Analytic Method which includes essay modeling, grammar correction, thesis writing, instruction in formal language, writing as an authority; and that of Process Writing, which stems from the political questioning of the established hegemony, its language and agenda. Process writing,

Comment [34]: In years since this book has become controversial. First a bunch of attacks, then a rise to defend. For that reason I suggest you put "despite the controversies that attend this text," or something like that.

in emphasis, is almost entirely on content and critical thinking and questioning. Pat Bizzell refers to the different sides as inner-directed theorists versus out-directed theorists (366-70). I have chosen here to use Analytic Method and Process as my adopted terms since they are more widely used by the following authors: John Rouse, Gerald Graff, Lisa Delpit, and David Bartholomae.

In an essay published in College English “The Politics of Composition: A Reply to John Rouse”, Gerald Graff, a teacher using the Analytic Method, supports Shaughnessy’s methods and echoes Delpit:

Students and parents complain that they are being patronized, that the more relaxed, more personal pedagogy fails to teach anybody how to write. After all, from another vantage point, these practices...appear as merely an attempt to prepare these young people to get a decent job and thus have a chance at a decent life in American society...In a society in which we necessarily make our peace with capitalism or are relegated to the vocational scrap-heap, we have little choice but to play by the rules of the system (852).

David Bartholomae addresses these same concerns in “In Inventing the University”(1985). Like Shaughnessy, Graff, and Delpit, Bartholomae agrees with Shaughnessy’s assessments that basic writing students suffer most from their lack of experience with the forms and conventions of writing, with academic discourse in general, and with the commonplace cultural references and even vocabulary, that the more privileged classes take for granted (610).

Comment [35]: This is a tough paragraph because it's hard to define two terms that are so widely used. I can live with the process writing definition, but I'm not so sure Graff would agree with the Analytic definition. Could you either quote folks directly—to hang the definition elsewhere—or somehow say how you came to these definitions? I don't want to bog you down too much on this, so brief phrase quoting might be the easiest.

Comment [36]: I'd put this in a footnote when you first use the terms.

Comment [37]: What practices?

Comment [38]: Your comment here.

Comment [39]: Good. These three help you make your point.

Like Shaughnessy, Bartholomae **he** admires the fortitude of the students, pressed into trying to appropriate skills and language that are not their own. He refers to David Olson's work, a linguistic researcher, who like Turner, argues that the "key difference between oral language and written language is that written language separates both the producer and the receiver from the text." Says Bartholomae, "For my student writers, this means that they had to learn that what they said (the code) was more important than what they meant (intention)"(609). This strikes me as sad; isn't content just as important or more important, than **form**?

Comment [40]: Convention: Use last name when you begin a new paragraph.

Though Bartholomae acknowledges the politics of class-oriented issues facing the basic writer, he postulates that "all writers, in order to write, must imagine for themselves the privilege of being "insiders" – that is, the privilege both of being inside an established and powerful discourse and of being granted a special right to speak"(598), and yet, "the student, in effect, has to assume privilege without having any"(599). However, despite his insistence that there are power/class issues in composition, that writing "is an act of aggression disguised as an act of charity", Bartholomae believes that academic standards measure something important (595). He writes: "The act of writing takes the student away from where he is and what he knows and allows him to imagine something else. The approximate discourse, therefore, is evidence of a change, a change that, because we are teachers, we call 'development'"(600).

Comment [41]: Is it? I think Bartholomae is serious in his assessment, right?

Peter Elbow, on the other hand, **disagrees with the rigors** of traditional academic writing, including the standard assignment. Elbow's stance is that we need allow our students to teach us, as much as they need to learn from us, and I would argue further that this is especially true of working-class students. Elbow explains:

Comment [42]: Great to see this complication in Bartholomae. Is it problematic for you? What's your thought here?

Comment [43]: It's not that he disagrees. He doesn't believe the traditional academic writing assignment is as ubiquitous as Bartholomae claims. Yes, he thinks it's a bad assignment, but he also is less cynical than Bartholomae, believing the traditional assignment to have less dominance than Bartholomae asserts it does.

In contrast to students, the basic subtext in a writer's text is likely to be, 'Listen to me, I have something to tell you,' for writers can usually write with more authority than their readers. Therefore, unless we can set things up so that our first year students are often telling us about things that they know better than we do, we are sabotaging the essential dynamic of writers. We are transforming the process of "writing" into the process of "being tested". Many of the odd writing behaviors of students make perfect sense once we see that they are behaving as test-takers rather than writers (498).

A contemporary of Delpit, Graff, Bartholomae, and Elbow, Paulo Friere, a scholar who sits in the Process writing camp, and **in fact, arguably the father of such pedagogical thought**, first wrote on this problem over thirty-five years ago:

The pedagogy of the oppressed (is), a pedagogy that must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity...The central problem is this: How can the oppressed as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be "hosts" of their oppressors can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. As long as they live in the duality in which to be is to be like and to be like is to be like the oppressor, this contribution is impossible"(30).

Freire's point seems simple enough: that you cannot infantilize the poor or working class; you must respect them. The temptation is for the mentor or teacher to see himself as

Comment [44]: Of course he never really talked about writing, I don't believe. He's a precursor more than a father, but maybe I'm quibbling.

superior to those he is intent on helping, or teaching, leading to dehumanization of the oppressed. Friere admonishes the well-meaning oppressor (which could be any authority figure, especially an educator):

The same is true of the individual oppressor as a person. Discovering himself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish, but it does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed. Rationalizing his guilt through paternalistic treatment of the oppressed, all the while holding them fast in a position of dependence, will not do. Solidarity requires that one enters into the situation of those with whom one is in solidarity; it is a radical posture”(31).

Solidarity with the oppressed, what does that mean exactly? Does it mean, as Elbow would have it, that students should write only about what they feel passionately about, what they know or think they know or at least want to investigate, or is solidarity with the oppressed mean making them fluent in the form, codes, and content of the dominant and preferred language and **composition**?

In Teaching to Transgress bell hooks writes:

During my college years it was tacitly assumed that we all agreed that class should not be talked about, that there would be no critique of the bourgeois class biases shaping and informing pedagogical process (as well as social etiquette) in the classroom. Although no one ever stated the rules that would govern our conduct, it was taught by example and reinforced by a system of rewards. As silence and obedience were most rewarded, student learned that this was the appropriate demeanor in the classroom...Even though student enter the “democratic” classroom

Comment [45]: Good question. If you're going to go with this solidarity point I think you need more of an answer. What would Freire say? I'm not sure. What would Elbow say? And you need a transition to hooks.

believing they have the right to free speech, most students are not comfortable exercising that right....This censoring process is one way bourgeois values overdetermine social behavior in the classroom and undermine the democratic exchange of ideas (178-9).

If this is true, and typical of teaching in general then we have begun the silencing at an early age. **Obedience** was indeed a marker of the middle-class of New Orleans who, with rare exceptions, left the city once ordered. It was not just that they had the means but also their trust of authority: of the police, of the military, of the government, of the media. The authorities did not represent a threat to *them* and so they followed the rules. It was only under extreme duress that the poor of New Orleans followed the advice of the authorities, only to have their worst fears realized, abandoned at the Superdome and the Convention Center. Ironically, the class that is more likely to think critically in an academic setting, albeit in standard form, is often more likely to obediently follow rules of conduct both in life and in school, and arguably less likely to challenge the status quo, in part because the system rewards their **obedience**.

This conflict **plays** out into the classroom. As John Rouse explains in his attack on Mina Shaughnessy and the **Analytic method of teaching**:

Whatever its shortcomings, the Analytic method is useful as a form of control. Here are students whose language and loyalties are different from those of teachers trained in the belletristic achievements of the centuries. . And partly because of this, because of their restricted code and group loyalties, they have not done well academically in the past and so pose a threat to any teacher's sense of competence. Moreover, unlike

Comment [46]: Is this true of everyone? Yes, perhaps, but it seems your point would be that this is especially powerful for working-class and others? If so, say so.

Comment [47]: Nice line.

Comment [48]: Between.... (say it again)

Comment [49]: I think it's Analytic Method. I'm not good at the cap no cap thing, but I think the whole term needs to be capitalized. I failed to mark this earlier so you'll have to go back and check.

Comment [50]: Before the quote give us a summary—set us up a bit and show us your digestion of it. This will allow you to shorten the quote, and also it gives you mastery over Rouse, showing us how you've gained more from reading the whole article than we gain from just reading the quote.

their middle-class predecessors, they are apt to challenge not the reasons give by authority but authority itself. They are, in short, difficult. The Analytic method is an assertion of authority in the face of this threat, it demands that students show themselves willing to learn the rules and patterns of behavior set for them...Shaughnessy speaks of these students as “egocentric”...but Bernstein has shown that speakers of a restricted code are not egocentric but rather sociocentric and context-dependent, they rely on common experience to make their meanings clear. If they are to learn an elaborated code they must become, in fact, more “egocentric” – they must move from what we know to what *I* know (8). ||

Comment [51]: So he didn't capitalize the M? Hm. Since he seems to be the source of your use of this term, maybe you have to follow him. Still, I think I'm right. I won't complain either way though!

Comment [52]: A little more from you now.

Comment [53]: I don't know Rouse. Seems very interesting.

Paolo Freire argues that obedience to authority in the classroom, responding to the dominant ideology as though it is truth reinforces that ideology, and I think, it can easily be argued, often rewards the individual. In A Pedagogy for Liberation, which is a series of conversations with Ira Shor, || Freire writes, “When we separate *producing* knowledge from knowing the existing knowledge, schools become easily spaces for selling knowledge which corresponds to capitalist ideology”(8). In other words, traditional methods of teaching fail to address the philosophical nature of teaching itself, our purpose. Freire fervently believes the answer is dialogue. He sees dialogue in the classroom as a means of remaking society. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, he writes about the banking system of knowledge, the traditional attempt to “pour” knowledge, or “deposit” it, into students as though knowledge is a fixed thing.

Comment [54]: He left.

The banking method of education, a component of the Analytic method, still seems to be stubbornly influential in classrooms today. A Bloomfield public high school student, my

seventeen-year-old son, has been at war with more than one dominant-minded teacher trying to “deposit” ideas into his head, in particular, his sophomore Honors English teacher who he insisted on battling himself, without my help. At first, as most parents would, I doubted him, thinking my son’s healthy ego was getting him in trouble, but I watched as he struggled to keep his voice in his writing while adhering to his teacher’s ideas of writing: grammar and punctuation and style, and her assessment of his actual thoughts. He was determined to show her, and spent many hours trying to write better: clearer, more concise, better sentence structure. However, he wrote what he felt, refusing to water down his sometimes controversial ideas. I read his papers. I would have been pleased to get them in the college freshman composition class I was teaching at the time. Something else was going on here.

Though my son couldn’t articulate it, it was a struggle for domination. He got a C in the course. And he dropped out of Honors English for the remainder of his high school work.

Paolo Freire believes the Hegelian paradigm of master/slave, domination and submission, finds its way into the classroom in the form of the authoritarian teacher and passive student is dialogue. He argues this:

Dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s “depositing” ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be “consumed” by the discussants. Nor yet is it a hostile, polemical argument between those who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to the search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth. It must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a craftly instrument for the domination of one person by another. The domination implicit in dialogue is that of the world by the dialoguers; it is conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind (70).

Comment [55]: A personal issue, I must say, but I really prefer First-year writing because of the sexism of freshman. May seem petty, and it's your choice, but I thought I'd weigh in.

Comment [56]: Good paragraph.

Comment [57]: I guess I'd talk about your own's class identification. Is that relevant here? If not, say so. Just somehow connect it to class and that whole point.

Comment [58]: I think this last sentence could be left off.

I think it is entirely possible that while being unable to name it, working-class and unprivileged students already know that they are oppressed, that authority wants to shove its “knowledge” down their throats and they resent. They walk into our classrooms resentfully because they question what we have to teach them, not only in its practicality but in its truthfulness. They don’t trust our values or instead, they think the cards are stacked against them, that school is designed for other kids, middle-class kids, and not for them. They may think we are corporate cogs, mouthpieces for the dominant ideology, or worse, radicals who seek our own liberal political agendas while claiming that we are helping them.

As in the New Orleans during and post-Katrina and even now in the rebuilding of the city, educators as well as politicians or historians or even charity organizers cannot enter into helping or treating problems without being metaphorically one with the people you are trying to assist. It is and must be a collaborative effort because there are social and cultural realities that an outsider cannot understand. Outsiders often judge. Outsiders take a paternalistic and imperialistic view that often does not address the needs of the people. In the classroom, we as educators or students, undeniably enter with a level of judgment based on the values of our own backgrounds. Of course, good teachers, and indeed, earnest students, try to suspend that judgment towards others but it creeps in easily. Paolo Freire recognizes and addresses this frequent objection to dialogue:

On the other hand, dialogue cannot exist without humility. The naming of the world, through which people constantly re-create that world, cannot be an act of arrogance. Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility. How can I dialogue if I always project

ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a case apart from others – mere “its” in whom I cannot recognize other “I”s?

Theories are fine in academic papers but once applied in a classroom, there are repercussions, both social and political. The ongoing battle between Analytic method and Process writing is causing confusion and further increasing the divide between students and teachers. Every day that I tutored as a graduate assistant at the Writing Center, I was faced with these theories. The Writing Center heroically attempts to straddle the two camps, focusing more on critical thinking than on correct grammar or style. We were instructed, above all else, not to write the papers for the often overwhelmed and even needy students who saw us as their last hope. We asked them questions -- lots of questions. And we strove to get them to come up with their own ideas. All well and good, I think. But when they asked, even pleaded with us, to show them how to write the sentence better, or explain to them what the grammar was, our hands were tied. We were not supposed to instruct them on this, or at least, not focus on it. Though overall paragraph and formal structure were permissible instruction, we were to avoid too much grammar or sentence styling. The concern was that we would end up writing it for them, committing plagiarism. This baffled our students, most of whom were working-class, who were used to their high school teachers correcting them, in the typical Analytic method. These students expected and relished such help, feeling abandoned when we told them that we couldn't help too much. It particularly frustrated the students for whom English was a recent second language. I found that they were often like sponges, more confident in their abilities than their American counterparts, and did benefit from repeated corrections in appropriate language

usage. So in other words, we taught critical thinking (process) and some analytic (overall form and structure).

I was, in fact, accused once of over-helping a student, whose first language was Spanish. An older student in her late 20s, eager and bright, she came weekly to the writing center, desperately wanting help with grammar and sentence structure and I complied, only to hear from her in a tearful session in the writing center, that she had been accused by her professor of having me write the paper for her. The language usage was beyond her; it was too good. Though I had assisted with the grammar, her conservative and pro-American ideas were entirely her own and I had, of course, taken pains not to write the paper for the student. However, the tenure-track professor was indignant because in her experience, in her graduate work, no correction of grammar was ever allowed. She was taught, and her continued belief was, that a tutor's pencil should never touch the student's paper. But per the student, the professor's greatest concern was that the ideas were not her own, though the professor had no basis other than the grammar corrections to make such an assumption. It would only occur to me later that this incident may have been less about plagiarism than my having usurped the authority of the professor. I was a graduate student and it was not my place to make grammar corrections or work so closely with her student.

Did I help or hurt the student with grammar instruction? This has been debated since Mina Shaughnessy. If I was using the analytic method of grammar instruction and that was not considered appropriate, then where was the opposite of this binary? Where was Freirian pedagogy? Where were democratic principles? There was no free dialogue between student and teacher, only accusation and a conclusion by the professor that resulted in a lesser grade, and there was certainly no discussion between the three of us.

The matter was summarily dismissed by the professor. The professor's authority was in her position, above us, that of a tenure-track superior. The student and I both were made to feel afraid, though I was fortunate enough to have the support of more than one mentor in the program. But what did this teach the student? Did she learn the middle-class value of accepting the authority of the teacher? Worst of all, did she learn that to ask for help and to accept it, to work cooperatively with a mentor, is unacceptable and puts a second-language user, a member of a lower class, under suspicion of complicity and dishonesty?

In Chomsky on Mis-Education, Noam Chomsky writes:

Far from creating independent thinkers, schools have always, throughout history, played an institutional role in a system of control and coercion. And once you are well-educated, you have already been socialized in ways that support the power structure, which in turn, rewards you immensely”(16).

Is this what my tutee was suffering through, a lesson in obedience?

In the essay, “Considerations for American Freireistas,” Victor Villaneuva, Jr. argues that not only is the role of higher education exclusionary but that is all designed to promote the “common” wisdom of the ruling class, a political point of view directly influenced by Paolo Friere's work:

Hegemony can operate by promoting the ruling classes' ideologies as universal. Process approaches to writing instruction are universal. They have given rise to cognitive explanations of writing, the cognitive sciences also given to universality. Cognitive explanations rendered basic writers, most often members of minority groups, cognitively dysfunctional (630).

Perhaps the professor's problem with my tutee's essay was the pro-American slant of her writing. Perhaps the professor found it surprising and unlikely to come from a recent struggling South American immigrant. In a university atmosphere steeped in liberalism, such a viewpoint (one not unusual amongst the current working-class) might be seen as stunted thinking, not critical thinking. And though both the Bush administration and the Congress have been Republican and neo-conservative in recent years, the ruling class of higher education is unmistakably politically liberal, regardless of how the classrooms are conducted.

Noam Chomsky writes about the long history of working-class American values, referring to a 1924 study by Norman Ware regarding the 19th century labor movement and particularly the labor press, which was written mostly by working-class women. Long before any influence of Marxism, the labor press "condemned what they called the 'bought priesthood' referring to the media and the universities and the intellectual class, that is, the apologists who sought to justify the absolute despotism that was the new spirit of the age and to instill its sordid and demeaning values"(42). He writes further that:

All this would have been completely intelligible to the founders of classical liberalism, [who] considered creative work freely undertaken in association with others as the core value of human life...[John]Dewey and [Bertrand]Russell are two of the leading twentieth-century inheritors of this tradition, with its roots in the Enlightenment and classical liberalism (42-43).

Chomsky further states:

John Dewey was one of the relics of the Enlightenment classical liberal traditionDewey understood clearly that 'politics is the shadow cast on society by

big business' ...Education, he hoped, of the kind he was talking about, the production of free human beings, would be one of the means of undermining this absolutist monstrosity"(47).

There is a long American democratic philosophical tradition, that of American pragmatism, that is in agreement with working class sentiments that would benefit American higher education, which claims to embrace such principles but fails to so.

Chomsky writes:

I If schools were, in reality, democratic, there would be no need to bombard students with platitudes about democracy. They would simply act and behave democratically, and we know that does not happen. The more there is a need to talk about the ideals of democracy, the less democratic the system really is (37).

Historically, there is a long proud connection between working-class ideas and ideals that agree with a true democratic American philosophy that dates back before capitalism took root, before Marxism and long before the working-class association of leftist politics and unionism. This pervasive American philosophy explains the conservative bent of the American working-class today and their mistrust of modern liberalism. However, the beliefs in democracy and religious freedom are the foundations for the entire nation. It is here that we, as middle class teachers and academics, might find common ground with our working-class brethren who seek prosperity through education, one avenue to "the pursuit of happiness." Yes, to choose college is to pursue a life out of the working-class, financially, but this does not mean that these working-class students and their parents seek

to leave behind their political and social views, their heritage, their culture. While questioning and critical thinking are crucial to composition education and higher learning, this does not mean that the working-class will ever agree wholeheartedly with their instructors. If the skills we have to offer will empower them, then of course, we have every obligation to do so, but we cannot offer education in return for obedience or agreement with our views or even unquestioning compliance with the forms and methods of education and writing that we have come to cherish so highly. We must destroy the binary, the hierarchy that we use to lord over them, however innocently.

Naturally, we must maintain some structure and discipline in order to run a classroom but if instructors do not understand and respect the culture of their students, the culture of the American working-class, then we will fail to reach them. Thirty years have gone by in basic writing college freshman composition and the statistics are not encouraging. Large numbers of working-class students are not making it through four years of college, at least not at the institution they first enrolled in and in the standard four-year time frame. According to a U.S. Department of Education 1996 report *Bridging the Gap: Academic Preparation and Postsecondary Success of First-Generation Students*, "Parents' levels of education were found to be associated with rates of students' retention and persistence in college....Students whose parents attained a bachelor's degree or higher were more likely to stay on the persistence track to a bachelor's degree than first generation students" (http://nces.edu.gove/programs/quarterly/vol_3).

Though the data from this report is not encouraging, if we examine it further, it may not be entirely accurate. Working-class students have difficult financial situations or family commitments that may often prevent them from uninterrupted education, or result in

a change of schools. But even with this skewed data, it is easy to see that the problem is only going to worsen. The midrange projection increases for total enrollment in degree-granting institutions is expected to jump 17% from 2002 to 2014, a mere twelve years (<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/projections/projections2014>). This is after a 23% gain in enrollment from 1989 to the present.

And the perception that the key to financial success or at least stability is found through education is unlikely to change. The website Educated Nation quotes the following information from the U.S. Census Bureau:

That college graduates with a bachelor's degree earned an average of \$51,554 in 2004. These numbers hold true for men and women in every racial and ethnic group....Adults with advanced college degrees earned an average of \$78,093....High school graduates with a diploma earned \$28,645 on average. Those without a high school diploma earned an average of \$19,169” (<http://www.educatednation.com/2006>).

Naturally, as a result of public awareness, more and more Americans are therefore seeking a college education. The immediate post-high school enrollment rate into two or four year colleges increased from 49% in 1972 to 67% in 1997. Despite a brief decline between 1997 and 2001, the enrollment is again 67% as of 2004, the most recent comprehensive statistical data available on the IES, National Center for Education Statistics website. According to 2004 census bureau data, 28% of the U.S. adult population had at least a bachelor's degree then, up from 24% in 2,000 and only 11% in 1970 (<http://www.educatednation.com>).

Per projections based on the 23% increase from 1989 to 2002, the IES site projects a minimum enrollment increase of 15% in degree-granting higher education institutions by 2014 and a possible increase of up to 20% by 2014. The mid-range projection would mean that 19.5 million students would be enrolled in degree-granting institutions by 2014 (<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/projections>). Obviously, college enrollment is no longer a goal primarily of the affluent or middle-class. Yet despite these staggering numbers, it cannot be assumed that because the working-class covet the financial stability of the middle-class, that working-class people agree with middle-class values, culture, or moral beliefs. In teaching writing, we must first understand who we are teaching and how they see the world in order to interest them, make the information pertinent and the work compelling.

Julie Lindquist, now an assistant professor of English at the University of Mississippi, uses a decidedly anthropological means of identifying specific working class values and cultural beliefs and biases. In *The Smokehouses*, an article first appearing in *College English*, which she would later develop into the book *A Place to Stand*, Julie Lindquist investigates working class culture by studying the patrons at a blue-collar neighborhood bar. In describing what she learned from her job as a bartender in the Chicago working class bar, The Smokehouse, a job she held while completing her PhD, she writes:

My hope is that teachers of composition will be encouraged not only to examine their assumptions about what this rhetoric is worth and why, but to consider how their authority to teach it is a function of the ethos they create by their own claims of rhetorical capital. Such considerations will, I believe, better equip teachers not only

to understand the nature (and consequences!) of their own resistance to working-class agendas (229).

It was through the rhetoric of the bar that Lindquist came to understand the conflicts she was having in the classroom. She writes, “I have come to recognize as fundamental parallels between the barroom and the classroom as institutional sites of rhetorical practice”(225-6). She elaborates further:

(The smokehouser’s behavior) bespeaks a deeply ambivalent attitude toward the capital higher education has to offer. Smokehousers privately approve of those who strive to join the middle-class, but publicly disapprove of those who embrace the rhetoric of its institutions: earning a degree is seen as a route to upward mobility even as identification with the university is perceived as a kind of cultural abandonment (234).

In the collection, [This Fine Place So Far From Home](#), academics, like Irvin Peckham who is one of the contributors, educators whose origins were once working-class, write about the estrangement from their backgrounds, their retreat from these origins, and their personal conflicts over the abandonment of their pasts for middle class professional stature. Lindquist learns from the Smokehousers that this kind of class denial is perceived as class treachery and a play for individual power, and held in suspicion that it is also a repudiation of working class values that include honesty, humility, and respect for others, especially those who work in positions of little or no authority. Lindquist comments on her working class subjects perception of her, as an outsider, a middle class academic: “My rhetorical

habit of speculating and raising questions, a strategy that is so richly rewarded within the academic institution, was apparently seen by Walter and the others at the Smokehouse as both unproductive and manipulative”(232). She adds that “performing and philosophizing at the same time – is {seen as} essentially dishonest, is a play for status motivated by personal vanity, and not necessarily a concern for truth or for the public good (236).” This is illuminating and explains much hostility in the classroom. If they think, as Lindquist writes, that we are using our language skills, both written and oral, as a “claim of position of privilege” or “cultural capital”, is it any wonder that they hold the middle class educator in contempt?

Even so, in conversations with the “regulars” of the working class bar, the Smokehouse, Lindquist learned that several of the men bitterly regretted giving up their education. In A Place To Stand, she writes:

These Smokehousers narrate their histories of struggle with and alienation from institutions of formal education; these narratives of alienation bespeak the suspicion that schools are really intended to represent middle-class, not working-class, needs and interests. In talking of their own experiences with schooling, Smokehousers recount stories of class barriers – both social and economic...(96)

Clearly, the working-class harbor extremely mixed feelings about higher education, which leads to mistrust, mixed messages from both their parents and peers, resulting in student hostility and resistance. This is particularly evident in the English composition classroom where argument and persuasion are the rewarded cultural capital, but may be seen by the working-class as false, as vanity and sophistry. Before we can teach critical

thinking and writing composition that includes questioning and argument, we must invest in understanding the objections of our constituency, the students. As we might address objections in a paper arguing a point, we must acknowledge their political and cultural views, often conservative, and encourage their expression of the concerns and questions that they harbor. We must resist the impulse to judge their thinking by our own, often liberal, viewpoints. Essentially, we must aim for a classroom that is as democratic as possible, truly democratic.

In *Not Too Late to Take the Sanitation Test: Notes of a Non-Gifted Academic from the Working Class*, David Borkowski writes about his recollections of his unspectacular early education. Borkowski concurs with the Smokehousers' stories told to Lindquist when he writes:

As a giftless-student I had seen how books were often used against me and others, sometimes literally, like when Sister Louis Marie clobbered Jay Ruane with one....I see how teachers sometimes deployed books to maintain distance or used the curriculum to erect boundaries...to establish the condition of us (teachers and a handful of bright students) versus them (the rest of the mediocre and the dull ones) (114-115).

Whether or not it is or was true that books were used to "erect boundaries" as Borkowski describes it, the importance is in the working class perception that this is true. Borkowski is believable in his claim of being an ordinary working class kid, a kid who never excelled in school in his younger years. His memories of his childhood are candid and funny, but also reflect working-class values. He comments on the typical teacher:

“Another, less obvious way teachers maintain distance is by taking themselves way too seriously...in class, they looked so glum teaching I thought that if the material they considered essential to our educational survival brought them so little joy, then maybe I’d actually be better off dying cheerfully ignorant than depressingly intelligent”(118).

That’s funny stuff, but it also reflects the working-class belief that learning and academia is for “the other”, those humorless elite people from another class who will make more money, or who lord over the classroom. He goes on to express a very typical working class attitude, “Not exactly a good Catholic boy from the working class, I never felt loyal to authority, and I think this pointed me towards a democratic pedagogy” (117).

He explains his teaching technique:

I don’t teach academic discourse, plain and simple, even in my literature-based courses, and I’m determinedly inclusive. That I was practicing this method intuitively, in my own rudimentary way, before I knew to call it dialogic or a Freireian pedagogy has a lot, I think, to do with my gift-less background(116).

His estimation of most teachers echoes both Peter Elbow and Paolo Freire. “Humorless teachers were also the worst listeners....They were typically so full of themselves and so eager to pump their agenda into our heads that we might as well not even have been there”(119).

In this humor-filled essay, Borkowski uses his wit and exalts his former status as a mediocre student to make a clear point to his academic readers of College English, that elitism has no place in the classroom. On a more personal level, he seems to use his past as a means of finding common ground with his students. His teaching style is simple and

direct. Using an Aristotelian method, he asks his students what they believe and turns statements into questions and then involves the rest of the class in a discussion of the statements and questions. He relies heavily on peer interaction, initiated by his questioning. An assistant professor at William Patterson University, a relatively affordable New Jersey state four-year college and a commuter school, his classroom is most certainly, to a large degree, working class students. His pedagogy is rooted in his desire that “my students be reflective, to think about who they are, what they do, and what decisions they make, believing in the importance of those things in the construction of self and society”(115).

This brings us back unerringly to a tradition, a common thread found in educators and pedagogy theorists from John Dewey to Paolo Freire to Noam Chomsky. The connection is true democratic principles in the classroom. It is more than the myth of a nation; its true application is a founding principle of America. It is an idea, though sometimes misused, that every American school child regardless of station knows and is taught to revere. The “Pledge of Allegiance,” the songs “The Star-Spangled Banner” and “America the Beautiful” are all still taught in every American elementary school. The idea of “liberty and justice for all” is more than a catch phrase, it is a part of the American soul. The quest for freedom through a democratic state is compelling and very real to the immigrants still finding their home here, and many of these students now attending our two and four year colleges and universities are either immigrants themselves or second generation. We are jaded; they are not.

Ironically, in our attempt to be inclusive and recognize the variety and diversity of our growing working-class student body, one avenue that higher education has used is the

celebration of ethnic culture. In my teaching a remedial college freshman writing class that consisted of fifteen or so students, literally from all over the world, I used a popular book, Crossing Cultures. I believe the intention of the book was to engage them through sharing ethnic and cultural background as an accepted and natural part of the mosaic that is the American public. The idea was to encourage a sense of belonging, of pride in self, of understanding through discussion of culture. It was a nice idea, a kind attempt at inclusion, but it was from an outsider's point of view. Their hostility was masked as boredom and passive aggressive resistance. They were not interested in discussing their culture or that of others because they were much more concerned with what they had in common with each other and with me. They resented the discussion of culture because it focused on what was different about them. More than once, when I attempted to find out about their heritage in the context of discussing the text, they bristled and said, "I'm American," regardless of whether they had been born in Korea or Columbia. They probably saw my attempts to point out their difference from me, a native-born American, as a way of separating myself from them, as better, which of course, was far from my intentions. The idea of celebrating the individual and respecting other cultures, an integral part of tolerance in a democratic society, is the focus of a liberal agenda, however well-intentioned. Right or wrong, from their more conservative viewpoint, inclusion results from equality based on shared values and beliefs, sameness, in the American identity.

What is the American identity and as hopelessly old-fashioned and nationalistic as it may seem, could this be the common ground we have with our students? According to Cornell West, Professor of Religion and Director of Afro-American Studies at Princeton University, author of The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism,

the idea of the American identity has its roots in Ralph Waldo Emerson's theodicy, what Harold Bloom concluded was Emerson's "truest achievement...to invent the American religion"(Bloom qtd in West 17). This would include what West describes as a "distinctive feature of Emerson's reflections on power...that he associates a mythic self with the very content and character of America" (12). West expands on this further:

This American religion that extols human power, vision, newness, and conquest domesticates and dilutes the devastating critiques of American civilization put forward by Emerson himself....Emerson's notion of power... celebrates moral transgression at the expense of social revolution. Moral transgression essentially consists for Emerson in the exercise of personal conscience against custom, law, and tradition. It rests upon a deep distrust of the masses, a profound disenchantment with the dirty affairs of politics and fervent defense of individual liberties (17).

Cornell West further explains Emerson's rejection of modern epistemological philosophy as follows:

He evades modern philosophy; that is, he ingeniously and skillfully refuses (1) its quest for certainty and its hope for professional, ie. scientific, respectability; (2) its search for foundations. This distinctly American refusal is the crucible from which emerge the sensibilities and sentiments of future American pragmatists (36).

The connection here is that the concept of America itself and what it means to be American is deeply engrained in the culture from its early inception. American pragmatism, fathered by Emerson, continues to appeal to new Americans and the upwardly mobile working class, those now attending college, who are attempting to use their individual power and liberty to achieve and elevate themselves from the masses, though

they are still strongly tied to their beginnings and proud of their communities. Like Emerson, they are suspicious of any philosophy grounded in the trickery of language and argument, the politics of language. In the classroom, they reject the idea of scientific certainty, that we can prove our point through logical argument, seeing our rhetoric and composition as sophistry; they suspect us of middle-class moral ambiguity. Again, we are at a class impasse, this time based on philosophical differences.

Yet, this is also where we find shared values and understanding, our ingrained cultural debt to American Pragmatism. The American educational innovator and scholar, John Dewey owed much of his pragmatic approach to education to Emerson. Unlike Ralph Waldo Emerson, he was liberal in his viewpoint of the common man. . Cornell West writes:

John Dewey is the greatest of the American pragmatists because he infused an inherited Emersonian preoccupation with power, provocation, and personality – permeated by voluntaristic, amelioristic, and activistic themes – with the great discovery of the nineteenth-century Europe; a mode of historical consciousness that highlights the conditioned and circumstantial character of human existence in terms of changing societies, cultures, and communities. Dewey is the first American pragmatist who revises Emersonian motifs of contingency and revisability in the light of modern historical consciousness” (69-70).

Dewey crowns Emerson as “the philosopher of democracy.” In an essay originally published under the title *Emerson – The Philosopher of Democracy*, in the International Journal of Ethics, July 1903, Dewey writes:

Against creed and system, convention and institution, Emerson stands for restoring to the common man that which in the name of religion, of philosophy, of art, and of morality, has been embezzled from the common store and appropriated to sectarian and class use...truth...becomes(s) a puzzle of and trick of theologian, physician, and litterateur...a trick of manipular skill, of specializing performance” (Dewey qtd in West 76).

Dewey as an American pragmatist, a proponent of Emerson’s American religion, saw philosophy’s usefulness as a starting point for action, rather than an excuse for cynicism and inaction. Cornell West states it best, that “Dewey champions doubt – it is the very motor of provocation – yet he sidesteps modern skepticism”(89). West adds, “the epistemological problematic of modern philosophy now, in Dewey’s view, stands in the way of American and world progress”(93). In a lecture at the Imperial University in Japan, later published as *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey proposes the following:

Modern philosophic thought has been so preoccupied with these puzzles of epistemology...distinguishing between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds and ...telling how a separate subject can know an independent object. But would not the elimination of these traditional problems permit philosophy to devote itself to a more fruitful and more needed task? Would it not encourage philosophy to face the great social and moral defects and troubles from which humanity suffers, to concentrate its attention upon clearing up the causes and exact nature of these evils and upon developing a clear idea of better social possibilities.... (Dewey qtd in West 93).

From Dewey's writing and lecturing, Cornell West concludes that:

More pointedly, pragmatism conceives of truth as a species of the good; the procedures that produce warranted assertions are themselves value-laden and exemplary of human beings working in solidarity for the common good. In this way Dewey's metaphilosophy and his accentuation of the role of critical intelligence are inseparable from his promotion of creative democracy"(100).

American pragmatism, a philosophy of democracy in action has wide-ranging implications for shared understanding between all groups of Americans, however different in political party affiliation, ethnicity, religion, geographic location, or social class.

I have been asked the reasonable, and very pragmatic, question, one that attempts to put theory into action: "What can be done on a practical level in the classroom to overcome class issues?" But in my estimation, this is jumping the gun. Solutions, like dialogic teaching techniques or peer interaction, are only as good as the understanding of the problem: a deeply ingrained class bias on the part of the most well-meaning educators, and a working-class student hostility and resistance to authority, which results in student prejudice and fearfulness toward middle and upper-class teachers. These class differences, that we try to ignore because they offend our ideas of an egalitarian American, are instrumental in the upbringing of American children and deeply political in nature. We must first understand the widespread implications of class and realize that bridging the gaps between the classes is a matter of democratic unity.

I believe that there are shared values here, that the American religion of Emerson – an interest in power, action, and the sacredness of the individual's liberty, the same elements

that serve our capitalist system so well, may be a starting point for the social classes. As Americans, we are not only immersed in the belief in democracy, but we are unavoidably shaped by the environment of capitalist competition.

In Chomsky on Mis-Education, Noam Chomsky writes, “Dewey seems to have felt that reforms in early education could be in themselves a major lever of social change”(37). Chomsky argues that Dewey and Bertrand Russell, both men on social conscience, are the direct descendents of classic liberal thought, Jeffersonian thinking. He describes how Thomas Jefferson, realizing that the industrialization and capitalism was gaining strength in the young nation, “feared the rise of a new form of absolutism that was more ominous than what had been overthrown in the American Revolution. . . . Jefferson distinguished in his later years between what he called “aristocrats” and “democrats.” The aristocrats are ‘those who fear and distrust the people, and wish to draw all powers from them into the hands of the higher classes.’ The democrats, in contrast, ‘identify with the people, have confidence in them, cherish and consider them as the honest and safe depository of the public interest,’ if not always ‘the most wise’”(Jefferson qtd in Chomsky 43).

The question is: who are the aristocrats and who are the true democrats? In recent years, the conservative, fundamentalist, and labor-oriented working class have voted overwhelmingly Republican, in part, because they believed the Republican party represented them and the dreams of the American Religion, of the heartland, while the East and West Coast Democrats appeared intellectual, devoid of morality, elitist. The red states versus the blue states became the paradigm.

Pockets of modern Democrats exist even in a red state like Louisiana, in the city of New Orleans, for instance. Even so, Mayor Ray Nagin, a Democrat, made it very clear that

his greatest concern prior to Hurricane Katrina hitting the city was the business community, thus waiting until the last minute to evacuate the city, leaving thousands of poor and working-class people with no means of transportation, to fend for themselves in one of the nation's greatest catastrophes. Who are the aristocrats and who are the true democrats? The nation is struggling with that question even now.

New Orleans today, for better or worse, is in many ways now a clean slate, much of its unique history and substandard public school system swept away. There is an unprecedented opportunity to rebuild. In the January/February 2006 edition of *The Atlantic Monthly*, the state of public education in New Orleans is examined. In the article *Reading, Writing and Resurrection*, Amy Waldman reports that thirty-one of the fifty-three public schools are now charter schools, a "higher proportion of charter schools than any other American city"(2). These schools function without a teacher union and are stocked with many inexperienced but enthusiastic young teachers from outside the city, looking for opportunity (Waldman 2). So far, there has been no conclusive evidence that charter schools can or will improve student test scores. On a national basis, charter school student test scores are no better, and sometimes worse, than public school test scores (Tough 1). In many ways, this is the largest scale experiment in an American city's public education system.

Whether the new system will get a fair chance is hard to say. According to Goodwin Liu, a University of California at Berkeley law professor, the federal government is guilty of "education apartheid." "In states with more poor children, spending per pupil is lower. In Mississippi, for instance, it is \$5,391 a year; in Connecticut, it is \$9,588. Most education financing comes from state and local government, but the federal supplement for poor children, Title I, is 'regressive' Liu points out, because it is tied to the amount each state

spends. So the federal government gives Arkansas \$964 to help educate each poor child in the state, and it gives Massachusetts \$2,048 for each poor child there.”(Tough 1). On the other hand, President Bush had pledged money for the new system, seen by some as an experiment in private schooling paid by public funds, a form of the controversial school voucher system.

In the KIPP program, now being across the nation in some of the most successful charter schools in financially-disadvantaged areas, a program of education invented by two young teachers, David Levin and Michael Feinberg, alumni from the federal program Teach America, teach middle school children to mimic middle class learning skills in the classroom, by using “slant, which instructs them to sit up, listen, ask questions, nod and track the speaker with their eyes....Levin’s contention is that Americans of a certain background learn these methods for taking in information early on and employ them instinctively. KIPP students, he says need to be taught the methods explicitly”(Tough 2). This is successful program is a clear return to the analytic method, aShaughnessy-style approach.

And this may be fine for younger children, but it would infantilize young adults at the college level. It seems to me that we must treat college freshman as adults, regardless of whether their skills are developed or their ideas fully formed. We cannot take a paternalistic view towards our freshman students. This is a common pitfall of class interaction. On the other hand, the research behind the Slant technique is worthy of consideration for older students as well as younger ones. “Toll and Levin are influenced by the writings of a psychology professor from the University of Pennsylvania, “writes Paul Tough in his New York Times article, “the author of a series of positive psychology....[he] promotes a technique he calls learned optimism...an essential part of the attitude they are trying to instill

in their students”(Tough 2). Interestingly, disciplines such as psychology, or anthropology, sociology, and even linguistics, seem to play an increasing part in understanding class issues that inhibit learning and teaching.

Clearly, class difference is complicated, as complicated in the classroom as it is in the “real” world, requiring many disciplines to understand it. It is not a problem that you can put a band-aid on, pick the right classroom text, implement the right procedures that will work every time. It is a complex set of circumstances, political, social, and cultural. And the academic is caught up in class issues as much as the student. The polarization of red states versus blue states, conservatives versus liberals, middle-class versus working-class, is in many ways the same binary. The more we see our differences as separating us from the “other”, the greater the divide becomes and the less we help each other. This extreme division in the country has not been so clear since the Civil War. We seem to have forgotten what binds us together as a people, the great democratic principles of individual liberty and the right to free speech, which should surely include some margin for creativity and difference in the act of self-expression.

Do working class students need help with grammar, sentence structure, and organization of ideas? Having tutored extensively, students from all walks of life, I think that is a given. However, the preoccupation with a fear of plagiarism has stagnated universities. Working-class students are culturally more accustomed to group dynamics and peer interaction. Peer work is, in my opinion, a valuable tool. Detailed teacher or tutor criticism is helpful and not a form of “writing the paper.” These are ideas that the working-class do not have trouble understanding. It is the academy that has trouble with writing as a group effort. Having published myself, I find this ludicrous. When one writes an article, for

instance, it is subject to extreme suggestions, and radical changes that are worked out between writer and editor. It is a false notion that writing is an entirely solitary achievement. The act of writing, the craft of it, can be taught and possibly should be taught the old-fashioned, Mina Shaughnessy way.

However, what students write about is a different matter. In *Is Teaching Still Possible: Writing, Meaning, and Higher Order Reasoning*, Ann Berthoff states that we must move from “a pedagogy of exhortation to a pedagogy of knowing”. She contends that: “discourse grows from inner dialogue...[and] because they make interpretation central... the two I consider most useful are perception and dialogue (317). She uses a journalistic heuristic approach, HDWDWW (How does who do what and why?) in order to elicit thought and generate meaning from her students. “Lead them to discover that scientists and lawyers and poets look and look again...our job is to devise sequences of assignments which encourage conscientization, the discovery of the mind in action “(319-20).

Coincidentally, John Dewey believed in the press as an instrument of change and in the beginning of his career, wrote extensively as a journalist. Despite general climate of suspicion of the media today, the immediacy of news reporting lends itself to political discussion that is inextricably linked to the lives of students and teachers alike. If we can resist the temptation to proselytize, examination of current events and writing from a journalistic perspective has a merit as way of teaching students to organize their thoughts and examine closely. It is also lends itself to sustained dialogue, discussion, in the classroom. Given that the struggles in the classroom are political, that class is inescapably present and political as well as social and cultural, drawing comparisons to business and government politics seems a reasonable, thought-provoking place to start.

I agree with Peter Elbow, who believes that good writing is a result of interest, passion. Some of my most successful assignments were when the students wrote about personal issues that troubled them. It is a mistake to think this generation has nothing serious on its mind. Over the course of the semester, I received many bad papers. But I also received a harrowing self-aware paper on self-mutilation, and another of one young woman's personal experience with abortion, a passionate documented essay on the poisonous chemical in the food supply by a young budding scientist, and several deeply-moving papers on family members, after a prolonged classroom discussion about what it means to be invisible to someone else. Perhaps it is our assignments that need to be more creative.

In terms of teaching a student to write well about something he cares little about, such as a novel he doesn't even like, something he will have to do throughout his academic career, I think the key may be teach the student to find relevance between the assigned text and his/her life. This involves discussion, and questions and more questions, without providing answers, which as academics, we usually think we have, even if we aren't handing out that information.

Most of all, we need to sit with them at their level as best we can despite a grading system and a position of authority. They look to us for guidance but we are not their parents, we are their teachers, and we should be in the classroom to learn *from* them not just teach *to* them. It is in the back and forth, the discussion, that we will better understand each other, forge respect and share a true democratic ideal. We need to give them voice, even though we may not like what they have to say. If they are thinking and expressing it, they are entitled to think differently than us, and possibly express their thoughts in ways that are untraditional. Writing is a fluid creative enterprise; there is room for experimentation. If we allow this

latitude, we may get great papers, because they will be written less from fear and more from a sense of freedom. On the other hand, they may disappoint us with conservative unchanged viewpoints, but as long as we are getting real writing, thoughts on a page, and not the opposite, words that mean nothing and are meant to only fulfill an assignment, anti-writing, and as long as they are genuinely engaged in the writing, then we have accomplished much.

In his autobiographical book, The Audacity of Hope, Barack Obama writes:

I think Democrats are wrong to run away from a debate about values, as wrong as those conservatives who see values only as a wedge to pry loose working-class voters from the Democratic base. It is the language of values that people use to map their world. It is what can inspire them to take action, and move them beyond their isolation...the standards and principles that most Americans deem important to their lives, and in the life of the country – should be the heart of our politics, the cornerstone of any meaningful debate about budgets and projects, regulations and policies (52-53).

Certainly, this holds true for education. Teaching composition and rhetoric at the college level is teaching the expression of free speech, personal liberty, the expansion of free thought – the essential American values. In that light, it is nothing short of a monumental obligation to create a microcosm of democratic principles that assume all members of a classroom have the right to participate or not, an opportunity to learn, an equal chance to voice their beliefs freely both in speech and through the power of writing. With the ability to write, to voice their beliefs and concerns, we give our students the means to have the courage of their convictions, to not be victims to those more powerful or more literate, those classes with a

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greater sense of entitlement. Free speech and the knowledge to use it well is the great equalizer.

