

A (RE)VISION OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOR INCLUSION

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of  
Texas State University-San Marcos  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

By

Manuel Agustin Piña, B.A.

San Marcos, Texas  
May 2013

A (RE)VISION OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOR INCLUSION

Committee Members Approved:

---

Rebecca Jackson, Chair

---

Octavio Pimentel

---

Deborah Balzhiser

Approved:

---

J. Michael Willoughby  
Dean of the Graduate College

**COPYRIGHT**

by

Manuel Agustin Piña

2013

## **FAIR USE AND AUTHOR'S PERMISSION STATEMENT**

### **Fair Use**

This work is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-533, section 107). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgement. Use of this material for financial gain without the author's express written permission is not allowed.

### **Duplication Permission**

As the copyright holder of this work I, Manuel A. Piña, authorize duplication of this work, in whole or in part, for educational or scholarly purposes only.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I want to thank all of my professors who helped make this thesis possible through their guidance, mentorship, and classroom instruction: Dr. Rebecca Jackson, Dr. Octavio Pimentel, Dr. Deborah Balzhiser, Dr. Jamie Mejia, and Dr. Nancy Wilson.

Most of all, I am especially grateful for my wife, Amy Elizabeth Piña. Without her patience, understanding and loving support, neither my graduate study nor this research project could have become a reality.

This manuscript was submitted on March 6, 2013.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
CHAPTER	
I. FRAMING THE RESEARCH .....	1
Identifying the Critical Teaching Project.....	1
Dominant Students within Critical Pedagogies .....	3
Research Outline .....	6
Research Limitations .....	8
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	10
Current-Traditional Pedagogies: Epistemology and Form .....	11
Expressivist Pedagogies: Epistemology and Form .....	12
Critical Pedagogies: Epistemology and Form.....	16
Critical Pedagogy: Paulo Freire’s <i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i> .....	17
Problem-Posing Education: Breaking Away from the Banking Model.....	21
Critical Models in Composition: Continued Expansion after Freire .....	25
Incompleteness in Critical Pedagogy .....	29
III. EXCLUSION AND OTHERNESS IN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY .....	32
The Social Self in Critical Pedagogy .....	32
Finding Critical Pedagogy’s “Other” .....	37
Cyclical Marginalization: Failing to Dialogue with the “Other” .....	44
Cyclical Marginalization Continued .....	47
Closing Clarifications .....	49
IV. TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF INCLUSION .....	54
Dual Dialogue: A Pedagogical Necessity .....	55
The Paradox of the Dominant Identity and Dialogue .....	56
Understanding the Nature of Dialogue: Lessons from bell hooks .....	59
Misplacing Dominant Identities: Lessons from Allen and Rossatto .....	62
Ways of Conceiving of Multiplicity in Identity .....	67
Dialogue between the Ontological and Epistemological Selves.....	69

Positioning the Dominant .....	75
V. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS.....	77
Critical Teaching: An Unfinished Project.....	78
Final Thoughts .....	80
WORKS CITED .....	82

## CHAPTER I

### FRAMING THE RESEARCH

“A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice *co-intentional* education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge.”

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

#### *Identifying the Critical Teaching Project*

As critical theory has continued to grow and adjust to accommodate the multiple, and ever shifting, theoretical and pedagogical foci in rhetoric and composition, its most basic tenet has weathered the changing disciplinary landscape with relatively little effacement: the advancement of transformative possibility through critical consciousness (Anzaldúa; Freire; Giroux; hooks; McLaren; Shor; Villanueva). Feminist theory, critical race theory, and class theory, for example, each represent a nuanced articulation of critical theory, and each hedge toward their own unique pedagogical concerns. The unifying stand that binds them, however, is a common commitment to improved societal equity through the development of critical awareness, albeit in various forms. Whatever shape it may take, teaching for critical consciousness involves asking students and teachers to jointly re-envision the world that surrounds and informs them; to work together to uncover and interrogate the hidden narratives that shape their lives and perspectives.



Yet critical teaching does not ask participants to interrogate dominant ideology<sup>1</sup> simply for the sake of examination alone nor does it entail the passive transfer of dogmatic knowledge from the expert teacher to the student receptacle. Instead, as theorist Henry Giroux posits in *On Critical Pedagogy*, “Critical pedagogy asserts that students can engage their own learning from a position of agency and in so doing can actively participate in narrating their identities through a culture of questioning that opens up a space of translation between the private and public while changing the forms of self- and social recognition” (14). In other words, critical pedagogy embodies democratic principles, in both form and function, by asking both teachers *and* students to become active co-participants in the radical transformation of their understanding of not only their world, but also their very selves, in meaningful ways through critical awareness, frequently with an eye toward promoting social justice and responsible citizenship. Ultimately, critical pedagogy is about enabling multiple forms of agency in education.

Although critical teaching is explicit in its commitment to societal transformation through altered consciousness, it is of paramount importance for the critical pedagogue to recognize that classroom participants are not only charged with critiquing the exterior world, they are also being asked to conduct a meaningful interior examination of their own selves. Put differently, the development of critical consciousness is a two-fold process: it requires participants to craft new perceptions of the world, representing a turn outward, as well as to focus the lens inward and experience themselves anew. As social

---

<sup>1</sup> Within the framework of this research project, I understand dominant ideology as representative of those large-scale social structures that grant unearned privilege to certain demographics of people. The terms “dominant students” and “students with dominant identities,” then, are used as umbrella expressions that encompass all those persons who benefit, either intentionally or otherwise, from global systems of hegemony. “The dominant,” therefore, *may* include, but is not limited to, the white student, the male student, the heterosexual student, the able-bodied student, and the upper-class student. At times I will use the term “dominant students” to refer to a specific demographic, say white students, but it is important to reiterate that dominant ideology can represent *multiple* categories of unearned privilege.

beings, students are asked to investigate how their actions might either counter or contribute to hegemonic ideology. The dual components of examination, the world and the self, cannot be divorced from each other if transformative consciousness is to be developed. A more in depth discussion surrounding the details of this dual examination will be argued for in the third chapter. For now, though, it needs only to be stated that the object under scrutiny in critical pedagogies is participants' social Selves.

### *Dominant Students within Critical Pedagogies*

This dual examination, reading both the world *and* one's position in it more critically, is no easy task for really anyone and can potentially stymie the development of critical consciousness as participants become resistant to challenges to the perceived natural order of the world, which concomitantly amounts to challenges of their very selves. Indeed, as Jennifer Trainor admits in her article, "'My Ancestors Didn't Own Slaves': Understanding White Talk About Race," asking white students to read and write about race is often "ineffective in combating such problems and, sometimes, even inadvertently fuels racist sentiments in White students" (144). In its most extreme form, then, critical teaching can actually produce participant resistance that runs directly counter to its intended goal of critical consciousness. As research conducted by Jennifer Trainor reveals, the risk of alienating students from critical agendas is especially pronounced in students who ascribe to dominant ideologies.

Trainor's research, which will be explained more fully in the chapters that follow, demonstrates that there are few subject positions available to the dominant student within the framework of critical pedagogies that actually enable them to re-imagine their world in useful and meaningful ways. To argue her case, Trainor draws portraits of two students

with dominant identities, Paul and Holly, and through interviews with these students she begins to unravel the complexity of critical teaching for students with dominant identities. In Paul's case, there was no subject position that he could occupy that would allow him to begin to craft an "antiracist white response to white-perpetuated historical injustices" (Trainor 645). In other words, in the critical classroom Paul's identity was attached solely to that of the dominant oppressor. Critical pedagogy for Paul then became a critique not of master narratives, but of Paul as an individual, which placed him ever on the defensive and extinguished the possibility for transformation (Trainor 643).

Conversely, Holly *was* able to read critical texts without feeling personally responsible for historical inequities, yet her disavowal of whiteness came at a price: she was able to read critical texts without personal culpability, yes, but she was also unable to translate those texts into meaningful action. As Trainor describes it, for Holly "nothing takes the place of the whiteness she shrugs off" (646). Critical pedagogy ultimately failed Holly since she was unable to experience the cognitive and social transformation that critical teaching strives to develop.

As an educational practice founded on the principle of enabling access and agency to the previously marginalized, the exclusion of dominant students (or any subset of students for that matter) from the development of critical consciousness represents a contradiction of terms for critical pedagogies. Moreover, I see inherent in all veins of critical pedagogy the potential to essentialize and pigeonhole dominant students into defeating subject positions. For example, how well do males receive a feminist pedagogy? Or if white students are unable to escape their privileged status as whites, how receptive would they be to a pedagogy that seeks to unseat that very racial privilege?

Perhaps the question is better asked: How transformative can a critical pedagogy really be for a dominant student, especially if that student is only allowed to occupy positions that are self-deprecating or “other-oriented?” Indeed, male students often take on defensive, and ultimately defeating, positions in feminist-oriented classrooms while white students are likewise resistant to challenges to their unearned racial privilege. These defensive subject positions taken by dominant students limit any potential for the transformation of their consciousness. Yet this begs the question, who should stand to benefit from the critical classroom, all students or only minorities? Moreover, how much traction can critical movements, like feminism and race theory, realistically hope to gain *without* the support from, at least *some*, of the dominant population?

Paulo Freire recognized the delicate balance required of liberatory education; he understood the pedagogical short-sightedness of classroom practices that simply “oppress” the oppressor. To this point he clearly argues, “If the goal of the oppressed is to become more fully human, they will not achieve their goal by merely reversing the terms of the contradiction, by simply changing roles” (*Oppressed* 38). For Freire, revolutionary, liberatory education was an act of humanizing its participants through the deepening of their consciousness. As such, the inability of dominant students to meaningfully partake in the process of re-imagining their perceptions of the world and their selves belies a tacit, however unintentional, dehumanizing aspect of critical pedagogies. Far from being exclusionary, critical teaching as articulated by Freire was not possible unless it was infused with love, thus “Because love is an act of courage, not fear, love is commitment to others” (*Oppressed* 70). Likewise, bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress* affirms that in her iteration of critical pedagogy, she tries to “share as much as possible the need for

critical thinkers to engage multiple locations, to address diverse standpoints, and allow us to gather knowledge fully and *inclusively* [emphasis added]” (91). Theorists like Freire and hooks speak to the transformative possibilities found in a critical pedagogy, yet as Trainor’s research reveals, this transformation is not necessarily made available to everyone. There is, in other words, a discernible distance between word and deed in critical teaching practice.

### *Research Outline*

In the chapters that follow, I will detail and expand upon the gap in research identified by scholars like Trainor, and will subsequently work to develop one potential way of imagining a bridge between dominant students and critical consciousness. The driving question behind this research revolves around the notion of inclusion. How, in other words, can critical pedagogies be re-imagined to be inclusive, and therefore transformative, for dominant students? This question is not meant to detract from the value or the position of the minority student in the critical classroom; likewise neither is it intended to function as a privileging of the dominant student. On the contrary, it is a question that is based on *equality* in the classroom, so that all students, not a select few, might stand to gain from the transformative possibilities found in critical pedagogies. For if critical pedagogies are earnest in their attempts to erode the hegemony of dominant discourses then they should not enact classroom practices that alienate some of the very identities that are meant to be transformed. Large-scale social change cannot, I argue, be predicated on exclusionary tactics; it is, at base, an inclusive endeavor. What is needed, therefore, is a nuanced (re)articulation of critical pedagogy within the discipline of composition, one that is premised on the notion of inclusion and that speaks to the

transformative potential in all students with special attention paid to an understanding of the dominant student's identity.

To accomplish this end, in chapter two I will first draw a comparative analysis between several composition instruction methods, to include current-traditional, expressivist, and critical pedagogies. This comparison will focus heavily on the epistemological differences that guide each of these pedagogies. Sketching out the paradigmatic distinctions between these three major approaches to instruction will serve primarily to illuminate the foundational elements of critical teaching and will furthermore demonstrate how both agency *and* inclusion are central to the success of critical pedagogies. Next, in chapter three I will develop the case for understanding critical teaching as a dual examination, as a critique of not only the external world but also an internal investigation of the student's own social positionality in their world. Within this theoretical framework, I will then use Jennifer Trainor's research on dominant students' reactions to critical pedagogies as a springboard to expand on the notion of exclusion. I will argue that some of the very pedagogical structures of critical teaching serve to perpetuate a cycle of exclusion for dominant students.

Having identified and deepened the gap between dominant students and critical teaching, I will then make a case for an altered understanding of the dominant student's identity that will facilitate inclusion. In chapter four I will appropriate and re-situate the notion of a split between the ontological self and the epistemological self as articulated by Elspeth Probyn in *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies*. I will argue that tapping into *both* sides of the dominant identity, the epistemological and the ontological, is necessary to create the pedagogical conditions that are conducive to

transformative consciousness, and concomitantly, inclusion in the critical teaching project. Although Min-Zhan Lu has offered a somewhat similar perspective on Probyn's work (*Reading* 346), I will deepen and extend the conversation by filtering Probyn's arguments through a nuanced understanding of the dominant student's identity within the critical teaching framework. In the concluding chapter I will make the case for a political reading of pedagogical choices. As sites of political contestation, I contend that the critical teaching project should never be considered complete or definitively settled. The inherent incompleteness of critical pedagogies therefore necessitates the continued development of place-based critiques of the practices and structures of critically-minded teaching.

#### *Research Limitations*

It is prudent, I believe, to acknowledge the limitations and expectations of this research project. What this research will *not* offer is any generalizable, or perhaps even definitive, conclusions to the issue at hand. My expectation is not to arrive at a master strategy for inclusive efforts on behalf of the dominant student, as this would contradict the very impetus behind critical teaching. Accompanying a prescriptive response is a tacit understanding of students in the critical classroom as pedagogical objects, persons to be handled and manipulated into conforming to preconceived educational molds. As objects, students lose their ability to act as agents of their own education and transformation.

Therefore, it is necessary at all costs to avoid positioning students as passive recipients of pedagogy, and instead enact a theory of teaching that maintains their authority in the classroom. This is an aspect of critical research and teaching that, more than a matter of mere classroom practicality, reaches down to the very moral roots of

critical pedagogies. In *Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire argues that, “What is ethically required of progressive educators is that, consistent with their democratic dream, they respect the educands, and therefore never manipulate them” (80). Following this ethical requirement, it is not my intention to manipulate dominant students into fitting into some prescriptive ideal for inclusion. Instead, I want to offer a (re)vision of how *critical pedagogies* have traditionally (mis)understood and approached the dominant identity.

In other words, the onus is not on dominant students to conform to critical teaching standards; conversely, it falls to critical pedagogies to find ways to include dominant students *without* treating them as pedagogical objects. As a response to this call, I have used descriptive arguments as a means to maintain the authority and agency of dominant students while simultaneously offering a revision of how critical teaching perceives such students. The “limitation” in this response is that it will not result in concrete material answers to the problem of inclusion. However, as I will further explain at the conclusion of chapter four, universal, prescriptive answers do not fall within the purview of critical theorizing. Such answers are best formulated and enacted at a local level. My expectation here, then, is to provide a means for imagining those place-based responses as an actual possibility and to demonstrate the need for continued self-critique in critical pedagogies.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

(Note: I am aware that the following review of the literature as it pertains to composition pedagogy is presented in an overly brief and linear form. This reductive presentation of a few of the more prominent instructional approaches within composition history certainly does not do justice to the rich, recursive realities and blurred boundaries between composition's disciplinary paradigms. This linear presentation is used instead only to highlight some of the more glaring paradigmatic differences in epistemology and the relevance they concomitantly bring to bear in the classroom in a discipline with an extended and complicated history).

Since their earliest articulations, significant epistemological differences have distinguished critical from current-traditional and expressivist writing theories in the composition classroom. These epistemologies necessarily inform and shape the various forms the writing classroom can take and also play a determining role in the content covered therein. Therefore, in order to more fully understand the paradigmatic differences in composition it is important to first understand the tacit perceptions about meaning-making that underwrite the various modes of educational instruction. These differences will serve as a frame for structuring an understanding of critical pedagogy as well as provide points of reference for a subsequent critique of critical teaching.

*Current-Traditional Pedagogies: Epistemology and Form*

The current-traditional model of writing instruction is informed by a positivist understanding of meaning-making. Brian Huot describes the positivist epistemology cogently as he writes that “Positivist reality assumes that student ability in writing, as in anything else, is a fixed, consistent, and acontextual human trait” (83). Therefore, in this pedagogical approach, writing skills and academic language are perceived to be already established and pre-ordained and need simply to be transferred from the expert teacher to the passive student. The underlying assumptions are that knowledge is external, exists a priori, and that the teacher, having already attained knowledge, functions in the classroom to disseminate information down to students. In other words, there is no construction, no making of knowledge between and among teachers and students; knowledge only changes hands, never itself changes. This method of instruction is otherwise known as the “banking” model where education is limited to “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire 53). Importantly, implicit in this model of instruction is an understanding of language as merely a value-neutral medium through which knowledge is passed; words in and of themselves are not classed, cultured, raced, or gendered. In the positivist tradition since knowledge is considered to be acontextual and universal, “any question of inequality or bias or vested interests to favor a specific community or interest group would be treated as irrelevant” (Canagarajah 54). This element of the positivist model of meaning-making is noteworthy because it delimits what is, and perhaps more importantly what is *not*, considered to be appropriate instruction material.

The positivist underpinnings of the current-traditional approach to writing instruction are significant because: 1) they disavow the existence of a hegemonic, privileged over-class, and 2) they work to structure the composition classroom so as to forward a perception of neutrality in language; since knowledge is perceived to be static and passive, students need only to sit and wait to be filled with the requisite knowledge and skills possessed by the teacher. Current-traditional pedagogies, then, mirror this understanding of language by presenting composition students with a fixed set of predetermined, seemingly neutral, skills they are required to master, frequently through rote practice and repetition. Instruction is therefore focused primarily on the acquisition of mechanical writing skills, such as grammatical correctness and rule memorization (Connors 116). Since its epistemology denies gender, class, and racial bias in language and therefore also denies the existence of hegemonic knowledge bases, this model of composition instruction is necessarily bereft of any such topics as classroom content. Teaching instead primarily takes the form of skill transmission with a focus on student mastery of a pre-determined canon of knowledge. Current-traditional models of writing instruction, then, underscore an understanding of neutrality and universality as they pertain to both knowledge and the acquisition of writing skills, resulting in a pedagogical form that is often limited to skill-and-drill exercises.

### *Expressivist Pedagogies: Epistemology and Form*

Expressivist pedagogies, while multiple in their articulations (Fulkerson 667), all demonstrate a move away from external skill acquisition and focus instead on developing the internal abilities of the student writer. Erika Lindemann assesses the majority of expressivist pedagogies well by observing that “The student writer has a self to discover,

some truth to express, a unique language and voice,” and that “The teacher in a process-centered [expressivist] course does not see himself as an expert... Instead, he considers himself a more experienced, confident writer, giving students permission to reflect self-consciously on their composing” (293). In other words, an expressivist pedagogy differs from the current-traditional in that the classroom structure shifts from the *transfer* of proper writing conventions and techniques to the *development* of the writer’s inner “voice,” a deepening of students’ personal knowledge. Yet despite this pedagogical divergence, there is some significant epistemological common ground between these two approaches to composition instruction.

Despite their development in opposition to current-traditional practices in the composition classroom (Burnham 23), expressivist theories of writing instruction share with the current-traditional a common understanding about the pre-existing and *socially* neutral nature of knowledge and meaning. That is to say, while expressivism moves beyond the skill-and-drill routines common to current-traditional practices, it continues to perceive language and writing skills as still existing a priori; the difference being that they are understood to be *internal* to the writer. While the location of language and writing skills are contextual in as much as they are located within individuals, a significant move away from the current-traditional, expressivism maintains their value-neutral and pre-existing attributes. Indeed, the epistemology guiding Peter Elbow’s seminal essay “The Doubting Game and the Believing Game-An Analysis of Intellectual Enterprise,” which paved the way for expressivist theories of rhetoric and writing instruction, forwards a view of language as essentially unbiased in-and-of itself. Elbow also posits that while it may *seem* as though language acts as a transfer of knowledge,

there is, in fact, no acquisition of new knowledge; there is only the re-ordering of pieces of knowledge that already existed within the individual. To quote Elbow at length:

“...words cannot *contain* meaning. Only people have meaning. Words can only have meaning *attributed to them by people*. The listener can never get any meaning out of a word he did not put in it. Language can only consist of set of directions for building meaning *out of one’s own head* [emphasis in original]” (151-2).

In other words, meaning is made through the assembly of already-in-place pieces internal to the writer; words only serve as a roadmap of *how* to assemble those pieces. Moreover, the words, and their assembly, are understood to gain value only once they are possessed and processed by individuals; un-possessed words maintain their neutrality. Therefore, expressivist writing instruction places a heavy emphasis on the *individual* coming to her own “voice.”

This is not, however, to completely discount or negate the social aspect of language. Elbow is clear that the social does indeed play a significant role in expressivist models of meaning-making. He admits that, “though words in ordinary language *can* mean anything, they only *do* mean what the speech community lets them mean at that moment [emphasis in original]” (154). In other words, while meaning-making is ultimately an individual endeavor, the rules for understanding language are socially determined. However, it is important to note also that the social is significant only in that it provides a consensus that allows the individual to locate language within her own self. Indeed, in *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow is careful not to portray the writer as the isolated, solitary genius. Instead, Elbow repeatedly plays up the importance of community in expressivist writing pedagogy by stating, “A group is the engine of the believing game” (xxv) and “The teacherless class and the believing game are completely undermined if one tries to function solo” (xxvii). Yet the function of the social in

expressivism can be critiqued for being limited in its service to the individual. In other words, the social aspects of language are pertinent to writing instruction only in that they provide the means for individuals to “grow” and “cook” their writing internally, to use Elbow’s metaphor. James Berlin offers a similar criticism of this very aspect of expressivism by saying, “While the reality of the material, the social, and the linguistic are never denied, they are considered significant only insofar as they serve the needs of the individual” (484). For Berlin, then, expressivism is restricted in its understanding of the social aspects of language since the social is understood only in terms of how it is manipulated and applied to and by the *individual*. Language and meaning are not socially constructed between persons, individuals only use language in a way that either conforms to or violates the norms set by various speech communities.

These perceptions of language and knowledge concomitantly lead to expressivist classroom practices that underscore and reinforce the notions of neutrality and pre-existence as they pertain to language and writing skills. Classroom structure and content converge on the personal, and often focus on writers “coming to voice” and self-expression. In analyzing critiques of expressivism, Chris Burnham writes that “expressivism’s concern with the individual and authentic voice directs students away from social and political problems in the material world” (28). By placing such a heavy focus on the development of individual “voice,” expressivist classrooms’ contents naturally preclude any social topics. This criticism exposes vestiges of positivist influences in expressivist pedagogy since it often does ignore the socially constructed, and potentially hegemonic, aspects of language and knowledge in favor of a more personal and socially neutral perception.

*Critical Pedagogies: Epistemology and Form*

Contrary to current-traditional and expressivist models of meaning-making, foundational to critical theory is a postmodern understanding that language and knowledge are contextually situated *and* constructed (Canagarajah 54-6). This epistemological base belies the value-laden nature of not only language and knowledge, but also the ways in which that knowledge is created, privileged and reproduced. Unlike models of composition instruction guided by positivist perceptions, which foster passive compliance or a narrow focus on the individual only, postmodernism creates a much broader content base and space in which educators and theorists can begin to critique and interrogate the previously unquestionable, that which was assumed to be objective and natural. “Within composition studies,” writes Elizabeth Flynn, “researchers and theorists with a postmodern orientation have questioned the neutrality and objectivity of the researcher, writer, or teacher and have attempted to determine what a politicized approach to composition might be” (540). If knowledge and language can no longer be considered immutable, objective universals, they become available to be held up to examination to uncover not only how they might be constructed, but also who potentially benefits from their privileging. Put differently, language, knowledge bases, writers, and readers all become subject to critical interrogation. In fact, critical theory posits that knowledge production, language, and educational practice never were actually neutral or ahistorical; they were always implicated in the reproduction and maintenance of some vested cultural values within a specific historical context (Hardin 28; Villanueva 85-6). Hence, this signifies a major paradigm shift in composition’s epistemological

perspective: from the objective pre-existence to contextual creation, from inner development to social construction.

Likewise this shift in guiding perspective also signals a major change in the possible forms composition instruction might take as well as an expansion of what is considered to be legitimate instructional content. Following a postmodern perspective, the content covered in the composition classroom is not necessarily restricted to mastery of a set of “correct” writing conventions or the finding of an inner “voice;” instead, the very structures surrounding written convention become available for investigation. In other words, depending on the application (for each critical classroom responds to the historical and material exigencies surrounding it), the critical teacher might instruct students on specific grammar rules, but she would also problematize those same written conventions by having students interrogate them for privilege and bias. Student might learn not only the form and application of normative written conventions but also would learn to uncover the hidden narratives that surround or are a part of them.

*Critical Pedagogy: Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

As the postmodern perspective gained traction in educational fields it provided the theoretical framework necessary to open the previously unquestionable up to critical investigation. Part of this expansion involved rethinking the seemingly “natural” and privileged status ascribed positivist models of instruction and probing them for hidden agendas and narratives. As they began to apply postmodern critiques to models of instruction that employed what Freire termed “banking” education, early critical theorists perceived that an elite ideological group, otherwise termed the “dominant,” was cultivating significant and unequal benefits. Nor were these benefits the elite enjoyed



benign, as they appeared to co-opt and oppress the larger portion of the population into fulfilling the desires of the select few through their educational methodology. Out of the realization that the many were being ideologically pressed into serving the interests of the few came the first manifestations of critical theories and their subsequent pedagogies. Instrumental in the articulation and development of these critical theories of education was teacher and theorist Paulo Freire.

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* stands as the "ur text" for critical theory and pedagogy (George 93). In it, Freire argues against the positivistic banking model of teaching, which works to secure the material and ideological supremacy of and for the elite, in favor of a more radical, dialogic model of education, one that works to undo the hierarchical and hegemonic apparatuses that serve to oppress. Freire's early work develops a form of literacy instruction wherein "people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation [emphasis in original]" (64). So teaching, or *critical* teaching rather, cannot be limited to current-traditional styles of skill-and-drill exercises or even expressivist models of discovering voice. The style of teaching adopted from Freire therefore offers a much more socially conscious and expanded understanding of education than previous models of instruction. Freire's pedagogical vision also highlights how a postmodern epistemology creates the potential for a much broader content base in instruction. Since critical theory is guided by a model of meaning-making that does not affirm the order of the world as inherently natural and above questioning, the world itself necessarily becomes subject to investigation. Unlike positivist models of

instruction where students need only to “read the word,” the postmodern perspective allows critical theories to expand instructional material to include both “words” and “worlds.” Yet of importance is also how the implications of Freire’s pedagogy reach beyond content and stretch into educational purpose. Whereas in say a current-traditional instructional model the goal of teaching is to *reproduce* existing knowledge, critical education interrogates the (re)production of knowledge and is therefore an exercise not in the *amassment* of pre-existing knowledge but in *transformation* of how that knowledge is perceived, understood, and accepted.

Indeed, the move away from transfer of knowledge to transformation represents a significant shift in the very impetus guiding educational practice. For Freire, a hidden undercurrent of hegemony and oppression runs beneath traditional banking models of education. He sees their pedagogical *raison d’etre* as the reinforcement and sustainment of the status quo, which, not coincidentally, favors the cultural and material interests of the elite. To quote Freire directly, “The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have their world revealed nor to see it transformed” (54). The oppressive elite, in an attempt to secure their privilege, rely not only on positivist notions that affirm the “natural” order of their status, but they also rest on pedagogies that ensure continued transfer of that acceptance to others. In the Freireian view, traditional banking pedagogies provide the necessary cultural apparatus to ensure the elites remain in power since students are pigeon-holed into passive, unquestioning receptacles. The end-goal of education is only transference. Freire’s critical theories of

education challenge the notion of education as the mere transferal of information from teacher to student (60) and, in doing so, alter the guiding purposes of teaching.

In opposition to the banking models of education, Freire offers what he terms “problem-posing” education. The problem-posing model represents a significant break from other pedagogies in that it does not seek to fill eagerly waiting students up with a predetermined set of knowledge, but instead works to bring students, teachers, and their world into a critically-minded dialogue with each other. The ends of education become cognition and consciousness as opposed to memorization and acceptance. Freire describes the differences between traditional and critical pedagogies in this way:

“Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality [emphasis in original]” (62).

So for Freire, pedagogy is primarily concerned with bringing those in the classroom into a critical conversation with each other, themselves, and their historical exigencies. It is important to realize also that the critical teaching project is not intended to function as a re-packaged articulation of banking style pedagogies. By this I mean that Freire is not attempting to sell the educational system yet another neatly organized set of guidelines for teaching; *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* does *not* represent a “how-to” manual for teachers. Instead, “problem-posing” education is a system that works to develop “critical consciousness-the ability to define, to analyze, to problematize the economic, political, and cultural forces that shape” students’ and teachers’ lives (George 93). Freire’s vision is about bringing about transformative consciousness through dialogue, not universally applicable strategies for transferring information. Yet in order for this vision to come to

fruition Freire concedes that several pedagogical contradictions common to banking educational models must be resolved.

*Problem-Posing Education: Breaking Away from the Banking Model*

For “problem-posing” teaching to achieve its goal of transformative consciousness, both teachers and students *must* break from their traditional banking roles in the classroom in order that they might interrogate and re-create knowledge jointly, with *all* participants acting as both teachers and students (53). By this, Freire is referring specifically to the roles of the teacher as the depositor and the student as the receptacle. These roles are confining in that they organize the classroom into a rigid hierarchy with the teacher firmly in control of all aspects of the classroom. In fact, the power differential created by the limited roles traditionally assigned to teachers and students forms the scaffolding from which the entire concept of banking education is predicated; the hierarchy it creates is essential to the reproductive nature of banking-style education. What better way to control the content and maintain a privileged knowledge base than to strip students of power? Freire argues trenchantly that “To resolve the teacher-student contradiction, to exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of student among students would be to undermine the power of the oppression and serve the cause of liberation” (56). Freire acknowledges that assignment of the teacher as the sole purveyor of knowledge creates an unequal and ultimately defeating hierarchy for teaching that seeks to cultivate critical consciousness. This is why “problem-posing” education *must* start with the dissolution of the typical hierarchies; teachers and students must both learn to occupy multiple positions in the classroom. Everyone must become “jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire 61). Essential to critical

pedagogy is the notion that students can no longer be viewed as empty, waiting receptacles, they must take an active role in their own education. In “Problem-Posing Education,” Nina Wallerstein corroborates this shift in student positionality central to Freireian pedagogy by stating that “The learner is not an empty vessel to be filled by the teacher, nor an object of education...Learners enter into the process of learning not by acquiring facts, but by constructing their reality in social exchanges with others” (34). So the first contradiction that must be resolved if critical pedagogy is to achieve transformative consciousness is the re-positioning of students as valuable, active participants in the educational process.

As the teacher-student hierarchy is resolved and students emerge with agency and authority, the typical lecture-style of banking education must necessarily be replaced with classroom interactions that reflect and affirm the validity of students’ empowered positions. Instead of passive receivers of pre-existing knowledge, students are positioned active agents, and this authority comes endowed with the responsibility to take part in the knowledge-making process. Therefore, students cannot simply listen to a lecture or turn inward to discover their own voice in the critical classroom. They must instead engage in critical dialogue with each other and the world. The shift to dialogic classroom interactions is of vital importance to the critical teaching project. Freire leaves no room for doubt of this when he states “If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity” (69). Critical pedagogies cannot function without the use of dialogic classroom interactions between and among teachers and students. Not incidentally, the resolution of the teacher-student

contradiction and the concomitant implementation of classroom dialogue lead to another aspect of traditional pedagogy that must be addressed if the critical teaching project is to reach its goal of transformative consciousness: the location, or starting point, for classroom content.

Since they are based on a positivist epistemology, banking-style pedagogies necessarily remove students' social realities from course content. By this I mean to say that in the banking model of education students are not granted any real agency in terms of naming and examining knowledge bases. Students are only either served up a set of external, pre-ordained knowledge that they are required to master as in current-traditional models, or they are engaged in learning how to assemble pieces of knowledge that existed within them a priori as in expressivist pedagogies. In either scenario, the role that the students play in the formation of their knowledge is largely ignored. In Freireian terms, students are considered to simply be "in" the world, not "with" the world. However, Freire's resolution of the teacher-student contradiction necessitates that students take an active role in examining their reality, and such an active role requires that students' social realities and exigencies must take on a more central role in course content. Indeed, Freire believes that "The starting point of organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situations, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (76). In other words, the path to critical consciousness begins with the students' own social realities. This point *cannot* be stressed enough: critical pedagogies *must* seriously consider and converse with students' social situations. Freire drives this position home when he states:

"It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about

their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of “banking” or preaching in the desert” (77).

Critical pedagogy, as articulated by Freire, is concerned primarily with teaching students to read the “word” *and* read the “world;” it is about fostering a critical perception of the world, about raising awareness and consciousness about the realities that surround, shape, and inform us. How can this realistically be achieved if the realities of students are ignored and teachers operate with the intent of instilling their views on students? How can students stripped of agency possibly engage in meaningful and genuine critical thinking? Freire argues they cannot; he asserts that transformative consciousness through education is achievable only through mutual respect and dialogue between teachers, students, and their historical locations (69). The intersections of these three players form the basis of the content in Freire’s articulation of the critical teaching project.

It is important here to caution against an overly reductive reading of Freire’s work as it pertains to student agency and involvement in the development of content in the critical classroom. While Freire *does* argue for a “student-centered” approach to teaching, he is careful not to conflate student “identity” with student “experience.” In other words, while critical teaching must begin with an earnest acknowledgement of students’ historical locations if they are to purposefully interrogate them, it does not necessitate that the classroom content indulge in an “overdose of experiential celebration...[which] exoticizes discussing lived experiences as a process of coming to voice” (“Dialogue” 381). By design, critical teaching is born of, and therefore must begin with, the historical exigencies and situations surrounding students’ lives; but this does not mean that students’ lived experiences form the crux of critical pedagogy. It only means that if

critical teaching hopes to achieve transformative, critical consciousness, the legitimacy of students' perspectives and positionality must be acknowledged. In *Empowering Education*, Ira Shor acknowledges that critical teaching does begin with what students bring with them to class (44). Likewise, Wallerstein also argues that much of the content and structure of critical teaching comes from students' lives (34). But, again, the acknowledgement that critical pedagogy emerges from students' (and teachers' and schools') historical locations should not be confused with a privileging, or even focus on, concrete experience. It *begins* with student agency, yes, but critical teaching is not *about* student experience. It is about a critical engagement with the historical setting surrounding students, which, incidentally, cannot be conducted without honoring student identity and location. Shor corroborates the Freireian idea of promoting student agency and identity when he states that problem-posing education "frontloads student thought and backloads teacher commentary" (*Empowering* 147). Unlike the banking style of education where student identity was dismissed as irrelevant or denied out-right, Freire's articulation of critical pedagogy is operable only when student identity and situation are seen as legitimate starting points for engaged dialogue.

*Critical Models in Composition: Continued Expansion after Freire*

Although *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published over forty years ago and focused primarily on issues related to the oppression of peasants in Brazil, it laid the groundwork for critical theory to expand outward into other educational arenas. Freire's work grew, and continues, to inform various other areas of critical concern in rhetoric and composition, such as feminist, class, and race theories. Writing in 2010, contemporary critical theorist bell hooks heralds the continued relevance of Freire's work for current



articulations of critical pedagogy. She argues that while *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was never intended to function as a universally applicable method for critical teaching, the scaffolding that it built continues to function as a guide for progressive educators working to redefine teaching in liberatory and transformative ways (*Teaching Critical Thinking* 38). For example, while Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands: La Frontera* stands most obviously as a cultural and feminist critique of hegemonic language practices in America, it draws heavily on the principle of heightened awareness and consciousness that is foundational to critical theory developed by Freire. In detailing how the modern *mestiza* can overcome cultural, masculine and linguistic hegemony, Anzaldua makes repeated reference to creating a new consciousness, one capable of paradigm breaking. The new *mestiza*, she argues, "reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women, and queers" (104). While perhaps not readily obvious, undergirding Anzaldua's claims is a belief in the transformative potentiality that can be achieved via critical consciousness. Anzaldua also draws apparent inspiration from Freireian critical theory when she writes that, "At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once, at once see through serpent and eagle eyes" (101). Her argument will bear relevance in the chapters that follow, but for now it is important only to note that Anzaldua appears to follow Freire's notion that a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, sometimes contradictory, must be granted legitimacy if critical consciousness and transformation is to be achieved.

Likewise, Ira Shor has argued extensively about the need to raise the profile of social class issues in the educational system. His blistering, class-based interrogation of the community and vocational college system in the U.S, while certainly nuanced, is formed around the principles basic to Freire's notion of critical theory. In *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, Shor argues that, contrary to popular belief, one of America's "unacknowledged realities is that mass higher education is the largest warehouse in America. Surplus labor is stored there and regimented" (6). Transplanting the Freireian model of critical teaching, Shor finds that the most effective means for combating the storage system of higher education that has become culturally engrained in Americans is to develop a teaching model that "examines familiar systems in an unfamiliar way," which enables "transcendent changes [to] become possible" (93). Much like Freire argues about the normalizing, oppressive function of the banking style of education, Shor contends that the general populace has been conditioned to accept as natural the oppressive aspects tacitly attached to vocational schooling and community colleges. He posits that the primary means to combat oppressive "false consciousness" fed to the working class is through a liberatory teaching ideology that forwards critical thinking and prepares students to become their own agents in the creation of a democratic culture (48). Freire's influence in Shor's work could not be more obvious, as Shor makes repeated reference to the ideas presented in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Again, this pedagogical approach, while focused primarily on the idea of class oppression in higher education, centers on promoting a heightened level of critical awareness in students.

The same focus can be found in Victor Villanueva's scathing critique of the racial and class hegemony inherent to the twin American educational myths of meritocracy and

rugged individualism in his seminal work *Bootstraps*. While admittedly more tempered than some of his contemporaries, particularly Peter McLaren, Villanueva's arguments against and suggested remedies for the failures of the educational system are framed well within the realm of Freire's critical theory. For Villanueva, the ultimate goal of education should be to expose students to "differences and similarities within the literacy conventions they have to contend with, to know the traditional norms while also appraising them, looking at the norms critically" (100). Put differently, teaching can counter hegemony through a dialogic, critical examination of societal discourses, both dominant and minority. Villanueva's implementation of critical theory is no doubt nuanced and distinct from other articulations, especially by its unique use of narrative form, but underwriting it is an objective common all forms of critical theory: transformative possibility through the development of critical consciousness.

All of these pedagogies, while niched and unique each in their own right, exemplify the wildly divergent trajectories that critical pedagogy has the potential to embody. Yet despite their differences, there is a tie that binds them: a belief that education is more than depositing; that despite what the content focus is, teaching is about students transforming their minds and lives through critical consciousness. Critical teaching is more of an ideology, a belief in the transformative possibility in education, than a particular style or teaching method; its historical roots and design resist a singular definition. McLaren trenchantly assesses that critical pedagogy cannot be pinned down as one specific set of classroom practices or foci; it is a mass conglomerate that is comprised of a multiplicity of pedagogical foci with a unifying goal. McLaren posits that "Critical pedagogy does not, however, constitute a homogenous set of ideas. It is more accurate to

say that critical theorists are united in their *objective*: to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices” (186). So while critical pedagogies may take varied and nuanced forms, they all are bound by their shared commitment to the transformative potential found in teaching for critical consciousness.

### *Incompleteness in Critical Pedagogy*

Yet a commitment to the deepening of student consciousness is not the only thread common to critical pedagogies. From *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* onward there has been little theorization, or even consideration, of the dominant students’ place in the critical classroom, which is contradictory given the dialogic approach to teaching often taken in critical pedagogies. As mentioned previously, Freire’s vision for a liberatory pedagogy is predicated on the dissolution of the traditional power hierarchies between teachers and students. Freire theorized that “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (61). This is not to say, however, that a critical teacher should relinquish all culpability for her class, which would certainly be irresponsible and counterproductive. Indeed, one of the cornerstones of Freireian theory is that the classroom is *never* ideologically neutral (Wallerstein 33); teachers cannot absolve themselves of authority nor can they be fully non-directive in structuring the classroom. However, Freire is careful to draw a distinction between authority and authoritarianism. Teachers can maintain a level of authority in the critical classroom by “helping learners get involved in planning education, helping them create the critical capacity to consider and participate in the direction and dreams of education, rather than following blindly” (“Dialogue” 379).

That is to say, again, that in classroom committed to critical consciousness, teachers and students bear joint responsibility for, and authority in, the creation of the learning process.

For “minority” students, such as the peasantry Freire was originally writing about, understanding and articulating a position of authority in the critical classroom was relatively unambiguous since they had little difficulty identifying their oppressors: their material conditions positioned them in clear opposition to the dominant in painfully obvious ways. (This is not to say that identifying and naming personal instances of oppression is necessarily an easy or comfortable task for those students whose experiences are grounded in subjugation, only that class lines between the “have’s” and the “have not’s” were clearly drawn in 1970’s Brazil). The oppressed were the ones who necessarily *had* to take an active role in their own liberation, and the liberation of society at large, through *conscientizacao*. Indeed, Freire believed that racial changes to systems of oppression and hegemony could only be brought about through the oppressed, since the oppressors would never willingly participate in the dismantling of their privilege. “It is only the oppressed, who by freeing themselves,” Freire postulates, “can free their oppressors. The latter, as an oppressive class, can neither free others nor themselves” (38); hence the need for students to take an active role in their education and for critical teachers to acknowledge the validity of students’ identities. Yet here also, during the initial formation of critical theory, is evidence of a perceived disregard for the subject positions held by, and available to, dominant students. Since dominant students could not possibly take an active role in the transformation of oppression, at least according to the structure of critical teaching as articulated by critical theorists like Freire, the subject

positions available to them became a moot point. Their transformation could *only* be brought about through the efforts of the oppressed; therefore the minority subject positions become *the* focal point of Freire's theorization of education for critical consciousness and the subject positions of the majority student are lost. This lack of concern for majority subject positions represents a measure of incompleteness and exclusion in the critical teaching project. For while the battle lines between oppressed and oppressor were perhaps more clearly drawn for the audience Freire was initially writing for, the postmodern understanding of the fragmented and multiple subject positions that all students, minority and majority alike, requires that no student identity be de-legitimized or marginalized if critical pedagogy is sincere in its effort to bring about transformative consciousness. The next chapter will provide a detailed investigation of the lack of theorization and marginalization of certain identities in the critical classroom, and how their exclusion is both contradictory and limiting for the critical teaching project.

## CHAPTER III

### EXCLUSION AND OTHERNESS IN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

“It is necessary that I open myself to knowledge and refuse to isolate myself within the circle of my own truth or reject all that is different from it or from me.”

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*

#### *The Social Self in Critical Pedagogy*

Irrespective of the content focus (e.g. racial, class, gender, sexuality, disability or issues of “difference”), critical teaching is, at its most basic, an examination of the intersections of persons and their surrounding historical exigencies; Freire’s educational theories fundamentally changed the impetus behind teaching from a passive *pouring in* to a questioning *investigation of* knowledge and information. The goal of education became not transfer of knowledge, but rather the transformation of social structures of inequality and hegemony. His work shows how, as active co-participants empowered with agency and legitimacy, students and teachers might probe existing knowledge bases and cultural power structures in an effort to promote social justice and come to a more meaningful understanding of the world. Yet it is important to realize that this critical investigation is not an endeavor external to or separate from students’ identities and social selves; it is simultaneously an examination of their world *and* their position in it. Yes, critical teaching does turn the lens outward, interrogating cultural practices for a guiding undercurrent of hegemonic ideology and systemic oppression. However, central to the

premise of fostering critical consciousness is the notion that students (and teachers) must concurrently examine their *own* positionality and implication in their histories. After all, people exist because they are in relationship with the world and with each other. Indeed, critical theories of education are founded on the relational aspects between people and their worlds. In his essay “Education as the Practice of Freedom,” Freire builds his articulation of critical education around the assumption that “Existence is a dynamic concept, implying eternal dialogue between man and man, between man and world, between man and his Creator. It is this dialogue which makes of man an historical being” (14). Disregarding the obvious masculine tilt, Freire’s point is clear: persons cannot escape their social selves; it is the social that constitutes us as people. Therefore, any critical examination of the world would be incomplete without incorporating the social relationships between and among people and their historical subjectivities.

The previous chapter established that the subject positions and identities of students *must* be granted agency and legitimized for critical teaching to realistically work toward liberation and transformation, but along with this empowerment and authority comes the responsibility to examine not only the external world but also one’s place in it. An interrogation of the external world abstracted and separate from students’ social positionality amounts to little more than a pedagogical façade, a false consciousness. For to examine the surrounding world without understanding the self’s place in it is to diminish the very agency necessary to arrive at a heightened consciousness. Students and teachers cannot engage in a critical examination of the world from a position of authority while simultaneously abdicating their place in it. Freire is explicit in this matter when he states, “I must re-emphasize that the generative theme cannot be found in people,



divorced from reality; nor yet in reality divorced from people; much less in ‘no-man’s land.’ It can only be apprehended in human-world relationship” (*Oppressed* 87). Put differently: the world cannot be understood without the people in it, and likewise people cannot be considered apart from their world; to deny the human-world relationship is to deny one’s own agency. This epistemological underpinning also points to the understanding that the intersections of students’ social identities must serve as the starting point for pedagogical content in the critical classroom. Henry Giroux offers a similar perspective in *Teachers as Intellectuals* as he argues that critical teaching finds its beginnings in “individuals and groups in their various cultural, class, racial, historical, and gender settings, along with the particularity of their diverse problems, hopes and dreams” (128). The pedagogical “stuff” of critical content cannot be found external to student identities or their lived experiences, only within them. So in the critical classroom, the critical lens is projected not only outward but simultaneously inward, a critique of the world and the people that constitute it. Therefore, critical pedagogy requires that students (and teachers) learn how to perceive themselves differently, to investigate how their actions, languages, and places in the world might counter or contribute to hegemonic discourses. The object of scrutiny, then, becomes not just external exigencies and discourses, but also the social Self.

This dual examination, reading both the world *and* one’s social position in it more critically, can certainly be a challenging endeavor, but it is a necessary one for contained within it is the possibility for transformation. Yet it also harbors the potential to stymie the development of critical consciousness as students can become resistant to challenges to the perceived natural order of the world, which, when understood in a reductive, one-

dimensional manner, concomitantly amounts to challenges of their very selves. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell Hooks admits that the consideration of new perspectives found in critical teaching can have adverse effects on students; her experience as a critical educator has shown her that “this type of learning process is very hard; it’s painful and troubling” (153). In other words, the new, critically-minded perceptions of their social Selves that students craft in the critical classroom can potentially be self-damaging and therefore difficult to accept. As an obvious example, consider the position of the affluent White male student in the critical classroom. Wherever the critical lens is focused for this student, be it gender issues, class issues, or racial issues, this student is seemingly implicated in almost all systems of hegemony *as* the oppressor. How could this student’s realization that his actions, whether intentional or otherwise, directly contribute to the domination of others be anything other than “painful and troubling?” How receptive, then, can he realistically be expected to be to a pedagogy wherein he finds that he is associated with the very sources of, or perhaps that he is even the very reason for, social inequity?

Even for non-dominant students the critical teaching project can be a difficult process. Take, for example, the working class, immigrant student, a student who should, ostensibly, be more receptive to critical teaching than dominant students since they have likely been targeted by systems of hegemony. As the oppressed, their experiences *should* hedge them toward a more critical perception of the world, yet this is not always the case as David Seitz chronicles in *Who can afford critical consciousness?* Seitz acutely notes that for working class immigrant students, “the critique of dominant ideologies, or the extension of that critique to their social worlds outside college, may be too uncomfortable

because their stakes for achievement are so high” (21). In other words, for these students there are real social and material consequences that come attached to an adherence to certain myths like the American meritocracy; hence their reluctance to engage in such critiques. As Keith Gilyard poignantly assesses in *True to the Language Game*, “Not to engage in the dominant discourse may diminish some very real material possibilities for ordinary people struggling to do better” (143). Willingness and even the ability to participate in the dual examinations necessary for critical pedagogies’ success are not as straightforward as they might appear. The undeniable reality of critical teaching is that learning to craft new perceptions of the world and the self is a difficult, often personally painful, process.

As critical pedagogies challenge students to push and expand their own boundaries of self and social consciousness, students may encounter difficulty in not only the handling of their new-found agency, but what they may find as they make use of that empowerment. Indeed, critical theorist Ira Shor admits in *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* that “The self-discipline and mutual dialogue of a liberatory classroom will be as threatening as they are empowering to the students who have been conditioned to await orders” (51). Students brought up in a banking style of education will be acclimated to a system that eschews student authority and therefore liability; they will be accustomed to being positioned as neutral receptacles not active participants with the world, responsible for the creation of knowledge. Being placed in a position of authority will not only seem unnatural to students but also threatening since their social subjectivities and relationships will come under scrutiny. Therefore, the student authority and culpability in learning so central to critical teaching also creates a contradictory double bind, being at

once a necessity yet simultaneously a hazard. Without it, teaching reverts back to little more than an act of depositing. With it, students' social identities themselves become subject to not only examination but also association with discourses in ways not previously understood.

The social Self is a powerful identity, and perceived pedagogical threats to it are not likely to be taken lightly. Without tenable subject positions from which to engage in a critical interrogation of both the world and their social selves, students are likely to misinterpret the critical teaching project as a direct affront on their individual selves. For those students, critical pedagogies will not be understood as an interrogation, in part, of master narratives, but of them personally. In its most extreme form, critical teaching can actually produce participant resistance that runs directly counter to its intended goal of transformative awareness if students become mired in limiting and defeating subject positions. That is to say that if critical pedagogies do not allow for the formation of legitimate, viable subject positions from which to conduct the challenging self-examinations, if particular identities are forced into marginalized or demonized positions, the drive to critical consciousness will be met with stiff opposition and will ultimately be unsuccessful at best and counterproductive at worst.

#### *Finding Critical Pedagogy's "Other"*

Despite a commitment to previously marginalized voices and identities, despite a commitment to inclusion, despite its best of intentions, the interrogation of the social Self can also lead to the creation of critical pedagogy's own illegitimate "other," namely "dominant" or mainstream students. That is, little theoretical attention has been paid to the development of nuanced social identities for "oppressor" students in the critical

classroom (Allen and Rossatto, hooks, Trainor). Critical teaching often neglects, or is unable, to provide dominant students with viable subject positions from which to engage in challenging examinations of the social Self. Moreover, the perception of resistance generated from the lack of pedagogical space is often misread in terms of student deficiency, thereby stifling students' dialogue with their identities and creating a cyclical system of marginalization for dominant students. Though far from being a given, minority students *may* be able to avoid this marginalization because while they may in fact also be complicit in systems of oppression, a concrete distance exists between their identities and those of their oppressors.

A woman, for example, may more easily be able to interrogate expressions of gender oppression because she is not a man. Although her perceptions and actions may unconsciously or unknowingly contribute to patriarchal oppression, her identity and experiences as a woman give her broader access to feminist perspective than may be available to a man. There is a distance between her identity as a woman and her social interactions. Since the pedagogical focus in the feminist classroom may be gender oppression, a male student's identification as a man is the aspect of his identity that figures most prominently in a man's reading of the pedagogy. For a man in a feminist classroom, then, there is often little distance between his social actions and his identity as a man. They are ostensibly synonymous. How transformative can feminist teaching be for a man when the subject positions available to him are "other" or "oppressor" oriented? It is no surprise then that men often take on defensive, and ultimately self-defeating, positions in the feminist oriented classroom.

Sara Farris corroborates this pedagogical phenomenon in her article “‘What’s in It for Me?’ Two Students’ Responses to a Feminist Pedagogy,” wherein she details how despite her best efforts she was unable to make her feminist pedagogy accessible to a group of young, white males. Their intense resistance and failure to engage a feminist pedagogy, was indicative of the typical move by male students “protect their male authority and privilege” (Farris 373; Orr 248). This inability of male students to distance their identities from those of oppressors often limits any potential for transformative possibility in gender relations. Likewise, the identities of white students, no matter how progressive, are tied to notions of a racial category associated with oppression. Ricky Allen and Cesar Rossatto argue cogently in their article “Does Critical Pedagogy work with Privileged Students?” that white students will be unable to escape their privileged racial conditions. Quoting them at length will clarify this point:

“Since oppression is a structural phenomenon, no individual person can escape their location as the oppressor any more than no individual person can escape their location as the oppressed... Even the most racial White student, for example, is an oppressor because they still benefit (relative to people of color) from the social context of whiteness” (166).

In other words, this reductive approach to understanding the dominant identity posits that, much like a man cannot absolve himself absolutely of his male privilege, neither can a white student revoke his elevated racial position. Therefore, unable to gain any measurable distance between their persons and systems of oppression, white students often take firmly defensive stances in discussions involving racial issues. This is the reality of dominant students’ identity politics that necessarily accompanies and complicates critical pedagogies: such students are often unable to gain sufficient distance between their identities as dominant within societal systems of hegemony. This inability

to disassociate from systemic oppression leaves dominant students with little room from which to navigate the challenges to the social self in critical classrooms.

This is not to say, however, that men or white students can *only* be understood as dominant oppressors. This is a prescriptive, reductive, and worst of all, fatalistic perspective; it indeed limits the potential available to dominant students. Neither is this meant to function as an excuse for dominant students' defensive resistance to critical teaching. Instead, at issue is the realization that dominant students operate from an equally complex location in the critical classroom. Their path to critical consciousness necessarily does not mirror that of minority or oppressed students. Yet the theoretical neglect of dominant students' social identities begs the question, who should stand to benefit from the critical classroom, all students or only some, women or only men, minorities or whites? Moreover, how much traction can critical movements, like feminism or racial equality, realistically hope to gain *without* the support from at least *some* of the dominant population? But perhaps the largest question at hand is: how can critical pedagogy move from an "or" oriented pedagogy to a "both/and" pedagogy? How can critical pedagogies operate in such a manner that is inclusive while still maintaining a push toward critical consciousness? Overlooking the social realities of dominant students pushes directly against some of critical pedagogies' most foundational elements. For that matter, the under-theorization and exclusion of any sub-group of students is both contradictory and limiting, especially for a pedagogy committed to examining the intersections of students social and historical locations through agency and dialogic practices. I argue that the identity of dominant students can be read in a more nuanced, complex manner; that there is a theoretical understanding of dominant identities that can

promote their inclusion into critical pedagogies and subsequently their cognitive transformation, it has only yet to be fully recognized and articulated.

Jennifer Trainor's research provides an excellent point of departure for a discussion surrounding the theoretical short-comings and pragmatic consequences attached to an under-theorization of dominant students in critical settings. This discussion will in turn serve as a springboard the development of my argument for an enhanced understanding of the dominant identity. In her article, "Critical Pedagogy's 'Other': Constructions of Whiteness in Education for Social Change," Trainor explores how the limited subject positions available to dominant students make critical pedagogies inaccessible and block any hope for their transformative consciousness. She also details how a lack of viable subject positions for dominant/white students to occupy in critical classrooms "risks promoting a devastatingly unintended consequence: the development of a conscious, essentialized, and angry white identity predicated on reactionary political values" (647). In other words, as critical pedagogy interrogates and deconstructs normalized systemic racial oppression in the classroom, it simultaneously often forces dominant, and in Trainor's study, white students (and any other student who believes in or has stake in the dominant discourse) into defensive and problematic subject positions that ultimately block their path to critical consciousness, rendering critical teaching methods ineffective. Worse still, Trainor's research reveals that the lack of consideration for dominant identities in critical pedagogies might not only estrange them from critical consciousness, but also deepen their commitment to hegemonic ideologies.

Trainor's portraits of two white students', Paul and Holly, experiences in a critical classroom highlight the limited and defeating subject positions that the critical teaching



project makes available to dominant students. Trainor's research shows how, when confronted with critically minded readings, Paul experienced intense essentialism and feelings of personal blame for social inequities, which lead to a reductive understanding of the course content, an unsurprising result considering that dominant students' inability to distance their social identities from systems of oppressions leads to their understandable, yet mistaken, equation of the personal with the global. This conflation of the self and the systemic is brought on by the inability of dominant students to see themselves as anything other than antagonistic to social justice projects. As Trainor explains, some strands of whiteness studies position the "white" identity as "inseparable from power and privilege" (633). No wonder then Paul's interaction with critical texts and classroom discussions left him feeling as though his identity was under attack, that the texts were directed at *him* personally and held *him* responsible. In his own words, Paul felt that "I don't want to be blamed for this [racism]" (643). Unable to identify as anything other than privileged, then, the only viable subject positions left for Paul were defensive ones. Trainor notes that "For Paul, inability to locate in the texts or discussions a positive articulation of his identity, of whiteness, meant a negation of identity, of self, of humanness, altogether" (645). Is it any wonder that Paul was unable to come to a more critical reading of his world?

In contrast, Holly's inability to achieve meaningful transformative consciousness was expressed in much subtler ways. Her experience in the critical classroom was such that while she was able to acknowledge whites' traditional role in systems of oppression and hegemony without reading it as a personal affront, the distance she placed between herself and her identity as white was so great that it absolved her from acknowledging

any of that same privilege (Trainor 646). Holly was able to grasp the concept of white privilege without taking a defensive stance, yet ultimately the critical message was lost on her because she was unable to perceive how she benefited from and perhaps contributed to systems of oppression. The distance at which she held her white identity was too great to make understanding it meaningful; she took neither personal nor rhetorical responsibility. When interviewed about white privilege, Holly offered contradictory responses. On one hand, she sympathized with the idea that Black English was a legitimate language, yet when pressed further, she admitted that she felt that Black English, although valid, did not have a place in academic writing. As Trainor explains, Holly was unable to translate her understanding of white privilege “into any kind of action” (646). In other words, Holly was able to access an external examination of the world, but was unable to turn the lens legitimately inward, thereby absolving her of any culpability in systems of privilege and effectively limiting any real transformative possibility. Holly was able to escape being positioned as “other” in the critical classroom, but this move came at the expense of being about to engage in transformative consciousness. If for Paul the distance between his identity and critical pedagogy was too close then for Holly the distance was too great.

Trainor’s research, then, reveals a contradiction in the modern critical teaching project: few legitimate subject positions are available to dominant students that enable them to conceive of and examine their social selves in useful and meaningful ways. Further, the limited subject positions that are made available to dominant students inhibit their access to transformative consciousness. Either they come to understand themselves as defensive “others,” or they limit themselves to only external examinations of the

world, never fully coming to terms with their social and historical locations. Critical pedagogy for them then becomes either an individual critique, placing them ever on the defensive, or it is reduced to an examination of the external world that promotes a false consciousness about their historical and cultural locations. Either way, the result is the same. The hope for critical transformation is lost.

*Cyclical Marginalization: Failing to Dialogue with the “Other”*

The estrangement of dominant students from critical pedagogies caused by their positioning as “others” is especially troubling for critical pedagogies because not only does it force them into untenable subject positions, it also transforms them from active subjects in the educational process back into passive objects. This creates a cycle of marginalization in critical pedagogies that is virtually unbreakable for dominant students. In *Teachers as Intellectuals*, Henry Giroux argues that traditional banking-styles of teaching are oppressive to minority students specifically because, as outsiders, minority students are seen as culturally deficient, something to be filled up with the “proper” knowledge. While I agree with Giroux’s assessment of the banking-style pedagogies, I believe it can be appropriated and used to also understand why a labeling of “other” is so limiting not only to dominant students, but to the critical teaching project as a whole. Giroux argues that “Defined within a logic that views them as the other, students now become objects of inquiry in the interest of being understood so as to be more easily controlled” (94). Likewise, the “other-ing” of dominant students in critical classrooms sets them as pedagogical objects, persons to be controlled into accepting certain ideological perspectives. This positioning of dominant students signifies a contradiction in a pedagogical approach to teaching that was specifically formed in direct theoretical

opposition to ideological dogmatism in the classroom. Critical teaching is built on the notion of dialogue through agency. The position of “other” strips students of their agency, which in turn limits their ability and even desire to dialogue with critical perspectives. In the absence of agency and dialogue, dominant students are understood in terms of *about* and not *with*; more of a move is made to talk *about* their social identities than is made to converse *with* them.

Much is said *about* dominant student resistance to critical teaching. Failure of dominant students to achieve critical consciousness or to subscribe to the tenets of critical teaching is often spoken *about* in terms of student deficiency or unwillingness to accept *our* doctrine (Allen 316-7). Yet infrequently, if ever, are dominant identities talked *with* in the critical classroom despite Freire’s injunction in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that, “To simply think *about* the people, as the dominators do, without any self-giving in that thought, to fail to think *with* the people, is a sure way to cease being *revolutionary* leaders” (113). To not dialogue *with* dominant, or any other, identity in the critical classroom amounts to a contradictory use of banking-style techniques, the assumptions being that the “correct” ideological base exists a priori and is possessed by teachers who need only to convince students to conform to their perspective. Perceptions of student deficiency brought on by a lack of dialogue with certain subject positions also set up a defeating us/them mentality in the critical classroom, wherein teachers and students are positioned in an antagonistic manner opposite each other. The underlying assumption is that the teacher does not need to dialogue *with* the dominant student, only understand them enough to find ways to get them to appreciate her ideological slant. Not surprisingly, positioning teacher and student in such a fashion facilitates the reformation

of banking-style hierarches in the classroom, again, violating one of the foundational requirements for the enactment of critical consciousness.

Perhaps most importantly, though, a failure to communicate with certain student identities creates a contradictory cycle of marginalization for both teachers and students. Without agency, dominant students' identities are unable to be dialogued with and consequently are unable to take an active role in their education, thereby forcing them back into familiar banking-style roles as docile recipients of pedagogy. Furthermore, the cycle of marginalization is perpetuated by an inability of critical teachers to see past the perception of dominant students as anything more than "others." Student deficiency models in any pedagogy are therefore doubly damaging. As Giroux describes, "not only do students bear the sole responsibility for school failure, but there is also little or no theoretical room for interrogating the ways in which administrators and teachers actually create and sustain the problems they attribute to the students in question" (*Teachers* 93). The implication here is that through an inability to see past certain students as outsiders, teachers are likewise unable to see past how their own interactions with and perceptions of those students might contribute to their continued assignment as outsiders. Teachers are unable to perceive how they construct limiting identities *for* students. Again, Giroux's comments were intended to function as a critique of banking-style pedagogies, but what should prevent the critical lens from being turned back on itself? Why should critical pedagogies be exempt from the same examinations they apply to other theories of education? Student deficiency models and a failure to dialogue with all students are equally damaging to banking-style teaching as they are to critical pedagogies, they facilitate the perpetual theoretical neglect of a sub-set of the student population.

Therefore, the possibility that critical pedagogues' interactions with dominant identities and discourses might facilitate a cycle of blind marginalization merits further examination.

### *Cyclical Marginalization Continued*

As "others," dominant students' contributions to the critical classroom may be minimized, and the perspectives they do offer are often read as resistant or understood to signify an unwillingness to participate. That is to say, the perspective of the dominant student is normally seen as ideologically and epistemologically self-serving, *not* as a sincere attempt to participate in counter-hegemonic, critical dialogue. But, what if their positioning as "others" in critical classrooms causes dominant students' speech to be misinterpreted and too easily dismissed as an act of defiance by an entrenched oppressor? Might their marginalized position veil a genuine attempt to engage critical pedagogy? More importantly, though, might their positioning as "others" bias teacher assessment of dominant speech acts thereby continually pushing dominant students to the margins, cutting short their transformative potential? Put differently, what might be said about *teachers* based on their perceptions about dominant students' speech acts?

Again, Jennifer Trainor's research presents a gateway into a deeper reading of teacher responses to students' speech. Her article, "'My Ancestors Didn't Own Slaves: Understanding White Talk about Race,'" contends that dominant students' responses to critical discussions of race are not as straight-forwardly defensive as they might initially appear; underlying them are complex layers of emotion, meaning, and intention. Taking a rhetorical approach to understanding racist language, Trainor unpacks dominant white students' seemingly racist responses to discussions of racial inequity. For example, the

response “my ancestors didn’t own slaves,” initially appears to “abdicate responsibility for racism and forward a view of Whites as innocent of racism” (146). However, through discussions with white students who participated in such discourses, Trainor found that instead of being an act of resistance, this type of speech act was actually a move by dominant students to connect with minority students, a way for dominant students to show that they were on the “right” side (146). As I have already acknowledged, though, Trainor recognizes that this rhetorical move by dominant students is problematic in that it places too great a distance between dominant identities and their social realities. Discourses similar to this appear to erase dominant student responsibility to examine their social location as well as the external world, the lens cannot be legitimately turned inward as it must. Much like Holly was unable to engage her social self in a meaningful, transformative way, dominant discourses such as “my ancestors didn’t own slaves” enables students to ignore their social locations, thereby blocking the path to critical consciousness. Still, there is a level of complexity in dominant students’ responses to critical teaching that is often not given due attention. As Trainor argues, “The student who asserts that his ancestors were innocent is not only forwarding a racial politics that exonerates Whites from responsibility, but also *expressing a host of desires for racial understanding and healing* [emphasis added]” (147). Thus there is perhaps more to dominant students’ responses than is immediately visible, yet their positioning as “others” precludes the possibility to explore the complexity of dominant students’ speech acts. Instead of progressing their critical processes, dominant students’ contributions further stagnate the potential for transformation through reductive readings by teachers.

The larger issue at hand is not whether dominant students intend for their discourses to be resistant or not; more importantly, an uncritical reading of dominant discourses as wholly defiant belies a tacit imposition of identity on these students by critical teachers. In other words, perception of students' responses to critical teaching says as much about the teacher as it does the student. Yes, dominant students' speech acts can be ideologically self-serving, but so can teachers' reception to those discourses if they are not given critical consideration. Take, for example, the dominant discourse "my ancestors didn't own slaves." Perhaps this speech act may actually be indicative of racial bias and an act of defiance, but then again it might not, as Trainor's research has shown. For the critical pedagogue to dismiss this discourse out of hand as defiant signifies an unwillingness on her part to dialogue with dominant students, an unwillingness to see dominant students as anything besides "others. Trainor argues that perceptions of dominant students' language raise questions about how teachers actively, although perhaps unconsciously, construct identities *for* students (160). This is especially troubling because it enlarges the possibility for the cyclical marginalization of dominant students within critical pedagogies. The less critical pedagogues interrogate their own reception of students' responses, the more likely dominant students are to be labeled as resistant "others" and excluded from the critical project.

### *Closing Clarifications*

The preceding arguments and critiques are not to say that critical pedagogies should be re-focused to attend to the needs and identities of dominant students. Critical pedagogies historically have, and *should have*, paid close attention to the issues affecting the disenfranchised (Allen and Rossatto 167). Neither should dialogue with dominant



student identities be misunderstood to represent an affiliation with or affirmation of dominant, hegemonic ideology. To acknowledge the legitimacy of dominant students' identities and subject positions does not serve to privilege them, it simply creates a place for them so that they might be able to view their social positions more critically. Again, critical teaching has always, and should continue to, be framed around cultivating a critically conscious citizenry, one dedicated to the democratic ideals of equality. The identities of the oppressed are vital to critical teaching project, yes, but not to the exclusion of all other identities; it is a pedagogy *of* the oppressed, not necessarily a pedagogy *for* the oppressed only. The identities and subject positions of all students must be given legitimate consideration because they serve as the foundation from which transformative consciousness is made possible. Throughout his numerous publications on critical theories of education, Freire consistently maintained that transformative consciousness starts with the student and the socio-historical baggage they bring with them to the classroom. In *Pedagogy of Hope*, he posits that for transformation to occur, for students to get "there," education must begin with their "here." His logic is eloquently simple: "You never get *there* by starting from *there*, you get *there* by starting from *here*. This means, ultimately, that the educator must not be ignorant of, underestimate, or reject any of the 'knowledge of living experience' with which educands come to school" (58). While Freire's arguments were admittedly pointed at the identities of the oppressed, his logic does not preclude the inclusion of dominant students' identities. Freire's theories were written for inclusion, not exclusion; the drive was toward transformative consciousness, not a reversal of the status quo resulting in the oppression of the once dominant. Indeed, he firmly cautioned against divisive sectarian perspectives in the

critical teaching project (*Hope* 85), and the positioning of dominant students as pedagogical outsiders is assuredly exclusionary sectarian politics. It is anti-dialectic, anti-dialogical, and most of all, it is anti-critical. How can critical pedagogies hope to get dominant students “there,” without allowing them a legitimate “here” from where to begin?

Paradoxically, then, critical pedagogies will only be successful when they embrace the dominant discourses, when they investigate the values, vocabulary and identities of those they hope to convince and persuade (Trainor 163). A denial and dismissal of dominant students’ socio-historical subjectivities all but ensures that they will remain in their “here’s,” perhaps even more committed to the hegemonic ideologies. There must be theoretical room for the inclusion of dominant students’ identities, for without them critical pedagogies amount to little more than an act of pedagogical self-affirmation, thereby stifling and potential for larger-scale change. Freire wrote that “Unless educators expose themselves to the popular culture across the board, their discourse will hardly be heard by anyone but themselves” (*Hope* 107). Likewise I contend that progressive, critical teachers must avoid committing the same pedagogical error. They must avoid closing themselves off from dominant cultures and discourses if they hope to facilitate critical consciousness and societal transformation. Any modern pedagogy committed to social justice must be framed as critical and questioning while maintaining a posture of inclusion and examination of *all* student identities. I believe the modern blurred boundaries between oppressor and oppressed, dominant and minority, necessitate that critical pedagogies give due attention and consideration to the identities

of more than just a portion of the population. Dominant students can, and should, be able to participate in liberatory education, for they will play a part in social transformation.

Yet how can critical pedagogies realistically hope to embrace and investigate dominant students' discourses and identities when those same subject positions are limited to, or are framed as, "others?" How can they hope to achieve transformative consciousness when the very things necessary to attain it are made unavailable to them? Critical teaching is built upon the foundations of agency, dialogue, and inclusion. To deny one or all of these constitutive elements to any sub-set of students is to promote a false consciousness, or worse, to exclude them from the critical teaching project. To not dialogue with dominant identities in the critical classroom is to efface their agency, to take back the very thing they need if they are to engage in a meaningful examination of their social selves. If the end-goal of transformative consciousness can hope to be met, students must not be seen as, or limited to, pedagogical objects to be acted upon. The purpose of dialogue in critical education is not to affirm or deny particular ideological beliefs, but rather to provide students with their due agency, to allow them adequate pedagogical space and subjectivity in which to maneuver on their path to critical awareness. Modern critical pedagogies committed to social justice, which incidentally came into being as a move *away* from oppressive educational practices, should not themselves leave room for marginalization and "other-ing". The goal is not to oppress the oppressors, but to dialogue in unison and solidarity for liberation and social equality. Division is as contradictory as it is limiting.

In the following chapter I will work to address some of the pedagogical inconsistencies revealed in the preceding discussion and will forward a possible re-

articulation of the form and structure of critical teaching based around the principle of inclusion. I will seek to develop one potential answer the question: How might critical pedagogies avoid operating in isolation, how might they open themselves to the possibilities that can only be found in those whose beliefs and values are different?

## CHAPTER IV

### TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF INCLUSION

“The circle of knowledge has but two moments in permanent relationship with each other: the moment of cognition of existing, already-produced, knowledge, and the moment of our own production of new knowledge.”

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*

To this point, the theoretical neglect of dominant students and the need to articulate a viable subject position for them in the critical teaching project has been well established. The pedagogical structures endemic to the critical classroom that were designed to foster an atmosphere of inclusion have been rolled back to reveal the systematic exclusion of a specific demographic of students and their identities. Yet this critique is not meant to function as an invalidation of critical teaching projects all together - much the opposite. I offer this deconstruction as a way to create a new opportunity, a new point of investigation, so that that pedagogies committed to transformative consciousness might evolve to better respond to the historical and institutional exigencies currently surrounding them.

The previous chapters have demonstrated that the critical teaching project is - as yet, and probably always should be - an incomplete project. I argue that present articulations of critical pedagogies are unfinished in that they have yet to provide adequate consideration for and a theoretical re-positioning of dominant identities for

inclusion. This argument is predicated on the notion that all identities can and, most importantly, *should* have access to critical pedagogies; the social issues often critiqued in the critically focused classroom operate on a global scale, therefore a global response to them is required if social transformation can hope to be achieved. Therefore, I now turn toward crafting one such possible response to the problematic positioning typically assigned to or taken on by the dominant student in the critical classroom that precludes their participation.

*Dual Dialogue: A Pedagogical Necessity*

If critical pedagogies are earnest in their desire to transform systems of hegemony through critical consciousness, then they *must* theorize subject positions for dominant identities within their conceptual framework that do not marginalize such students. The previous chapter has shown just how challenging the critical classroom can be for dominant student identities; their positioning often precludes them from dialoging externally with their surroundings or internally *with* their social selves (and sometimes even both), thereby relegating them to the margins. Yet despite this difficulty, the place of dominant identities must be re-evaluated and *must* be re-located so as to allow these same students to engage in purposeful, critical conversation with not only their external exigencies but also within their own multiple social selves. If either of these types of dialogue are withheld or inaccessible to dominant students, critical pedagogies will continue to fail them.

This dual examination is not, in and of itself, a revolutionary idea, as this has already been well established as a staple of the critical teaching project. What I propose, and what heretofore has been unarticulated, is a positioning of dominant student identities

that actually allows them to participate in this dual examination. I argue that a pedagogy of inclusion is possible through new understandings of the positionality of dominant identities. Moreover, such a pedagogy is not only attainable, but also desirable in the interest of more widespread social transformation. That is not to say that critical teaching should be re-centered around the dominant identity, only that dominant students can and should have a role to play their own transformation. For while it is of vital importance to ensure that students with dominant identities not enjoy continued privilege in the critical teaching project, neither also should they be excluded from participating and taking an active role in their own education/transformation.

*The Paradox of the Dominant Identity and Dialogue*

As should be now evident, the dominant identity represents a unique challenge for a pedagogy dedicated to questioning and challenging normative perspectives of realities. The dominant identity occupies a seemingly unnatural place in the critical teaching project, which is, after all, an approach to educational practice that is intended to *dismantle* the hegemonic discourses often espoused by dominant students through the process of dialoging within themselves and their historical surroundings. Yet there *is* pedagogical space for dominant identities since the end goal is the dissolution of *systems* of oppression, not necessarily individual oppressor identities themselves (Sheets 18). Individual identities are meant to be reshaped, or at least re-thought, through an examination of the students' selves and worlds. Therefore, critical pedagogies can, and should, be re-imagined for the inclusion of dominant students. Despite their relative privilege, men *can* meaningfully engage and participate in the feminist movement; white students *can* work alongside minority students toward achieving racial parity. But these

pedagogical and societal visions are only possible if dominant subject positions within the critical teaching framework are properly theorized so as to actually enable dominant students to work toward raising their own consciousness. What is needed, therefore, is an understanding of and a space for dominant identity in critical pedagogies that is neither privileged nor altogether alienated, one that creates the possibility to critique both the world and the self.

Paradoxically, the student with dominant identity needs to be able to at once distance herself while simultaneously drawing closer the point of examination, the social self. The distance between the dominant student and her social self must be great enough so as to avoid a conflation of the global and the individual, leading to a defensive posture, yet she must not be so far detached from the critical interrogation that it becomes exclusively external to her, preventing self-transformation. This dual act of drawing closer while simultaneously distancing herself from her social identity is only contradictory if the social self is understood as a wholly singular and static entity. Yet postmodern notions of a multi-faceted, fluid self allow for a more dynamic perception of identity, a social self that is not cemented in one place but is able to understand and move between a multiplicity of angles, hence the ability for the dominant student to simultaneously engage in paradoxical views of herself without creating contradictions that might shattering her entire sense of social identity. Moreover, the more complex concept of identity forwarded by postmodernism allows for the possibility of dialogue not only between the student and her historical surroundings, but importantly it creates the possibility for an *internal* dialogue between various, and often contradictory, aspects of the individual student's multiple ways of knowing. In other words, the postmodern



condition allows for a separation of the dominant student's epistemological and ontological selves, a strategic distinction that allows her to view her privileged experiences from multiple levels; this more complex conception of her lived experiences allows her to view them more critically without invalidating the self. A more detailed discussion of this later.

In order to sketch one possible framework for helping critical pedagogues to understand how to relocate dominant identities, though, I begin by first briefly examining what discussions and arguments scholars have already offered in response to Trainor's similar call for increased awareness of "the rhetorical frames our [critical] pedagogies provide for students as they structure identity" (*Constructions* 647). The need to more fully explore the nuances of this unique, delicate in-between space that dominant students must occupy in critical pedagogies has not gone unnoticed by disciplinary scholars, yet their theoretical responses have thus far proved to be largely inadequate. That is, the few scholars who have attempted to address the unique positions held by students with dominant identities have either failed to consider the requisite dual nature of dialogue in critical teaching projects or have failed to appreciate the unique location that such students must occupy if they are to develop their critical awareness; in other words, they have placed the dominant identity either too close or too far from the point of examination thereby limiting dominant students' ability to enter into critical teaching projects. Despite their incompleteness, beginning with an understanding of previous theoretical short-comings with regard to dominant identities will provide useful insight and will function as a stepping stone for imagining how critical pedagogies might be re-

fashioned for inclusion while continuing to maintain a focus on heightened consciousness and social transformation.

*Understanding the Nature of Dialogue: Lessons from bell hooks*

(Note: Although the following discussion of hooks' research toward the place of dominant identity within a feminist discourse actually pre-dates Trainor's research, it is positioned here as a "response" only for the purpose of clarity as hooks' research does speak indirectly to many of the issues raised in more detail later by Trainor).

As aforementioned, critical scholars have offered prior acknowledgement about how problematic the limited and self-defeating roles are that are available to dominant identities within the critical teaching framework. At the beginning of the eighteenth chapter (which is conspicuously brief) in *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*, bell hooks offers an unveiled admission that within feminist studies, "there is very little and certainly not enough said about men, about the social construction of masculinity, about the possibilities of transformation" (127). Fair enough. hooks here has issued an astute recognition that the identities and roles of men in the feminist movement are sorely underdeveloped. Yet despite this concession, in the discussion that follows hooks does not make an attempt to conduct a thorough analysis of the position of masculinity within the field of feminist studies, nor does she attempt to carve out a space for the male identity. What hooks centers on instead is the relative silence that has existed between the feminist movement and men; she argues that women within the feminist movement need to dialogue to, about, and, with men so as to facilitate the transformation of male consciousness.

I agree, dialogue between feminism and the male identity is certainly one of the first key steps in the push for gender equality, especially considering that hooks concedes that “more and more males need to engage in feminist struggle if there is to be an end to sexist oppression, to male dominance” (132). Moreover, hooks’ characterization of the dialogue that must take place *between women and men* is correctly situated around the Freireian principles of agency and co-participation between Subjects. It is important that in her call for increased dialogue, hooks is careful not to slip into an objectified perspective of the male identity; she concedes agency and co-Subjectivity to both male and female identities. Yes, the feminist movement *is* directive in that it seeks to alter the male consciousness about systems of privilege and domination, yet it must not do so in a manipulative or itself oppressive manner. Again, there is a clear distinction between authoritative teaching and authoritarianism. Feminist teachers, like all critical pedagogues, are positioned as authorities in the classroom and they do intend to direct the content down a particular path, but men must not be understood as passive objects who will simply receive feminist pedagogy. That is to say that men must maintain agency and legitimacy in order to engage in critical feminist dialogue. hooks argues cogently that “Rather than focusing on men in a way that renders them objects, feminist scholarship on men by women is informed by a politic that resists domination, that is liberatory” (133). Yes, feminism must grant agency (not privilege) to the male identity if men are to participate (as they must) in dialogue with the feminist movement.

Yet hooks does not err in either her call for or her characterization of increased dialogue between women and men. Her short-coming is that her discussion is, well, short and one-sided. Importantly, while her understanding of the dialogue *between men and*

women as Subjects is remarkably accurate, her perception of the dialogue that must take place *within* the male identity is severely underdeveloped. In her brevity, hooks is unable to begin crafting an understanding of the male identity: how it will receive and navigate among feminist language and ideas, how the male identity must negotiate understanding its privileged experiences, how (theoretically) men might come to view the male identity so that an interior dialogue can even exist as a possibility. In other words, what is missing from hooks' argument is an appreciation for the internal dialogue that must take place within the male student's identity *so that* external dialogue and transformation become real pedagogical possibilities. This is not to say, however, that the external dialogue is somehow predicated or dependent on the internal; there is a simultaneous and reciprocal existence between the dual conversations that makes up the fabric of critical dialogue.

However, neither can one exist or function properly without the other. Working in tandem, the internal dialogues open spaces for external conversations and examinations to take place, which then in turn give rise to the further development of new internal investigations and re-imaginings. Therefore, a one-dimensional perspective of dialogue, like the one implied by hooks, actually inhibits the inclusion of dominant identities into critical pedagogies. How can those with dominant identities expect to engage in a critical dialogue with their world if there is not a recognition of the internal conversations that enable such an examination and vice versa? It is not enough to pay lip service to the dominant identity and *say* dialogue with the world will take place and expect it to simply happen. As it has been shown, conversation between and within the dominant in critical settings is often easier said than accomplished; the potential for dominant identities to take on (or be assigned) the role of a pedagogical Other is great. Dominant identities must

be able to dialogue within themselves if they hope to critically converse with their external realities. Therefore, the position of the dominant identity must be adequately understood so that this internal dialogue might be able to take place without the student sliding back into defensive or self-defeating positions. hooks' approach to understanding the dominant identity, while a step in the right direction, does not fully acknowledge the complexity of the dual nature of dialogue that must take place between and within the male identity. Thus is it ultimately not developed enough to provide a theoretical framework that would lead to inclusive measures in critical pedagogies. A pedagogy of inclusion must appreciate and be structured around an understanding of dialogue as both an external *and* internal conversation, yet the larger question remains unanswered: How can dominant students, or all students for that matter, be positioned so as to engage in a legitimate internal dialogue, thereby promoting their involvement and inclusion in the critical teaching project?

*Misplacing Dominant Identities: Lessons from Allen and Rossatto*

As I have been endeavoring to show thus far, the keystone in formulating a pedagogy that is inclusive of dominant identities rests in understanding and positioning such students in a manner that encourages and enables an internal dialogue. For the dominant student, the critical project hinges on this ability to critically converse with her own social selves. Therefore, how the dominant identity is positioned and approached within the critical framework is of paramount importance toward facilitating such internal examinations. In their article "Does Critical Pedagogy Work with Privileged Students," Allen and Rossatto argue for re-positioning of dominant identities and finding ways to more critically engage them within the critical teaching framework, a task not all together

dissimilar from my current project. Ultimately, Allen and Rossatto echo many of the theoretical sentiments that have driven the development of my current research. They believe that critical pedagogies stand much to gain from embracing the “empowerment found in the development of positive identities for those in oppressor groups” (165), a research goal that I too have been explicit in pursuing. Moreover, their research is guided by a recognition that dominant identities necessarily occupy a unique place within pedagogies committed to critical consciousness. Contextualizing the Freireian notion of radical love, Allen and Rossatto base their arguments around the idea that, “It [radical love] takes into account that people are differently situated within hierarchies of oppression. Therefore, how an oppressor student should love and be loved is different from that of the oppressed student” (178). Again, I agree: approaches to understanding those with radically different identities must vary relative to the students’ social positioning. A critical understanding of the equally unique subjectivity of different identities is key to developing a pedagogy that is not exclusionary.

Yet despite the baseline similarities in research design, Allen and Rossatto have missed key steps in their development of dominant student positionality. In the scaffolding that structures their argument, they fail to assign any measureable value to the processes through which dominant identities can potentially enter into critical dialogue. Much like hooks, Allen and Rossatto assume dialogue (both internal and external) as a pedagogical given and therefore err in their final positioning of dominant students. For example, they contend, rightly, that “The oppressor student needs to unlearn the ways in which their beliefs have consequences that negatively affect the oppressed” (178). This process of “unlearning” would presumably be accomplished through critically dialoguing

with and re-envisioning their privileged experiences. Yet no attention is paid to *how* this necessary dialogue can be enacted by the dominant student. There is no appreciation for the nuances of dialogic practices (which necessarily vary between different identities) that enable transformation. Instead of exploring the means to foster critical conversation between and within dominant students, Allen and Rossatto jump straight to a final positioning of oppressor identities without fully fleshing out the means they employ to reach that end. In other words, the conclusions they draw from their research are predicated on an incomplete portrait of the dominant identity within the framework of critical teaching, thereby calling the efficacy of their arguments into question.

To explain further, Allen and Rossatto argue that in Freireian-inspired critical pedagogies, minority students' lived experiences of objectification and dehumanization occupy a central place in the classroom content, an assessment that garners support from Freire's own work (see chapter 2). Moreover, they posit that, "The oppressed student is seen as being close to the experience of oppressive structures, giving them a degree of epistemological authority" (167). Again, I would argue that this represents an accurate assessment of the *minority's* positioning as the oppressed within critical frameworks. However, I argue that the positioning of minority and dominant identities in relation to critical examinations *must* be different to account for their variant subjectivities. Allen and Rossatto seem to ignore this difference, despite their admission to its necessity, and conclude instead that in order for oppressor identities to develop critical consciousness they should be placed at the center of critical examinations. Essentially, their final understanding of the dominant student's identity creates a contradiction unto itself. They admit that dominant students and minority students must be understood and approached

differently in order to develop critical awareness (178), yet their final positioning of the dominant student essentially mirrors that of the minority student; they do not craft the unique understanding of the dominant student's identity that they deem as a pedagogical necessity. They argue explicitly that "In our notion of a pedagogy for the oppressor, being in 'the center' is more like being in the 'hot seat' or being the spectacle of oppression that serves as the focus of inquiry and critique" (175). Ignoring their pejorative choice of descriptors, Allen and Rossatto seem to be arguing for a pedagogy that simply transposes the classroom experiences of minority and dominant students. Placing dominant students' identities as the "spectacle" of oppression ignores the fact that dominant identities likely do not come with the same "degree of epistemological authority" that minority students might bring to the classroom. Therefore, being in the "hot seat" should affect a different response from students engendering dominant identities. Moreover, being centrally located in the critical framework does not in and of itself guarantee transformative potential in the dominant identity; in fact, more likely it is counter-effectual, working to further entrench dominant students in their hegemonic ideology (see Trainor's assessment of Paul in chapter 3).

This is not to say that critical pedagogies should pander to students with dominant identities; such students should be "confronted with a systematic and persistent deconstruction of their privileged identity" (Allen 175) so as to develop a more critical awareness. However, dominant students' privileged experiences cannot be simply thrown into the center of inquiry without a critical and complex understanding of their positionality. Critical dialogue cannot be taken as a pedagogical given, it must be purposefully developed. Importantly, dominant students must be positioned as Subjects,



active co-developers of dialogic practices if their consciousness is to be altered. Allen and Rossatto opt for a more passive, deductive approach to transformation when they argue that dominant students will continue to “dismiss or deny criticisms aimed at their oppressor ideologies, that is, unless they are *shown* models of how they can interact differently by working against the systems of oppression that they are a part of [emphasis added]” (177). Being “shown” how to move differently is much less internally persuasive than a student-centered, *inductive* approach to cognitive transformation (Seitz 196). Students who inhabit dominant identities need not to have counter-hegemonic discourses demonstrated *for* them; they need instead to arrive at re-visions of their privileged experiences through active participation in dialogic processes (Freire 1970/1994). It is for this reason that any attempt to revise critical pedagogies for inclusion without considering how the dominant can participate in dialogue will continue to misplace such identities in self-defeating locations.

While it has not been my intention to paint the pedagogical suggestions that such respected scholars as hooks, Allen and Rossatto have offered as “wrong,” per se, I have attempted to demonstrate that their findings are representative of a still problematic positioning of dominant identities that will continue to frustrate efforts of inclusion for such students. That is until the nuances of dialogue and the dominant identity are better appreciated, articulated, and employed to theorize a unique place for the dominant within the critical teaching framework. I now turn toward crafting one possible description of dialogue and dominant identity positionality, an understanding that works toward inclusion. To this end, I will appropriate and extend some of the concepts of the self forwarded by Elspeth Probyn in *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies*

and use them to articulate potential ways in which critical pedagogies can facilitate the development of a purpose-driven internal dialogue between dominant identities and their relatively privileged experiences, thereby enhancing their potential for new consciousness and transformation.

*Ways of Conceiving of Multiplicity in Identity*

Critical dialogue between active co-participants has typically been the staple of Freireian-inspired pedagogies. Moreover, the pedagogical content that drives this critical dialogue is found in the historical, concrete exigencies surrounding those involved in the conversation (Freire 1970). In other words, participants in the critical project must employ their lived experiences in service to abstract theorizing so that they might perceive their words and worlds anew. The necessity of using students' concrete experiences has proven to be a major stumbling block for dominant students, namely because, in the critical view, their experiences have alienated them from recognizing themselves as the recipients of unearned social status and privilege. The primary challenge for critical pedagogies, then, has been to enact ways in which the dominant student can gain enough distance from her privileged experiences to see them as such while not placing her so far as to completely disavow her privilege. As I read it, the key to developing this unique positionality that dominant students must occupy is found in extending the notion of dialogue into a multiply-identified dominant identity. The path to transformative consciousness should still be found in the dominant student's privileged experiences, but *how* to foster a critical dialogue between and within their histories must be reconsidered.

Although there are several ways to understand the self as a multiply-identified, contradictory subject, not all are productive within the critical teaching framework. The non-white male, for example, engenders both the privileged masculine identity as well as the marginalized racial minority identity. The more facets of the individual's identity composition that are considered, the more complex and confounding becomes the notion of a singular, unified subject. Hence, categorizing individuals as either dominant or minority becomes equally difficult. Indeed, considering the multiplicity and complexity of identity, most will find that they are simultaneously privileged and oppressed (Tatum 22). The assumption here is that if dominant students can find part of themselves that are oppressed, then they might more readily be willing to transform those aspects of their identity that are oppressive. Yet how would this approach to understanding fragmented, multiple identities benefit students such as the white, heterosexual, wealthy male? What relatively oppressed identities are available for them to identify with?

Moreover, despite the veracity of a multiply-identified and contradictory subject, a focus on this type of identification with their fragmented selves can be problematic for dominant students since it provides them with a means to opt out of examining those aspects of their identity that are privileged. Given the opportunity, most students will tend to more closely identify with their oppressed consciousness rather than admit their roles as dominant oppressors (Allen 171), thereby confounding any possibility for cognitive transformation. Instead, dominant students must not relax into comfortable denial of their privileged experiences. In order to develop a more critical consciousness, they must confront and dialogue with those identities that they are uncomfortable embodying, yet they must do so from a position that does not invalidate their experiences, and

subsequently themselves, altogether. One way to facilitate the re-perception of dominant students' privileged experiences is to make explicit the multiplicity of ways in which knowledge is either reproduced or created. In other words, students with dominant identities must be able to recognize and capitalize on the split between their ontological and epistemological selves. Probyn characterizes the distinction between the ontological and the epistemological self primarily as one's way of reading experience from multiple registers. The ontological self, as Probyn defines it, "testifies to the gendered, sexual and racial facticity of being in the social; it can be called an immediate experiential self" (16). In other words, the ontological self conceives of experience in a concrete, grounded manner. Experience is not generative in that it does not *create* new perceptions of reality; it only conveys the immediate reality of the student's surroundings. Conversely, the epistemological self understands experience more abstractly, not simply as a reflection of concrete reality, but instead as condition of possibility. Probyn argues that within the epistemological self, "experience is recognized as more obviously discursive and can be used to overtly politicize the ontological" (16). Rather than transmitting knowledge through a concrete perception of experience, then, the epistemological self can engage experience from a *creative* angle and can therefore foster the development of new and alternative conceptions experience.

#### *Dialogue between the Ontological and Epistemological Selves*

Having been cast as representatives of societal norms, dominant students are unlikely to have been explicitly confronted with the possibility of perceiving their experiential selves as privileged. Therefore, they have had no cause to question the reality portrayed by their lived experiences since their inward perceptions are validated

by existing external social structures. Put differently, as Beverly Tatum cogently assesses in *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, "...their [the dominant] inner experience and outer circumstance are in harmony with one another...In the absence of dissonance, this dimension of identity escapes conscious attention" (21). Since social meta-structures of hegemony deny the existence of privilege, and dominant experiences are understood as normative, the experiential is accepted at face value. Being socially positioned in this manner, the veracity of dominant students' experiences are understood as unquestionable, ontological truth. Dominant students' lived experiences dictate to them that they are not the benefactors of unearned privilege; therefore, bolstered by their ontologically grounded perception of reality, they have little pedagogical room within their identity to maneuver and reimagine their experiences. Thus their inability to enter into critical pedagogies and potentially transform their cognition is impeded.

Yet ontological reasoning is not the only means available for coming to knowledge about the meaning attached to lived experiences. On a more abstract level, epistemological interactions with the world offer a means for re-ordering and re-conceiving of experience. It is precisely this separation between the ontological and epistemological selves that can enable dominant students to break from the reproduction of knowledge and move toward the creation of knowledge, toward critical consciousness, and toward the transformation of their understanding of their privileged words and worlds. Elspeth Probyn offers theoretical support for distinguishing between these two ways of creating meaning from experience. She argues that the disjuncture between the ontological and epistemological aspects of the experiential can work in a productive

manner to drive new ways of understanding experience. Her reading of a multi-modal approach to experience points toward a distinction between two separate, but equally important, facets of the identity: the ontological self and the epistemological self. Taken together, this split-level understanding of the identity's meaning-making processes embodies the potential to position dominant student for inclusion. To quote Probyn at length:

“...while experience describes the everyday, or ‘the way of life,’ it is also the key to analyzing relations that construct reality. Moreover, as a third term located within an epistemological/ontological tension, the experience of the critic, of her ‘lived’ and of its connections to an object of analysis, can be put to work to motivate alternative modes of intervention” (18).

In other words, lived experience can function simultaneously at more than one level within the self in order to help peoples construct multiple perceptions of reality. Importantly, the push/pull between these different readings of experience helps students craft new ways of approaching their realities. While Probyn's arguments are directed primarily at feminist identity and representation within cultural studies, they also bear direct relevance in formulating a pedagogy of inclusion. Her assessments of experience and identity provide useful insight into how the privileged experiences of the dominant student can be appropriated, in the Freireian tradition, to facilitate new ways of dialoging with and re-experiencing the ordinary. The experiential, Probyn argues, can be understood beyond an ontological level, and can therefore be employed on a more politicized and analytic register (16). Instead of affirming the reproduction of hegemonic knowledge bases through ontological reasoning, experience can then also be used as a means for creating new perceptions; that is of course if a distinction is made between the multiple meaning-making selves present in the dominant student's identity. Once dominant identities are understood as multiply constituted in this manner, they can begin

to approach their privileged experiences from a detached yet simultaneously responsible position, a position that enables them to operate from both a grounded, ontological level as well as an abstract, epistemological level. This simultaneous work on multiple levels of the self exemplifies how the “experiential self can be checked using experience epistemologically to locate and problematize the conditions that articulate individuated experiences” (Probyn 16). If dominant identities are to re-conceive of their privileged experiences, in other words, then there must exist a Freireian-style, internal dialogue between these two distinct levels of their selves.

The importance that both aspects of the meaning-making self, the ontological and epistemological, play in the development of transformative consciousness for the dominant identity cannot be over-stated. Each fulfills a necessary pedagogical role, and neither should be granted privilege over the other in the critical teaching project. From a highly abstract perspective, the multiple levels of the self must each occupy spaces of agency in order to create meaningful dialogue. Ontological understandings of experience perform a valuable function in that they ground the student’s experience and identity; they keep the dominant identity close enough to their experiences so her privilege remains a living reality. Ontological perceptions of the self also work to provide firm experiential footing on which epistemological understandings of the self can be built. As Frances B. Singh deftly assess, “A road won’t stay in place unless there is something that has been consolidated beneath it. By the same token, new learning will not stick in a student’s mind unless there has been consolidation of prior knowledge” (112). Epistemological perceptions of experience likewise perform an equally important role in abstracting the dominant identity, placing enough distance between her and her

experiences so as to enable her to re-imagine her experiences and craft new, critically aware perceptions of her words and worlds. Both are necessary if the dominant student is to move differently and perceive her words and worlds in new ways. Much like Anzaldúa argues that the new mestiza must exist in contradictory plurality, retaining all aspects of the self, “the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned” (101), so too must the dominant student’s identity operate in its all its totality on its path to new consciousness. The dominant student can hoped be transformed if she is able to be “on both shores at once, and, at once, see through serpent [ontological] and eagle [epistemological] eyes” (100-1).

It is not as if there is a linear progression from ontological to epistemological, for if ontological means of understanding the world are forgotten, then dominant identities like Holly from Trainor’s research (see chapter 3) are able to escape culpability in systems of hegemony. The result of marginalizing the ontological self is a pedagogy that affects a false, shallow consciousness. Conversely, if the epistemological self is not realized then identities like Paul (see chapter 3) become mired in their oppressive perceptions of reality, and they are unable to see possibility in the experiential. There is a recursive and cyclical dialogue that must take place between the various levels of the dominant identity for critical pedagogy to effect a change in them. Freire’s observation from *Pedagogy of Hope* describes this mutual relationship well: “The circle of knowledge has but two moments in permanent relationship with each other: the moment of cognition of existing, already-produced, knowledge, and the moment of our own production of new knowledge” (192). Freire continues on to say that reproduction of knowledge falls under the purview of instruction and the production of new knowledge comes through research.



It is a fine distinction, to be sure, but in fact what critical pedagogies are asking of the dominant identity is to complete the circle, to “research” the ways they have been “instructed.” This characterization of critical teaching brings both the ontological and the epistemological into relationship with each other while demonstrating how both are a pedagogical necessity.

Interestingly, a recognition of the split between the ontological and epistemological self also demonstrates how the critical teaching experience differs for minority and dominant identities, and why the dominant identity must be positioned differently. For the oppressed identity, there may indeed be a dissonance between their “inner experience” and “outer circumstance,” to revisit Tatum’s assessment. This is not to say that all minority students perceive their experiences as oppressed; in fact many may *not* read their experiences as marginalized. Yet on a global scale, whether or not they understand and recognize it as such, their experience has been as the oppressed, unlike dominant identities. For the minority identity, then, they do not need to maintain the ontological self as a means to understanding how they are complicit in systems of oppression, *necessarily*. (This is, I understand, an overly reductive argument. Admittedly, there may be frequent instances when minority identities *are* implicated in the maintenance of hegemonic systems of oppression. I recognize identity politics as extremely complex, and I make this over-simplified distinction only to demonstrate some of the different ways in which minority and dominant identities can potentially make use of their ontological selves). Instead, for the minority, the ontological self is put to service as a means for identifying instances of lived oppression. Therefore, since the multiple facets of the meaning-making self are put to various uses according to which social group

it most closely identifies with, the positionality of the dominant student must be given unique consideration if she is to be included in the critical teaching project.

### *Positioning the Dominant*

To this point, I have worked to develop the case for a re-imagining of the dominant identity within critical teaching, and understanding that might lead to a pedagogy framed around the notion of inclusion. I have argued for a way that the dominant identity might be uniquely understood within the framework of critical examination so that it might actually find ways to transform its consciousness and begin to work toward social justice. I have also called for increased attention to the positionality of the dominant identity that is attached to this new way of perceiving it, the implication being that the student must be appropriately located within the pedagogical framework if her ontological and epistemological selves are to be meaningfully put to use. Admittedly, I have yet to respond concretely to this call. This withholding, though, has been purposeful.

Thus far I have taken caution to argue from a largely descriptive stance, as I have not believed my task to be the formulation of some sort of universally applicable, master strategy for inclusion of the dominant identity. Such a prescriptive task would surely belie a distorted understanding of the foundational elements of critical teaching. From Freire onward, critical pedagogies have relied heavily on the strength of localized, placed-based investigations of social issues. *Place*, after all, is where systems of hegemony and oppression manifest themselves and play out their social inequities. Therefore *place* is also where the means for responding to social challenges can be found; the very roots of critical pedagogies are found in local examinations and responses to

global social structures (*Oppressed* 76). David Gruenewald strongly echoes Freire's sentiments on the inherent value of the local in critical teaching. He argues that "Place, in other words, foregrounds a narrative of local and regional politics that is attuned to the particularities of where people actually live, and that is connected to global development trends that impact local places" (3). In a similar sense, the exclusion of dominant identities represents a global concern for critical pedagogies. Encouraging and developing a dialogue between the ontological and epistemological selves in the dominant identity represents one means for understanding the problem of inclusion, yet by no measure is it intended to be exhaustive or function as a prescriptive cure-all. The peculiarities of each local environment, each classroom (and perhaps even each individual) dictate that an ur-strategy for actually positioning the dominant identity would be as ineffectual as it is contradictory. Articulating how the dominant identity can be understood for inclusion is the first crucial step; yet capitalizing on and putting that understanding toward re-positioning the dominant within critical teaching requires a fine attunement to the politics and circumstances that can only be found locally.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

“It is crucial to reiterate that any pedagogy that is alive to its own democratic implications is always cautious of its need for closure; it self-consciously resists totalizing certainties and answers.”

Henry Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*

Admittedly, there is an air of incompleteness and ambiguity that accompanies any attempt to theorize the inner workings of critical pedagogies. After all, this research project has not built any concrete pedagogical bridges to connect the gap between critical teaching projects and dominant students’ identities. The distance between dominant students and substantive cognitive transformation still exists. But then again, theories of critical teaching are structured inductively around the broad notions of social justice and equality, not built deductively up from pedagogical specificities like sequenced reading assignments or prescriptive classroom methodologies. The ability to transform consciousness and affect social change therefore lies precisely in critical pedagogies’ ability to *resist* commodification and totalizing discourses; it is the ability to continually re-form and respond to local exigencies that keeps them both relevant and accessible.

What I have intended to offer, then, in critiquing the exclusionary aspects of critical teaching is not a pedagogical panacea, but rather a means of understanding the dominant identity that might in turn facilitate the construction of place-based strategies

for inclusion. To continue the metaphor, while the gap between dominant identities and critical pedagogies continues to exist and can ultimately be bridged only locally, I have attempted to provide a means for imaging that bridge. Moreover, neither should the descriptive arguments I have offered in relation to the dominant identity be considered exhaustive nor the final words on the issue of inclusion. They too represent a measure of incompleteness in the critical teaching project since they offer no definitive material answers. Yet it is crucial that the critical teaching project maintain a measure of imperfection, remain unfinished. This research project highlights just one of the many wrinkles in the project of teaching for transformative consciousness that need to continue to be carefully examined and ironed out.

*Critical Teaching: An Unfinished Project*

In fact, the nuances of critical pedagogies should never be said to be fully settled since, as Giroux cogently recognizes in *On Critical Pedagogy*, “pedagogy is the outgrowth of struggles that are historically specific” (80). This historicity dictates that critical pedagogies continue to self-evaluate and engage in dialogue with themselves and their relation to the surrounding historical contexts. The intricacies of critical teaching, in fact, are far from being exhaustively examined, understood, and explained. Recent publications such as *Going North Thinking West* by Irving Peckham, *Authoring: An Essay for the English Profession on Potentiality and Singularity* by Janis and Richard Haswell, *On Critical Pedagogy* by Henry Giroux, new editions of *Life in Schools* by Peter McLaren, *Critical Pedagogy for Social Justice* by John Smyth, along with numerous journal publications all speak to the still unresolved nature of the critical

teaching project. Indeed, the death toll of any pedagogy is signaled by its announcement of absolute completion and wholeness.

Furthermore, continued self-examination and refinement of any pedagogy is imperative due to the political implications that are bound to classroom practices and choices. If, as critical theory assumes, the postmodern situation problematizes notions of objectivity and neutrality, then the choices educators make speak significantly, however implicitly or explicitly, to the political ramifications attached to their pedagogical approaches. Freire drives this point home in his “Letter to North-American Teachers,” when he bluntly states, “It is my basic conviction that a teacher must be fully cognizant of the political nature of his/her practice and assume responsibility for this rather than denying it” (211). Traditional banking modes of education seek to depoliticize or at least hide the political nature of pedagogy. As presumed apolitical sites, banking models of education are able to formulate canons of teaching practice and classroom standards that are understood to be neutral as well as inherently desirable, and therefore above questioning. A continued self-critique in banking-style pedagogies would then be unnecessary, since the idealized canon is already established and in place. Pedagogical stasis and maintenance of the status quo are the hallmarks of un-reflective banking education. Ironically, though, critical pedagogues would contend that the denial that the classroom is a site of political contestation is itself an intensely political statement. Denial of pedagogical politics amounts to an alignment, however implicitly, with the privileged dominant ideology. Hence, for the critical pedagogue classroom practices cannot help be anything *but* political choices.

If, for the critical pedagogue, teaching is about interrogating the status quo in whatever form it may take, if it is about promoting social justice, if it is about cultivating transformative possibilities through critical consciousness, then these ends in-and-of themselves highlight the political nature of pedagogy. Here again Henry Giroux provides useful guidance. Giroux posits that “In the broadest sense, pedagogy is a principal feature of politics because it provides the capacities, knowledge, skills, and social relations through which individuals recognize themselves as social and political agents” (*Critical* 124) . In other words, the classroom is, by its very nature, a site where students and teachers can begin to identify themselves as socio-political beings. Recognizing herself as a political entity, the critical teacher chooses only to deploy a pedagogy of critique and interrogation rather than one of maintenance and complicity. Thus as sites of political struggle, critical pedagogies (and all pedagogies for that matter) cast far-reaching and significant implications on both teachers and students and as such, a continued reflection and self-critique is imperative lest critical pedagogies slip unknowingly back into the maintenance of the status quo, thereby subverting their original intentions. As sites of political struggle, in other words, critical pedagogies must take preventive measures, in the form of continued self-critique, to ensure that their deeds remain in congruence with their words. In this way, the very political nature of pedagogy ensures that critical teaching will never be completely settled. There should always be an air of restless self-critique if critical pedagogues are to remain dedicated to social justice.

### *Final Thoughts*

Perhaps at its most basic, critical teaching is a commitment to two things: social justice and a radical love for people. As such, critical pedagogies *must* continually engage

in self-critique to ensure that they are remaining faithful to both those commitments. Here again, Paulo Freire continues to offer cogent guidance on this point. He writes: “Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly” (*Oppressed* 42). Critical pedagogies have always been brought to life by the historicity surrounding them; to not engage in continuous self-critique is to ignore the very social fabric that is constitutive of critical teaching. This is not to say that critical pedagogies are groundless or without direction; the end has always remained constant – the advancement of social equality through transformative consciousness. Yet the means to reach that end must take into account the historical exigencies if the pedagogy is to be successful. Presently, the inclusion of dominant students’ identity into the critical teaching project is one such historical reality and pedagogical need that has largely been unaddressed. I have worked to not only bring this issue to better light, but also to provide a new understanding of the dominant identity, a (re)vision of critical pedagogy that would facilitate the inclusion of dominant students. Ultimately, though, the task remains, as it should, a perpetually unfinished one. In order to ensure that transformative consciousness becomes and remains a real pedagogical possibility for all students, progressive educators should continue to investigate and refine the critical teaching project.



## WORKS CITED

- Allen, Katherine R., Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Laura Gillman. "Teaching to Transform: From Volatility to Solidarity in an Interdisciplinary Family Studies Classroom." *Family Relations*. 50.4 (2001): 317-325. Print.
- Allen, Ricky Lee and Cesar Augusto Rossatto. "Does Critical Pedagogy Work with Privileged Students?" *Teacher Education Quarterly*. Winter 2009: 163-180. Print.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: La Frontera. Third Edition*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999. Print.
- Berlin, James. "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." *College English*. 50.5 (1988): 477-494. Print.
- Burnham, Christopher. "Expressivist Pedagogy: Practice/Theory, Theory/Practice." *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. Eds. Tate, Gary, Amy Rupiper and Kurt Schick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.
- Canagarajah, A. Suresh. *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002. Print.
- Connors, Robert J. *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997. Print.
- Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. Print.
- Farris, Sara. "'What's in it for Me?' Two Students' Responses to a Feminist Pedagogy." *Feminism and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*. Eds. Gesa E. Kirsch et. al. Urbana: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. 370-373. Print.
- Flynn, Elizabeth A. "Rescuing Postmodernism." *College Composition and Communication*. 48.4 (1997): 540-555. Print.
- Freire, Paulo. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. Print.
- . "Letter to North American Teachers." *Freire for the Classroom. A Sourcebook for Liberatory Teaching*. Ed. Shor, Ira. Portsmouth: Boyton/Hook Publishers, 1987. Print.
- . *Pedagogy of the Heart*. New York. The Continuum Publishing Company, 2000. Print.

- . *Pedagogy of Hope*. New York. The Continuum Publishing Company, 1994. Print.
- . *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1970. Print.
- Freire, Paulo and Donaldo P. Macedo. "A Dialogue: Culture, Language, and Race." *Harvard Educational Review*. 65.3 (1995): 337-402. Print.
- Fulkerson, Richard. "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century." *College Composition and Communication*. 56.4 (2005): 654-687. Print.
- George, Ann. "Critical Pedagogy: Dreaming of Democracy." *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. Eds. Tate, Gary, Amy Rupiper and Kurt Schick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.
- Gilyard, Keith. *True to the Language Game*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.
- Giroux, Henry. "Critical Pedagogy and the Postmodern/Modern Divide: Towards a Pedagogy of Democratization." *Teacher Education Quarterly*. 31.1 (2004): 31-47. Print.
- . *On Critical Pedagogy*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011. Print.
- . *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*. New York: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1988. Print.
- Gruenewald, David A. "The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place." *Educational Researcher*. 32.4 (2003): 3-12. Print.
- hooks, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston: South End Press. 1989. Print.
- . *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.
- . *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Hardin, Joe Marshall. *Opening Spaces: Critical Pedagogy and Resistance Theory in Composition*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. Print.
- Huot, Brian. *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2002. Print.
- Keating, AnnLouise. "Interrogating 'Whiteness.' Deconstructing 'Race.'" *College English*. 57.8 (1995): 901-918. Print.

- Lindemann, Erika. "Three Views of English 101." *College English*. 57.3 (1995): 287-302. Print.
- Lu, Min-Zhan. "Reading and Writing Difference: The Problematic of Experience." *Feminism and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*. Eds. Gesa E. Kirsch et. al. Urbana: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. 436-446. Print.
- McLaren, Peter. *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education. Fifth Edition*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2007. Print.
- Orr, Deborah Jane. "Toward a Critical Rethinking of Feminist Pedagogical Praxis and Resistant Male Students." *Canadian Journal of Education*. 18.3 (1993): 239-254. Print.
- Probyn, Elsbeth. *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Seitz, David. *Who Can Afford Critical Consciousness? Practicing a Pedagogy of Humility*. Cresskill: Hampton Press, Inc., 2004. Print.
- Sheets, Rosa Hernandez. "Advancing the Field or Taking Center Stage: The White Movement in Multicultural Education." *Educational Researcher*. 29.9 (2000): 15-21. Print.
- Shor, Ira. *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. Print.
- . *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Print.
- Singh, Frances B. "C-Words." *Blundering for a Change: Errors and Expectations in Critical Pedagogy*. Eds. Tassoni, John Paul and William H. Thelin. Portsmouth: Boyton/Hook Publishers, 2000. Print.
- Tatum, Beverly Daniel. "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" *And Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. Print.
- Trainor, Jennifer Seibel. "Critical Pedagogy's 'Other': Constructions of Whiteness in Education for Social Change." *College Composition and Communication*. 53.4 (2002): 631-650. Print.
- . "My Ancestors Didn't Own Slaves': Understanding White Talk About Race." *Research in the Teaching of English*. 40.2 (2005): 140-167. Print.

Villanueva, Victor. *Bootstraps*. Urbana: NCTE, 1993. Print.

Wallerstein, Nina. "Problem-Posing Education: Freire's Method for Transformation."  
*Freire for the Classroom. A Sourcebook for Liberatory Teaching*. Ed. Shor, Ira.  
Portsmouth: Boyton/Hook Publishers, 1987. Print.

## VITA

Manuel Agustin Piña was born in El Paso, Texas, on January 20, 1982 to Manuel and Judy F. Piña. After graduating from Franklin High School in 2010, El Paso, Texas, he attended Texas A&M University-College Station. He received a Bachelor of Arts in English-Rhetoric from Texas A&M University-College Station in May 2004. Following the completion of his B.A., he enlisted in the United States Navy. He completed tours of duty on the aircraft carriers USS John F. Kennedy and USS Abraham Lincoln. He also completed a tour of duty as ground forces in support of Operation Enduring Freedom at Naval Stations Bahrain and Jebel Ali. In May 2010 he received an honorable discharge from the United States Navy. In August 2010, he entered the Graduate College of Texas State University-San Marcos.

Permanent E-mail Address: [pina.manny@gmail.com](mailto:pina.manny@gmail.com)

This thesis was typed by Manuel A. Piña