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October 2004

Dear Reader,

In this (our tenth!) issue, we offer a comment on a troubling shift in recent work of Paulo Freire—or is it only an apparent shift? Howard Tinberg wrote in a letter accompanying his essay that he hoped that "before educators begin to set up lists of privileged texts that 'every American needs to know,' they will heed Freire's warning against devising curricula that silence students' voices." Howard carefully considers Freire's attitude towards the relationship of words and actions, thereby reminding us of the importance of problematizing the problematizer. Beth Daniell's comments likewise underline the importance of a continuing audit of what we mean by "collaborative learning." And we're including the closing paragraphs of Paulo Freire's "Afterword" to Ira Shor's *Freire for the Classroom: A Sourcebook for Liberatory Teaching* as a kind of *metacomment* on both.

By way of a response to the dialogue of Jim Zebroski and Nancy Mack (*Correspondences* 8), Susan Wells offers a practical meditation on the character of dialogue in pedagogy and theoretical discussion.

Your response to these provocative comments is welcome, as always, along with your suggestions about what you would like to read about in *Correspondences*. So far, we've kept our promises about what you can expect to see, except in two instances—circumstances beyond our control. I will venture to say, then, that you will shortly read a comment on current critical theory, remarks on the publishing industry, and more about the philosophy and politics of collaborative learning. Send your letters to me at the address below.

Ann E. Berthoff
14 Thoreau Street
Concord, MA 01742

On Reading Freire and Macedo's *Literacy*

Howard B. Tinberg
Bristol Community College

> I am inviting my readers to act as subjects and thus to reject the idea of merely accepting my analysis.
> —Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education*

Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo's newly published work, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World,* is for me both wonderful and troubling. When Freire and Macedo ask that educators respect students' culture and language, I am ready to bolt off to compose new writing and reading sequences and devise new classroom situations that will invite my students to "read" and "write" their world. What is most appealing to me about this book is its insistence that literacy can be achieved only in the context of people's lives. As I say, this is wonderful stuff, the kind to get me going on a Monday morning. And yet, even as I am drawn to Freire and Macedo's book, I am disturbed by it as well. It is not easy for me to account for this last reaction. Perhaps I am, after all, one of that "schooling class" that the authors rail against; I am a product of those very institutions that have attempted to "silence" students with a curriculum that reflects little concern for their language and culture. Or, perhaps, I am suspicious about a view of literacy that purportedly regards the learner as the subject of study but in fact has simply made the learner subordinate to (and the object of) yet another dominant curriculum, that is, the authors' own particular recipe for emancipation.

The book's credo, or more precisely its politics, is conveniently summed up early:

> Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world. As I suggested earlier, this movement from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* it or *rewriting* it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process. (*Literacy* 35)

For Freire and Macedo, reading is much more than learning to vocalize mechanically certain discrete sounds, nor is it a matter of regurgitating someone else's text. Reading the word is achieved within the context or frame of one's own world. Thus, in his reading text called "The Second Popular Culture Notebook," devised to improve the

reading of his students in rural São Tomé, Freire includes a narrative whose characters have to find a way to drive their truck (carrying baskets of cocoa beans) over a mudhole. They think about the problem, discuss it among themselves, and soon come up with a solution: placing dry branches and rocks on the ground to provide the needed traction. Significantly, the narrative is entitled "The Act of Studying." Study is presented as an activity of use in the world of peasant farmers, and not merely an academic classroom pursuit.

I do not teach peasant farmers. For the past two years, I have taught white, middle class students at an urban university. Despite such vast differences, I am struck by the similarity between my freshman composition students and Freire's farmers. I would call this shared quality a deep distrust of classroom learning, which is regarded as unconnected to the students' own language and thought. In such a forbidding environment, students come to doubt their own ability to learn. I think it a safe bet that most of my students, given the chance to reflect, would express themselves as did one of Freire's: "Before, we did not know what we knew" (*Literacy* 167). How could they? If I may use Freire and Macedo's terminology, rarely have these students been made the "subjects" of their own learning, but instead have been regarded as "objects," empty vessels ready to be filled (or, to use Freire's favorite metaphor, to receive deposits).

To read the word, in the Freirean sense, is to lay claim to the word and make it one's own. To read the world is to position oneself, and to act, in it. Since we come to know the world only through language and come to use language only through using it in the world, "reading the word continually implies reading the world" and, I would argue, vice-versa: to know the world we need to find the right words, words that allow us to reflect on the world. Freire and Macedo suggest as one way to bring student, word, and world together that the class engage in researching and compiling an ethnohistory of the community through taped interviews. The authors recommend such a project for rural areas, especially where an oral tradition still thrives. In fact, the multicultural, urban classroom of the "First World" can also benefit from ethnographic work whereby the student actively researches and writes about the ways of her own community.

But, for Freire and Macedo, reading the world/word is not enough. It must be *preceded* by writing and rewriting the world. The word must yield to "work" or action. Some years ago, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire expressed the following view of the relationship of word to work:

> Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a word is to transform the world. ...When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*....
>
> On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into *activism.* The latter—action for action's sake—negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible. (*Pedagogy* 75-76).

This earlier view held that "to say the true word—which is work, which is praxis—is to transform the world" (*Pedagogy* 76). The relationship between action and reflection, or work and the word, was for Freire symbiotic, each contributing to the other and in the process sustaining the delicate organism. The outcome or praxis was dialogue, which Freire defined as "the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (*Pedagogy* 76). Authentic dialogue allows each of us to attain "significance" and as such is an "existential necessity" (*Pedagogy* 77). In dialogue no one dominates or silences another.

In this latest book, Freire and Macedo begin to isolate work from the word and in so doing make me very nervous. In the earlier book, change is said to take place by virtue of the subtle interaction of reflection and work; here, the two are compartmentalized and clear precedence is given to the latter, which alone is "practical." Put another way, where once the "true words" made a real difference and had transformative power, now words yield to the world. As I read the situation, dialogue yields to silence. And what we are offered approaches what Freire earlier had called "activisim," action without reflection.

Freire of course is the first to admit that his is a committed pedagogy, and he rightly asserts no curriculum can be nor should be "neutral." Once we deny the politics of education we begin to silence our students. But my point is that a passionately held pedagogy must still be dialogic, that is, it must still encounter and negotiate with other pedagogies as fervently held and expressed; otherwise, *dialogue* becomes a mere slogan. When, in a letter to Mario Cabral included in the appendix, Freire challenges the leadership of the African nations of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde to jettison Portuguese as the language of literacy instruction in favor of the native Creole, he is the militant rather than the dialogist. Is it possible to be both? I think not. Militancy precludes dialogue, and the rest is silence.

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Pedagogue in Process

Beth Daniell
West Virginia University

At recent conferences, I've heard two papers offering theoretical justification for collaborative learning techniques in the writing class. One accounted for the success of group strategies with basic writers in terms of Walter Ong's orality-literacy dichotomy; the other used Paulo Freire's philosophy and pedagogy to argue for Ken Bruffee's collaborative learning techniques. I'm not concerned here with the wrongheadedness of the first paper: Anne Ruggles Gere has already made that argument in her recent *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications.* Her last chapter explains why the view of literacy espoused by Ong and others is inconsistent with descriptions of successful writing groups. Nor is my essay really about collaborative learning methods. My aim here is to explore some of the questions raised by the paper on the relation of the pedagogies of Bruffee and Freire.

I claim that as educators in the United States, we cannot use Freire to support Bruffee—or any other classroom strategy, for that matter—unless and until we are willing to talk in Freire's terms about our society and our place, our students' and our own, in that society. Until we are ready to use such terms as *economics, politics, ideology, oppression, poverty, power,* and *capitalism* in more than the superficial, academically sterile ways they are currently being bandied about, we may not claim that what we do is Freirean pedagogy. Freire's philosophy evolves from a view of knowledge, social relationships, and language that is antithetical to most institutionalized education in this country. School in the U.S. is structured on the assumptions that knowledge is a measurable entity; that students enjoy equal opportunities and are individuals with only superficial ties to groups of origin; and that the value of language as a transparent window on cognition is measured in degrees of "correctness."

Despite the dominance of this ideology, writing groups are not a new invention in America, Gere tells us. Her research indicates that the kind of writing group a teacher sets up depends on that teacher's conception of knowledge and of literacy. Confirming Gere's insight, Mara Holt has found that during the 1950s some composition teachers who employed group pedagogy argued that it allowed them to handle large numbers of students, while others claimed that it served to augment students' reliance on the teacher and the textbook as ultimate authorities. One article, revealing a decidedly McCarthyesque bent consistent with its publication date of 1956, claimed that group pedagogy prevented plagiarism because, to be blunt, it taught students to rat on each other. Holt warns us not to conclude that all group work accomplishes the same things. It doesn't.

Is it possible, then, that collaborative learning is not, as some apparently think, an automatic cure for all the ills of teaching writing in American schools and colleges? Is it a neutral technology? Raymond Williams, for one, has argued compellingly that no technology is ever neutral. Any given technological advance is already embedded in a social situation, serving the interests of those who invent or introduce it. The structure of the society determines both the uses and the users of technology. The voluntary writing groups Gere describes may attest to the human impulse to share literacy in order to increase literacy and may likewise indicate the value of literacy for some social groups. It does not follow, however, that collaborative learning is in itself necessarily a liberatory pedagogy.

Of course, teachers who subscribe to the banking concept of education, which Freire describes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* won't use CL techniques at all. Such teachers view knowledge as separate, "out there," and see learners as depositories to be filled by the teacher. For these teachers, reality exists independently of their own or their students' perceptions of it. "Banking" teachers probably won't employ any technique that takes time away from the teacher's main task: filling the empty receptacles with the official story. Clearly, they won't be tempted to experiment with Bruffee's pedagogy. Since knowledge is for Bruffee a social construct, he attempts to create a classroom which shifts power from the teacher to the community of students, but the real authority remains removed from students; final authority is located in the "discourse," or "interpretive," community. According to this view, students in a composition class are apprentices who learn the "normal discourse" in order to get into the interpretive community. Once there, if they are persuasive enough, they might be able to effect some change. (See Fish, Rorty, and Bruffee for explanation and Pratt, Lentricchia, and Myers for criticism.)

What Bruffee appears to be aiming for is "anti-foundationalist" education. The "foundations" of the social order and of academic thought, according to this post-structural perspective, are neither inherently right nor inevitable nor natural. Rather, the "foundations" are constituted by agreement—and validated by power. At this point, it is important to remember that Bruffee's pedagogy began in the Open Admissions program and is designed to prevent the devalorization of students' own backgrounds, language, ideas, and perceptions. He is telling students that their ways of thinking and using language aren't "wrong." Bruffee is trying, I think, to give students a way to preserve their own cultural, ethnic, and personal identities and at the same time a way to survive in the academy. It seems to me that Bruffee is also trying to have it both ways—to modify the present structures of the academy but not change them in any substantial way; to help students negotiate these structures but not touch their core identities. Bruffee forgets that these *students* will be changed, in any case.

One problem with anti-foundationalism is that we cannot acutally *be* anti-foundationalists. Realizing that there are no foundations, no transcendental sources of wisdom, doesn't change what we do in our classrooms; Fish says that we still

teach what we believe. We cannot *not* stand on some foundation. Formed and surrounded by social and thus political forces, we cannot escape our own historicity to stand on neutral ground. Bruffee's attempt to make the writing classroom a model of how knowledge is made serves to cut the composition class off from the historical, social, and political facts of students' lives. This move ultimately supports the status quo.

Which points to the main difference between Bruffee and Freire: Freire never forgets that all of us—teachers and learners alike—are historical beings, that we are people-in-a-situation who cannot but bring our life experiences to learning. Teachers must give students survival tools like rhetorical forms and the standard language (Shor and Freire 71), but it is not just the survival of human beings that Freire aims at; it is the transformation of the "interpretive community." Freire intends for pedagogy to contribute to revolution in societies which teach human beings that they are less than human. Through the "I-thou" dialogic inquiry of Freire's pedagogy, both teacher and students question the official story, reinterpret and transform it. In turn, as people-in-a-situation, they question, reinterpret, and transform themselves. The teacher here does not change the students; they change themselves. In the words of participants in Freire's literacy program: "They used to say we were unproductive because we were lazy and drunkards. All lies. Now that we are respected as men, we're going to tell everyone that we were never drunkards or lazy. We were exploited." ...."I work, and working I transform the world." ...."Before this, words meant nothing to me; now they speak to me and I can make them speak."

The foundation of this pedagogy is Freire's belief in the ability of human beings to use language in order to express and explore their world; to make meaning for themselves and then for others; to articulate relationships; to achieve through dialogue a critical consciousness. Freire's belief in the heuristic power of language is the key to his seemingly miraculous pedagogy, which can alphabetize adult illterates in 30 hours. "Generative words," collected from the learner's daily lives, are from the first politically charged; that is, they are discovered at the juncture of personal and social and historical identities. At the outset students see literacy as a way to voice their needs and purposes, and their understanding.

In the United States the structure of education rarely permits the classroom recognition of personal and political facts of students' actual lives. As Freire puts it in *A Pedagogy for Liberation,* the culture of North America dichotomizes reading the word and reading the world (135). Society demands that we teach students to write the word. And then the question becomes which world do we teach them to write? The world according to William Bennett? A world where knowledge is already defined, language prescribed, and the lives of learners separated from both? A world where the interpretive community supports injustice by pretending that it doesn't exist? Or a world where change is possible when human beings join together to examine it critically, where people-in-a-situation are allowed to name the world themselves? Bruffee and Freire seem to present a choice between world views. They agree that knowledge is socially constructed, but they appear to disagree about whether we can actually bring about changes in how it is constructed socially. In other words, their differences seem political. I use the words *seem* and *appear* because Bruffee's last article in *College English* indicates a growing awareness of the political implications of his perspective. Bruffee is closer to what I want to do in my classroom than banking education, but Freire is closer still.

Freire's pedagogy does not require self-consciously collaborative methods, for it is rooted in the social nature of language and human beings. Ira Shor says that Freirean pedagogy does not preclude lecture—so long as the lecture does not make its content into deposits of Truth and so long as it originates in students' felt needs. I find Bruffee's collaborative techniques helpful in discovering those needs. For the most part, I was educated in traditional ways. The teacher lectured and I took notes. I memorized the notes and assumed that if they made no sense, I wasn't smart enough to understand. And for most of my career, I taught the same way I had been taught. Bruffee gives me practical hints about how to get my students talking to one another, not just to me, and about how to help them articulate their own perspectives rather than mine. But it is Freire that gives me a reason to make these changes.

In composition, practice without a theory of the nature of language, literacy, and learning is at best a series of lucky hunches, at worst a repetition of the sins of the fathers. This is not to say that we should search for The One Right Way To Teach, but that critical, theoretical debate can reveal finer and finer distinctions so that choices about practice become clearer. At the same time, our theories must be grounded in practice and in purpose. Unquestioned theories in our classrooms can damage; after all, our theories are not tested on seed corn or pigeons. We can no longer grab a theory, any theory, to support a strategy that appears to work. We must question each theoretical explanation by analyzing the assumptions and the research the theory is built on and by studying its implications. Then we must question whether the theory is in fact consistent with what we say we want to teach.

Stephen North has recently written that composition is "a damned awkward subject...with inquiry and practice bound together in an academically untraditional way"

(374). But this very awkwardness calls for a dialectic between theory and practice, between academic concerns and private purpose, that can, even as it frustrates, inform and instruct us. Only such a damned awkward subject could reveal the inconsistencies in my own practice, theory, and purpose and at the same time strengthen my belief that I am a teacher in process.

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From Paulo Freire's "Afterword" to Ira Shor's *Freire for the Classroom: A Sourcebook for Liberatory Teaching*

For progressive teachers, pedagogy implies, then, that the learners penetrate or enter into the discourse of the teacher, appropriating for themselves the deepest significance of the subject being taught. The indisputable responsibility of the teacher to teach is thus shared by the learners through their own act of intimately knowing what is taught.

And the progressive teacher only truly teaches to the degree that he or she has also appropriated the content of what is being taught, learning it critically for herself or himself. In this way, the act of teaching is an act of reknowing an already known object. In other words, the teacher reexperiences his or her own capacity to know through the similar capacity to know that exists in the learners. To teach, then, is the form that knowing takes as the teacher searches for the particular way of teaching that will challenge and call forth in students their own act of knowing. Thus, teaching is both creative and critical. It requires inventiveness and curiosity by both teacher and learner in the process.

To teach content in a way that will make subject matter appropriated by students implies the creation and exercise of serious intellectual discipline. Such discipline began forming long before schooling began. To believe that placing students in a learning milieu automatically creates a situation for critical knowing without this kind of discipline is a vain hope. Just as it is impossible to teach someone how to learn without teaching some content, it is also impossible to teach intellectual discipline except through a practice of knowing that enables learners to become active and critical subjects, constantly increasing their critical abilities.

In the formation of this necessary discipline, the progressive teacher cannot identify the act of studying, learning, knowing with entertainment or game-playing that has very relaxed or nonexistent rules. Neither can it be identified with a learning milieu that is boring or unpleasant. The act of studying, learning, knowing is difficult and above all demanding. But, it is necessary for learners to discover and feel the inherent joy that is always ready to take hold of those who give themselves to the process of learning.

The teacher's role in nurturing this discipline and joy is enormous. Authority and competence both play a part. A teacher who does not take pedagogy seriously, who does not study, who teaches badly what she/he does not know well, who does not struggle to obtain the material conditions indispensable to education, that teacher is actively inhibiting the formation of intellectual discipline so

essential to students. That teacher is also destroying herself/himself as a teacher.

On the other hand, this intellectual discipline is not the result of something the teacher does *to* the learners. Although the presence, the orientation, the stimulation, the authority, of the teacher are all essential, the discipline has to be built and internalized by the students. Therefore, any teacher who rigidly adheres to the routines set forth in teaching manuals is exercising authority in a way that inhibits the freedom of students, the freedom they need to exercise critical intelligence through which they appropriate the subject matter. Such a teacher is neither free nor able to help students become creative, curious people.

Response to Zebroski-Mack

Susan Wells
Temple University

Our profession organizes the relations between speech and writing in a paradoxical way: we teach writing, but much of our professional discourse is conversational; work in rhetoric and composition retains the genres and inflections of teacher talk. This is empirically true—teachers of composition gather and chat. We go to conferences; we meet with staff; our daily activities in writing programs require a fair amount of coordinating and checking in with one another. It is also formally true that our scholarly writing is relatively close to conversation: while ordinary talk about literature is removed from the necessarily *written* quality of, say, Paul de Man's essays, there is less distance between ordinary talk about the teaching of writing and the current issue of *College English.* Like it or not. For better or worse.

The "Dialogue on Composition" written by James Zebroski and Nancy Mack gives us a chance to think through this paradox. What does it mean to write and reflect on composition, using the genre of the dialogue? Why do these reflections recommend that students practice a certain style of ethnography?

A dialogue is, of course, a work of fiction, written in one of the oldest genres we have. The "Dialogue on Composition," like *Utopia* and *The Republic,* tells the story of the creation of a community—a small community, both of whose members are critical theorists teaching writing. N and J, like members of any small community, are occupied with the question of social reproduction: how can the community of critical theorists grow by inducting students? N and J face this question with a certain ambivalence: their understanding of teaching is deeply emancipatory, and so they are alive to the paradox of students being maneuvered into accepting a critical viewpoint from the hands of the teacher. Writing a dialogue on this question allows them to put their ambivalence to use, to introduce into the body of the discourse those "yes, but" moves, so central to the practice of teaching, that seem like silly waffling in a discursive essay. By working out a representation of a dialogic performance, the authors of this essay have mediated between the demands of written reflection and the demands of good conversation; they keep faith with both the conversational customs of the discipline and with its commitment to the written, the revised, the selected, the labored.

In the form of the dialogue, then, we find a powerful recognition of the work of writing, of the plurality of voices, of the unequal distribution of discursive power in classrooms. But, while the speakers acknowledge that "dialogue is a lot more involved with power than most of us at first believe," this text locates power securely outside the bounds of emancipated classroom discourse. Power is something from outside that operates on students and teachers as a compulsion. False consciousness "makes" the teacher believe something; individuals are "socialized into" world views, and authoritarian voices make us do things that "we really do *not* want to do." How does an external consciousness compel a teacher, and who are we to say that it is false? Who were these individuals before they were socialized? What is this desire that is not really wanting? And again, who is to say? The issue of power is indeed on the table, and not only in the teacher's mission of exposure and enlightenment. Teachers engage in the powerful act of forming students, of calling out certain possibilities in their writing; these teachers have organized that act around a powerful story, one in which teachers give students access to an innocent, natural, and true form of consciousness. D.H. Lawrence told this story best, when he showed us Ursula planning to teach: "She would be the gleaming sun of the school, the children would blossom like little weeds, the teachers like tall, hard plants would burst into rare flower" (*The Rainbow,* 367).

It may make us all crazy, seeing that hope rise up again and again, knowing that no story is enough to sustain it for long, that no critique is powerful enough to deliver us from it. Let me juxtapose against this hope another story, a story of ethnographic practice. This passage opens my notes on a teaching observation at Temple, where we have been experimenting with ethnographic observation of teaching: "9:13. Teacher assumes role. Says good morning to each student by name as they come in. Students return greeting. Teacher smiles. Why?"

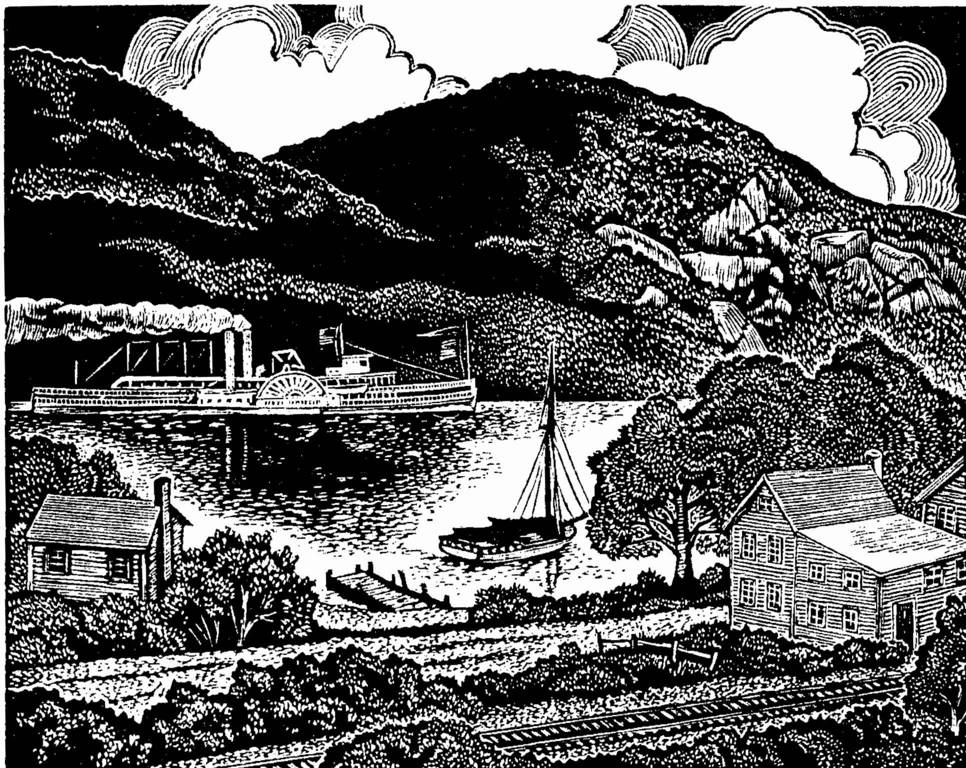
This notation reflects a certain teaching practice: a scrap of classroom dialogue stolen from the teacher's memory, repeating an opening ritual in Quaker schools. My notation of it also reflects a practice of surveillance. It was just this ritual greeting that had identified the teacher as "weird" to her peer counsellor and that had provoked me to visit her

class. I was curious; when I saw that classroom greeting, I also formed a working hypothesis. Like many new teachers. this one, I speculated, was worried about her relationship to her students and was handling her problem by building very controlled interactions into the class. I wondered how students responded to their own roles in this ritual, which did not seem to be optional. This issue—control of student voice—organized my observation and my talk with the teacher.

Ethnography, critical or conventional, can also be an exercise of power, perhaps the more effective because it works close to the bone, noticing gaze and movement and gesture, all those bodily signs that ordinary observation leaves untouched. It puts into play its own story, a story whose potential endings include, prosaically, mutual embarrassment, and melodramatically, social marginalization and unemployment. This ethnographic moment, then, represents my hope that a certain tall, hard plant could be provoked into rare flower, and like all such hopes, it is not innocent of a desire for power, a willingness to use the power that brought me into the classroom as observer and this teacher to the classroom as observed.

Because this moment is also an interruption: it admits another voice into the ritual dialogue between teacher and student. Noting the teacher's smile takes her performance and turns it into a story. I value this interruption, this raising to consciousness; I see in it some possibilities for the creation of new discursive forms. On another day, though, I see in it a particularly pushy and obnoxious form of surveillance. But such observations, whether performed by teachers or students, whether presented as essays to be graded or as reports to be bureaucratically processed, will, like dialogue itself, turn out to be a lot more involved with power than most of us at first believe. Recognizing that involvement, we might turn to one of the more somber pages of Gramsci, the tutelary spirit of this dialogue. Can we make room for this stern ghost at our feast of discourse?

> The work has to be done particularly in written form, just as it is in written form that criticisms have to be made—in the form of terse, succinct notes... the writing down of notes and criticisms is a didactic principle rendered necessary by the need to combat the habits formed in public speaking—prolixity, demagogy, and paralogism. (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*)



The striking wood engravings of Hudson River and other scenes in this and previous issues of Correspondences *are the work of Vic Schwarz, Cold Spring, NY, who designs* Correspondences *and all Boynton/Cook books.*

Correspondences Ten

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