Beyond Charity: Partial Narratives as a Metaphor for Basic Writing

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ABSTRACT: In "A New World: Redefining the Legacy of Min-Zhan Lu"(JBW 27.2, Fall 2008), Brian Ray revisits the controversy that emerged in the early 1990s in response to critiques of the iconic Mina Shaughnessy made by Min-Zhan Lu. He offers a reading of the debate that focuses on common ground between the two sides through a metaphor of linguistic charity based on the work of Donald Davidson. While common ground can no doubt be found between these two opposing sides, by focusing exclusively on the similarities between Lu and her critics, Ray runs the risk of diluting Lu's argument and inadvertently reproducing the relations of power that Lu's project is attempting to undermine. This article, therefore, offers a different route to reading the debate between Lu and her critics—a reading that focuses on the real and irreconcilable differences between the two sides. Building on the work of Elizabeth Ellsworth, this article offers a metaphor of partial narratives, in an attempt to expose the power relations embedded in all knowledge production. This metaphor of partial narratives provides not only a way of understanding the substantive difference between Lu and her critics but also raises questions that can help inform an approach to negotiating the different discourses present in composition classrooms, especially those focused on students positioned as basic writers.

KEYWORDS: Min-Zhan Lu; Mina Shaughnessy; partial narratives; linguistic charity; conflict and struggle

In "A New World: Redefining the Legacy of Min-Zhan Lu," Brian Ray revisits the controversy that emerged in the early 1990s in response to critiques of the iconic Mina Shaughnessy made by Min-Zhan Lu. Lu's critique would eventually lead to a debate in the pages of *College English*, where defenders of Mina Shaughnessy would take Lu to task for what they believed was both a misreading of Shaughnessy and the promotion of a dangerous and potentially explosive pedagogy. Ray should be commended for bringing attention back to this debate, which ended in a stalemate with neither side conceding to points made by the other side. He should also be commended for trying to find common ground between the two sides. This is especially important in academia, where too often false dichotomies

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are created that limit the potential of different theories to be in productive dialogue with one another. While I applaud this attempt to find common ground between Shaughnessy and Lu, my concern is that Ray's desire to find commonality glosses over important and real differences between the two sides of this debate.

In this article, I revisit the debate with an eye to differences between the two sides. My hope is to offer what Elizabeth Ellsworth in *Teaching Positions* calls a different "route to reading" the texts of Lu and her critics—a route that makes different assumptions and asks different questions than the ones made by Ray in his article. The route to reading that I will take focuses on differences between Lu and her critics, providing a vital supplement to Ray's focus on finding common ground. It will demonstrate that while Ray is correct in alluding to some similarities between Lu and Shaughnessy and her supporters, in the end Lu is offering a vision of the composition classroom that is a radical departure from that of Mina Shaughnessy and her followers, as well as a radical departure from the practices found in most composition classrooms today. Therefore, this different route to reading Lu's legacy is meant to be much more than a critique of Ray's position. Instead, I propose to use a critique of Ray's position as a way of asking bigger questions about the state of composition studies and the place of basic writing within the field today. In short, I see this critique of Ray as part of a larger project of pushing the field of composition studies in general, and basic writing specifically, to take stock of its past in order to meet the challenges of the future.

In the first part of this article I will offer my reading of Lu's theoretical framework through a chronological look at some of her major articles written around the time of the debate. I will then examine the debate that emerged in response to her theoretical framework, demonstrating the ways that the positions of Lu and her critics are in many ways fundamentally incompatible with each other. I will then explore Ray's attempt to bring the two sides together through the concept of "a pedagogy of charity" and will argue that although Ray does demonstrate some common ground between the two sides, a pedagogy of charity glosses over real differences between them. This glossing over of differences serves to silence the critique Lu was attempting to make of the field of composition in general and her critique of basic writing programs specifically. Based on this critique, I will attempt to theorize an approach to teaching that illuminates the differences between Lu and her critics through a pedagogy of partial narratives as opposed to a pedagogy of charity. I end with some ideas on how this might inform current pedagogical approaches in the field of composition.

Revisiting the Legacy of Min-Zhan Lu

Lu began to develop her theoretical framework through autobiographic work. In "From Silence to Words," she describes her experiences as a Chinese student in Maoist China coming from a household that attempted to instill in her a Western humanistic tradition through the teaching of European culture and the English language. She documents the conflict and struggle she experienced as she navigated these contradictory discourses arguing that "despite my parents' and teachers' attempts to keep home and school discrete, the internal conflict between the two discourses continued whenever I read or wrote" (445). While the struggle she experienced in having to navigate the two fundamentally contradictory discourses caused her a great deal of pain, she argues that "constantly having to switch back and forth between the discourse of home and that of school made me sensitive and self-conscious about the struggle I experienced every time I tried to read, write, or think in either discourse" (438). She concludes from her experiences that struggle, rather than something that is inherently limiting to students, can be embraced and used constructively by all students experiencing contradictions between home and school discourses.

There is a clear connection between this autobiographical piece and the subsequent theoretical framework Lu would articulate. In "Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy," Lu argues that "language is best understood not as a neutral vehicle of communication but a site of struggle among competing discourses" (27). Using this as her premise, she argues that Mina Shaughnessy was guilty of relying on an "essentialist" view of language that assumes that "linguistic codes can be taught in isolation from the production of meaning and from the dynamic power struggle within and among diverse discourses" (28). In short, in Lu's view, Shaughnessy fails to examine the political nature of language and discourse; in particular, she charges Shaughnessy with what she terms a politics of linguistic innocence that fails to explore the ways that academic discourse may constrain what students are able to say and the knowledge that they are able to produce.

This argument was built upon in "Conflict and Struggle"—the article that would lead to the huge debate in *College English* mentioned above. Elaborating on her critique of Mina Shaughnessy, Lu demonstrates how academic discourse is embedded in relations of power and argues that learning this discourse is not inherently empowering to basic writers; on the contrary, Lu points to how exposure to academic discourse may actually silence basic writers. The only way Lu sees around this bind is to "find

ways of foregrounding conflict and struggle not only in the generation of meaning or authority, but also in the teaching of 'correctness' in syntax, spelling, and punctuation, traditionally considered the primary focus of Basic Writing instruction" (910). In other words, basic writing teachers need to place conflict and struggle at the center of any pedagogy as part of a process of developing in students a "mestiza consciousness" (888) that allows them to blend different discourses in their writing and reposition themselves in relation to both their home discourses and academic discourse. This stance articulated by Lu received passionate critique by those who saw themselves as continuing in the tradition of Mina Shaughnessy. It is to the debate that emerged around this article that we now turn.

The Debate

The debate between Lu and the defenders of Shaughnessy came to a head in a symposium on basic writing that appeared in *College English* three years after Lu's "Conflict and Struggle" article appeared in that same journal. In total, six people participated in the symposium, with four of the respondents (Patricia Laurence, Peter Rondinone, Barbara Gleason, and Thomas Farrell) openly critical of Lu, one respondent (Paul Hunter) responding to Farrell and not to Lu directly, and Lu defending her position as a conclusion to the symposium. Rather than go through each of the respondents' arguments, which are succinctly summarized in Ray's article (111-14), I will focus on Lu's response to her critics and describe the critic's position only when demonstrating substantive differences between their positions and those of Lu. In contrast to Ray, who faults Lu for missing "an opportunity to identify common ground between herself and her peers" (113), I will argue that Lu's response shows fundamental differences between Lu and her critics that may not be reconcilable. In particular, I will focus on Lu's elaboration of the Foucauldian principles on which her analysis is based as well as her defense against her critics' accusation of either/or thinking.

Lu begins her response by clarifying the type of history she was attempting to do in "Conflict and Struggle." In response to her critics, who saw her argument as an attack on Shaughnessy's intentions, personality, or career achievements, Lu stresses that she was doing a Foucauldian analysis of the discourses surrounding the emergence of the basic writer. A Foucauldian analysis does not seek to find a chronology for a particular historical issue but rather tries to excavate the discursive regimes that make a certain system of knowledge possible as well as to identify the knowledges that have

been subjugated by this system (Foucault 85). Lu, therefore, was not trying to critique Mina Shaughnessy as an individual, but rather trying to critically examine the discourse of basic writing.

This Foucauldian analysis was seen by some of Lu's critics as an attack on Shaughnessy as an individual rather than a critical examination of the discursive regime of basic writing. For example, Barbara Gleason in her critique of Lu argues that "to say that Shaughnessy's pedagogy and research were based on the premise that form is separate from meaning is to say that Shaughnessy was influenced by some of the most commonly accepted premises and theories of her time" (887). What she fails to recognize is that this is, in fact, what Lu is saying. This is because they have fundamentally different ways of understanding power and agency. For Gleason, power and agency reside in the individual while for Lu power and agency are shaped and re-shaped by the discursive regimes prominent in any particular socio-historical context. For Lu, Shaughnessy was not an autonomous individual but a subject shaped by and working within discursive regimes embedded in relations of power. Therefore, what appears to be an attack on an individual in Gleason's view is in Lu's view a critical examination of a particular socio-historical context that made the emergence of the basic writer possible.

Lu expands on this Foucauldian analysis in her critique of Gleason's conception of student need. Gleason argues that rather than embracing conflict and struggle, the role of the basic writing teacher should be to care for their students and work to meet their needs. Lu problematizes this view, arguing that Gleason "implies that whatever 'needs' she has in mind are self-evident 'facts' or 'truths' inherent in students rather than a discursive and political construct shaped by a particular form of discourse: knowledge arrived at by taking a particular theoretical perspective towards a particular 'object' of study" (899). In contrast to this approach, which Lu believes reproduces the students as spectators, Lu advocates explicitly opening up classroom dialogue to analyzing the discursive constructs motivating classroom interaction. In other words, rather than treating discourse in general, and academic discourse in particular, as removed from the ideological processes that make their production possible, Lu is advocating a denaturalization process that attempts to make the ideological underpinnings of academic discourse an explicit part of instruction. The purpose of this denaturalization process is to give students the tools to reposition themselves in relation to academic discourse rather than be passive vessels absorbing academic discourse without question and accepting the teacher's conception of their needs uncritically.

In Lu's response, in addition to elaborating on her Foucauldian analysis, she defends herself against the accusation of perpetuating either/or thinking. She argues that it is her critics who are partaking in this kind of thinking. In particular, she takes issue with Patricia Laurence's contention that a metaphor of understanding, caring, exchange, and reciprocity is preferable to the metaphor of conflict and struggle that Lu proposes. Lu critiques this either/or thinking, arguing that "part of the reason I promote the image of the new mestiza and the notion of education as a process of repositioning is precisely because these concepts offer a way of thinking beyond the trap of polarization which seems to have dominated much of the earlier debate over 'the students' right to their own language' and current debates over so-called Political Correctness" (895). She goes on to examine some "borderland" writing demonstrating that the conjunctions and adverbs most frequently used by these writers are "both," "simultaneously," "not only . . . but also," and "as well as" (896). In short, borderland writing offers another discursive voice that can be in productive conflict and struggle with the either/or thinking that permeates much of academia including, in Lu's view, the work of Laurence.

Lu argues that this type of either/or thinking is also perpetuated by her other critics in the symposium. For example, she finds this type of thinking reproduced in the "polarized pro/con format" advocated by Thomas Farrell in his response, where he advises basic writing teachers "to have the students read articles arguing for and against some proposed course of action; and have them summarize arguments both for and against; and then have them write a position paper that includes a refutation of the adversarial position" (891). Lu also finds this either/or thinking in the commentary of Peter Rondinone. She challenges the dichotomy he creates between the world of academia and the world of the home. In contrast to Rondinone, who characterizes the world of the home as consisting of "idiots" with "values not worth clinging to" (897) and the world of academia as "conferences, journals, and programs to help people like himself," Lu argues that both worlds have positive and negative aspects. For Lu, the either/or thinking of both Farrell's pro-con format and Rondinone's academic versus home discourses serves to marginalize those students in the borderland who cannot or will not conform to these dichotomies.

In summary, there are great differences between Lu and her critics. The differences boil down to different ways of understanding the world and the nature of academic discourse. For Lu's critics, academic discourse is a neutral vehicle of communication that students need to know either in replacement

of or in addition to their home discourses. For Lu, coming from a Foucauldian perspective, power is embedded in particular socio-historical discursive regimes that make possible certain ways of understanding the world while subjugating others. Academic discourse is not immune from these relations of power. The only way that Lu sees to resist the power relations embedded in academic discourse is to embrace conflict and struggle in the composition classroom. This embrace of conflict and struggle will give students the tools to reposition themselves in relation to academic discourse and other discourses in their lives. How Lu envisions this happening in the classroom will be explored in greater detail below after an exploration of the limitations of the pedagogy of charity metaphor proposed by Ray as uniting Lu and her critics.

The Limitations to a Pedagogy of Charity as Metaphor

The concept of a pedagogy of charity comes from the work of philosopher Donald Davidson and has been adopted by some scholars in composition studies. The idea behind charity is that "under charity, interpreters assume that what their interlocutive partners say that doesn't make sense is nevertheless true—not error, ignorance, or deception—and so they are motivated to enter a dialogic process of interpretive vision and revision in search of the causes of the other's way of using words, a search that can end in the interlocutor's reconception of the way things are in a particular situation" (Yarbrough xii). In short, rather than assuming we know what others are trying to say, charity requires an approach where others are seen as rational beings and errors and misconceptions are not presumed.

In "A Pedagogy of Charity," Kevin Porter elaborates on what this might look like through a differentiation between a pedagogy of severity and a pedagogy of charity. In his view, a pedagogy of severity is characterized by "the shutting down of dialogic possibilities, assigning labels and making corrections instead of asking questions and searching for new answers" (576). This is contrasted with a pedagogy of charity, where students are presumed to be authors in control of the text, having chosen certain strategies for certain effects. Ray argues that this pedagogy of charity is the missing link that can connect Lu and her critics. In Ray's reading of the debate, the parallels between Lu and her critics "become clearer when viewed through the common denominator of linguistic charity" (119). In his view, both Lu and her critics favor negotiation with students on issues of language and grammar. He concludes from this that Lu's pedagogy does not pose a threat to the role

of academic discourse in writing classrooms and argues that it is important to ensure that basic writing teachers be instilled with greater linguistic sensitivity "not through calls for revolution, but through acts of charity" (p. 125).

I am very much in agreement with Ray in his call for more linguistic sensitivity among basic writing teachers. I also agree with him that there are indeed connections to be made between Lu and her critics as well as between Lu and a pedagogy of charity. Examining the application of a pedagogy of charity described by Porter in his analysis of the peer feedback one student (Joan) gave to a peer can provide an example of common ground:

> There is an eerie mix of voices and audiences in this passage. The "readerly" voice of the first three sentences surely shifts to a "teacherly," evaluative tone in the final sentence. . . . Behind these two voices I hear a third, that of the "student," addressed to me—not to the supposed "author" of the text—in an attempt to explain/justify her grade. . . . And perhaps thinking that she may have overlooked several grievous errors—the kind only English teachers ever seem to find—Joan felt she had to mention that she really did try to find problems with the essay but couldn't. (583)

One can see here a little bit of the experience that Lu so eloquently described in "From Silence to Words." Joan, like Lu, is blending a number of different discourses into one written assignment. Porter, in his charitable reading of it, should be applauded for seeing this blend rather than pathologizing it. Certainly he and Lu would agree here. Yet this recognition of blending seems to be where the similarities between Lu and Porter end. For Porter, this blending is "eerie" while for Lu it is the norm. Depicting this blending as eerie stills holds the deficiency to be in the student as opposed to a problem with the homogenization expected in academic writing and avoids the conflict and struggle that is the centerpiece of Lu's pedagogy. I would argue that this has to do with different conceptualizations of power used by Lu and advocates for "charitable" approaches such as Porter and Ray.

These different conceptualizations of power can be seen even in the use of the word "charity." Lu, in her critique of the politics of linguistic innocence, would challenge us not to see the concept "charity" as a term with a universal meaning understood by all people in all contexts. Instead, Lu's approach might encourage us to critically examine the different connotations charity could have. From the perspective of the person giving the charity (in this case the basic writing teacher), the primary meaning of the

term may be associated with positive values of altruism and good will. Yet, for somebody coming from a marginalized population who is oftentimes positioned as the receiver of charity (in this, case the basic writing student), charity may be more associated with condescension.

One image that comes to my mind is a scene from the movie *Roots* where the Black dean of a college is forced to sing for a group of White liberals who are charitably donating money to his school. The White audience applauds his effort with one of the women noting how interesting it is that "all of them" can sing. The White charity givers feel good about their charitable work; yet after they leave the dean and his colleague acknowledge how humiliating the receiving of charity is for them. In short, the concept of charity has many different connotations, and while the benevolently innocent one advocated by Porter is one way of understanding the concept, it is certainly not the only way of understanding it. The fact of the matter is that both the giving and receiving of charity have historically been and continue to be embedded in relations of power. It is these relations of power that Lu is trying to make the center of her pedagogy, and it is these relations of power that seem to be missing from the conception of charity advocated by Porter and taken up by Ray. Reading Lu through this charitable framework serves the function of diluting and glossing over these power relations.

Ray's applying of this charitable approach is indicative of this glossing over of power relations. Using the lens of a pedagogy of charity, Ray concludes his reading of two articles where Lu lays out in more detail her pedagogical approach with the statement that "Lu merely says that . . . we cannot assume the way we . . . might 'fix' certain problems equals the way the students would solve them" (p. 123). Yet, as noted above, Lu is saying much more than this. In the two articles that Ray cites, Lu is trying to describe a pedagogy that not only problematizes the idea that teachers know how to fix students' problems but also calls into question the neutrality of academic discourse and unmasks the power relations embedded in its ways of describing and analyzing the world.

With this said, I will now offer a re-reading of the two articles Ray analyzed with an attempt at identifying how Lu's approach, while having parallels with a charitable approach, also has fundamental differences. In "Professing Multiculturalism," Lu elaborates on how her theoretical framework might look in the classroom. In this article, Lu makes the case for a multicultural approach to style asking "why is it that in spite of our developing ability to acknowledge the political need and right of 'real' writers to experiment with 'style,' we continue to cling to the belief that such a need

and right does not belong to 'student writers?'" (446). Lu argues for a reconceptualization of the composition classroom to one that treats students as "real" writers with the authority to experiment with style. While there are certain similarities between treating students as "real" writers and the goals of a pedagogy of charity, the differences are profound in that Lu is interested in making conflict and struggle with and against academic discourse the center of thinking about "error" correction.

In this article, Lu provides an example of how this looks in her classroom. She describes a Chinese-speaking student who used the phrase "can able to" several times in something she wrote for class. Rather than treating this as an error, Lu and her class (including the student who wrote the phrase) critically examine the use of the phrase. They begin to note a possible cultural way of understanding the world where things are being done to people as opposed to people having ultimate control over their own destinies; this orientation is reflected not just in how the student used "can" but also through widespread use of the passive voice. Therefore, to simply assume that this "error" needs to be corrected to read "be able to" may be producing a particular discursive understanding of the world that may or may not be the discursive understanding that the writer wishes to convey. In short, this type of close reading gives students the opportunity to begin to see the interrelatedness of form and meaning. Once students are made more conscious of this interrelatedness, they can make conscious decisions regarding style rather than blindly accept the "correct" way of saying things—a "correct" way that is connected with a certain worldview that may not be the worldview the student wishes to articulate.

In "An Essay on the Work of Composition," Lu elaborates on this method in even greater detail, connecting her approach with an attempt at resistance to the fast capitalism that has been a product of globalization. While Ray is correct in saying that here Lu spends several pages considering various reasons why a public sign she encountered on a visit to China says "collecting money toilet" rather than "public toilet," his conclusion that teachers should not assume they know how to correct student writing leaves out the larger social, political, and economic aspects of Lu's argument. He fails to acknowledge Lu's wish to theorize ways of reimagining language that resist the cultural imperialism of the English-speaking world and allow for non-Euro-American interactions with English to exist on the same level as Euro-American interactions with English. It is within this social, political, and economic context that Lu analyzes the emergence of Chinglish in China and the campaign against it by the Chinese government, a context that is

lost in Ray's reading of her work. It is also within this context that we must understand her analysis of the use of "collecting money toilet."

Based on these assumptions and the social, political, and economic context of the emergence of the phrase "collecting money toilet," Lu speculates on a possible explanation for the use of this phrase as opposed to the more traditional "public toilet." She argues that it might represent a reappropriation of English that reflects a particular worldview where the public-private distinction may make little sense and the collecting money aspect of the toilet may be more important to the person who wrote the sign. Ray is correct to point out that part of Lu's argument is that we cannot assume we know how to correct the phrase; however, what Ray leaves out of his analysis is the way that Lu embeds her analysis within relations of power as well as her centering of dissonance in the process. As in her earlier work, Lu not only makes the case for treating students as "real" users of English but also makes the case that the dissonance students experience between and across standardized and peripheralized languages should be part of the composition curriculum. In Lu's view, this type of dissonance could be used to create alliances between composition studies and resistant users of English, in an attempt to redesign U.S. English against the grain of fast capitalism.

As can be seen, while Lu's work does have some things in common with a pedagogy of charity and with the views of some of her critics, there are also fundamental differences that should not be glossed over. By glossing over these differences, we may unintentionally gloss over the conflict and struggle that are integral to Lu's approach to composition studies. What results is a diluted version of what Lu is attempting to do in her work. I, therefore, offer a different metaphor—the metaphor of partial narratives—that I believe may more accurately reflect the conflict and struggle and analysis of power relations that are central to Lu's work. While this metaphor is a direct response to the metaphor of charity, I hope to use this new metaphor to raise questions for the entire field of composition studies and the state of basic writing within it. In other words, the new metaphor I propose is not so much a response to an academic disagreement with Ray but rather a call to reflect on where we currently are in terms of these questions that were raised over fifteen years ago and remain unresolved today.

Toward a Metaphor of Partial Narratives

The metaphor of partial narratives comes from the work of Elizabeth Ellsworth. In her seminal article "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?"

Ellsworth critiques the rationalist assumptions underpinning critical pedagogy that continue to oppress as opposed to empower the marginalized students it claims to advocate for. While her focus is critical pedagogy and not a pedagogy of charity, I believe that her insights are useful at getting to the limitations of both, especially since a pedagogy of charity is so keen on treating everybody as a rational being.

According to Ellsworth, pedagogies with a Western conception of rationalism as their foundation are not neutral but instead embedded in relations of power that not only privilege the teacher as bearer of ultimate knowledge but also privilege certain ways of being and certain ways of expressing an opinion. As she describes it, "these rationalist assumptions have led to the following goals: the teaching of analytic and critical skills for judging the truth and merit of propositions, and the interrogation and selective appropriation of potentially transformative moments in the dominant culture" (303-304). Here Ellsworth is making a similar argument to Lu in her unmasking of the power relations embedded in academic discourse that in her view are based on Western conceptions of rationalism. As she notes, "literary criticism, cultural studies, post-structuralism, feminist studies, comparative studies, and media studies have by now amassed overwhelming evidence of the extent to which the myths of the ideal rational person and the 'universality' of propositions have been oppressive to those who are not European, White, male, Christian, able-bodied, thin, and heterosexual" (304). In other words, academic discourse is not neutral but is instead embedded in relations of power that can perpetuate marginalization and oppression when treated as universal and objective.

In order to unpack this argument a bit it might be useful to lay out a working definition of the type of academic discourse embedded in Western rationalism that Ellsworth is critiquing. In "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae provides a succinct and clear definition of the basic characteristics of this academic discourse based in Western rationalism. In his view, a student is successful in entering academic discourse when he or she "can define a position of privilege, a position that sets him against a 'common' discourse, and when he or she can work self-consciously, critically against not only the 'common' code but his or her own" (644). What he does not interrogate in this article is who wins and who loses through the taking up of "privileged" positions in opposition to the Other.

For example, Patricia Clough in *End(s) of Ethnography* sees this taking up of a "privileged" position in opposition to the Other as embedded in an oedipal logic of narrativity, which she associates with a masculine subject

who "has appropriated power by dissociating himself from the spectacularized others of vision and not by simply denying their presence or their visions but by making their points of view public only through and as his vision" (40). Clough connects this taking of authorial position in relation to the Other not only with patriarchal relations of power but also with colonization and racism. Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera* goes even further, arguing that "in trying to become objective, Western culture made 'objects' of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing 'touch' with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence" (37). For Anzaldúa, the foundations of Western thought not only marginalize borderland populations but also serve to justify the violence oftentimes perpetuated against these populations. Academic discourse, as a product of Western thought, is implicated in this process.

As we can see, academic discourse based on Western rationalism is embedded in relations of power designed to benefit the few at the expense of the marginalization and oppression of the many. Charity cannot do justice to addressing these power relations that are at the center of Lu's theoretical framework. This is where a metaphor of partial narratives based on the work of Elizabeth Ellsworth may be helpful as a different route to reading the debate between Lu and her critics. Ellsworth, recognizing the power relations inherent in academic discourse as well as the power relations in any discourse, argues not for more rationalism or charity but, instead, a pedagogy of partial narratives. As Ellsworth describes it, "because . . . voices are partial and partisan, they must be made problematic, but not because they have broken the rules of thought of the ideal rational person by grounding their knowledge in immediate emotional, social, and psychic experiences of oppression, or are somehow lacking or too narrowly circumscribed" (305). In her view, rather than trying to create a unified voice, it is instead more productive to interrogate the partialness of all discourses (both academic and non-academic) and struggle through and with difference as opposed to trying to homogenize it.

It is this type of partial narrative that I believe productively makes clear the differences between the theoretical frameworks of Lu and her critics in the same way that a metaphor of charity can be used in an attempt to get to the commonalities between the two approaches. In "Professing Multiculturalism" and "An Essay on the Work of Composition," Lu is not simply saying that composition teachers need to be careful when dealing with student error. Instead, Lu is interested in making the composition classroom a space where partial narratives interact in a contact zone where conflict and struggle (both

internal and in interaction with others) are explored and reflected on. While Lu focuses on issues of "error" in her writing on the topic, her theoretical framework goes much further than that; in fact, even when focusing on "error," she is constantly connecting her work to larger discursive practices and the larger social, political, and economic contexts.

It is also with partial narratives that Lu's conception of agency and resistance can be understood. For Lu, one can never escape the discursive regimes that have created academic discourse or the power relations they are complicit in reproducing. However, by reflecting on one's partial narrative of the world and how this partial narrative both resonates with and conflicts with academic discourse, students can reposition themselves in relation to academic discourse and (re)appropriate it for their purposes. In many ways, Lu's thinking here is aligned with the thinking of A. Suresh Canagarajah, who argues for a pedagogy of appropriation that he believes allows marginalized students to "become insiders and use the language in their own terms according to their own aspirations, needs, and values" (176). In his view, this pedagogy of appropriation would help students "develop a critical detachment from the conventions, develop a reflexive awareness of the discourses we think by, and reformulate the rules of these discourses to conduct relatively independent thought" (185). Like Canagarajah, Lu is interested in embracing and facilitating students' experience of conflict and struggle with conventions of academic English so that they can appropriate it for their own needs and create a mestiza consciousness. For both of them, this is not an act of charity but of resistance and a fundamental challenge to the colonizing tendencies of Western academic discourse.

The point Lu is trying to make is the need to truly explore and embrace difference and the conflict and struggle that come with difference in the classroom as a way to resist the colonizing tendencies of academic discourse, especially for basic writers. In the end, this profound implication of composition teachers in relations of colonization may be the root cause of the backlash against Lu. For example, Laurence in her reply to Lu's defense of her position, critiques the use of the term mestizo, asking, "why should I, a teacher of English, be complicit in perpetuating a colonial metaphor in America, which implicates me, perhaps, as one of the 'peninsulares'?" (105). While Lu never uses the term "peninsular," perhaps she would agree that it is necessary to accept the fact that all academics, including basic writing teachers, are on some level peninsulares. Embracing this premise will allow basic writing teachers to reflect on the paradoxical nature of wanting to empower students that they are at the same time marginalizing.

In "The Tidy House," David Bartholomae, in a striking departure from the views he expressed years earlier in "Inventing the University," shows what the consequences are for basic writing students when composition teachers fail to acknowledge the colonizing tendencies in academic discourse along with the construction of basic writers. As he argues, "basic writers are produced by our desires to be liberals—to enforce a commonness among our students by making the differences superficial, surface-level, and by designing a curriculum to both insure them and erase them in 14 weeks" (12). It is, therefore, not enough for teachers of composition to work at understanding our students in the ways a charitable approach advocates because the reality is that our own partial narratives may not make this possible; in fact, an attempt at understanding our students may serve the function of homogenizing difference as we inevitably will see the Other from our own partial narrative of the world. It is this irreconcilable difference and the paradox that it creates that Lu is arguing should be the center of pedagogy in the composition classroom, and it is the embracing of partial narratives as a pedagogical tool that would make this possible.

Of course, the challenge becomes how composition teachers can facilitate a class of partial narratives where complete understanding of not just "errors" but discourse in general is impossible. This will inevitably always be an action-in-progress. As Ellsworth notes, "whatever form it takes in the various, changing, locally specific instances of classroom practice, I understand a classroom of practice of the unknowable right now to be one that would support students/professor in [a] never-ending moving about" (321). This constant moving about and the conflict and struggle that are associated with it offer us new ways of conceptualizing dialogue. Ellsworth describes this communication across difference as best represented by the statement "if you can talk to me in ways that show you understand that your knowledge of me, the world, and 'the Right thing to do' will always be partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others, and if I can do the same, then we can work together on shaping and reshaping alliances for constructing circumstances in which students of difference can thrive" (324).

A type of dialogue that holds promise as the foundation of a pedagogy of partial narratives can be found in the work of John Trimbur. In "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning," Trimbur argues that one way to avoid the homogenizing effects of presumed mutual understanding and agreement is to treat consensus as "based not so much on collective agreement as on collective explanations of how people differ, where these differences come from, and whether they can live and work together with

these differences" (470). In his view, this focus on difference "offers students a powerful critical instrument to interrogate the conversation—to interrupt it in order to investigate the forces which determine who may speak and what may be said, what inhibits communication and what makes it possible" (473). In short, very much in line with Lu, Trimbur envisions a classroom where teachers and students grapple with difference and the power relations that have produced those differences at all levels from the smallest "error" to the largest conversations.

In summary, a pedagogy of partial narratives, in contrast to a pedagogy of charity, challenges composition teachers to accept the inherently political nature of language and discourse and to make it part of their pedagogical relationship with students. A pedagogy of charity assumes that a composition teacher can understand his or her students and decide what their needs are in the process of moving them from the "eerie" mix of discourses (Porter 583) to a purely academic one. In contrast, a pedagogy of partial narratives makes the unknowability of the Other the center of a pedagogy that seeks to constantly interrogate the power relations embedded in all discourses and in all genres. It moves us beyond the politics of linguistic innocence through an acceptance that all knowledge is embedded in relations of power. While neither composition teachers nor their students can escape these relations of power, composition classrooms can become spaces where students are given the opportunity to (re)appropriate these power relations in the act of becoming resistant users of English through a continuous conflict and struggle for self (re)determination as opposed to becoming recipients of our charity.

The Paradox of the Teaching of Composition

Brian Ray should be commended for his efforts at revisiting an important debate in the teaching of composition in an effort to find common ground between two sides that were not successful at communicating productively in the 1990s because of a combination of personal and philosophical differences. Yet, in an attempt to find common ground, it is equally important not to gloss over real differences. While it is true that both Lu and her critics may share some commonalities as described through a pedagogy of charity, it is equally important to remember that different conceptions of power and the nature of academic discourse truly divide these groups. To gloss over these differences dilutes the meaning of the mestiza consciousness that Lu is hoping to instill in her students. For Lu, mestiza consciousness is inherently a process of conflict and struggle with both academic and non-

academic discourses. To deny this, or to ignore it in favor of finding common ground between Lu and her critics opens up the possibility of returning to the politics of linguistic innocence that Lu is arguing against. On the other hand, to embrace conflict and struggle opens up the path of engaging with difference in all of its complexity and irreconcilability.

While adding more complexity to the already complex task of teaching basic writing may make the work we do seem overwhelming, basic writing teachers who embrace the metaphor of partial narratives can work with their students to critically examine the ideological underpinnings of academic discourse while they struggle to master it. Basing instruction on the metaphor of partial narratives offers the possibility of the creation of classroom spaces for students to emerge as resistant users of academic discourse as opposed to uncritical assimilators of the language and ideological underpinnings of the academy. This, in turn, can provide both teachers and students with the tools to make academic discourse more inclusive of different ways of expressing knowledge.

It is undoubtedly disturbing to embrace a position that implicates one-self or those one admires in a system of colonization and domination. This is especially true for composition teachers, in particular basic writing teachers, who have been on the front lines advocating for the full inclusion of their students in mainstream academia since the Open Admissions struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. These are teachers who justifiably see themselves as advocates for their students. The impulse might be to avoid facing the disturbing possibility of one's own complicity in colonizing relations of power and to continue to treat good intentions as sufficient in empowering basic writing students. Yet Lu challenges us to embrace the paradox of being complicit in oppression through the creation of spaces in our classrooms where we grapple with power relations and the colonizing tendencies in academic discourse. A charitable approach is not sufficient in exploring these relations of power. This grappling can only come through conflict and struggle.

Yet we should also recognize that basic writing teachers have always been at the forefront of critiquing the status quo. During the Open Admissions struggles, basic writing teachers, led by Mina Shaughnessy, were ardent proponents of the inclusion of students who had previously been excluded from academic discourse and from U.S. colleges and universities. Lu continued in this tradition by critiquing the politics of linguistic innocence embedded within the discursive regime that produced the field of basic writing and advocating instead a pedagogy of conflict and struggle. Both of these different eras were challenging the status quo of their time and pushing

against the boundaries of the academic tradition as it stood. I would like to call on today's basic writing teachers to reflect on the radical tradition that has produced the field of basic writing and to critically examine where the field currently stands. An exploration of where the field has come from can provide us insight into what a radical approach to composition studies and the teaching of basic writing might be in today's socio-historical context. The challenge for the field is to continue to remain forward-thinking and to push at the frontiers of academic discourse. Brian Ray would urge the field to move toward a pedagogy of charity. However, a pedagogy of charity does not go far enough in pushing the academic tradition to become more inclusive. In contrast, a pedagogy of partial narratives—an approach that embraces conflict and struggle and the paradox of teaching—has the potential to provide insights into more effective strategies and to sustain and develop the radical tradition out of which basic writing was born.

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