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Finding Our Way from Within: Critical Pedagogy in a Prison Writing Class

OMAR, A TALL YOUNG MAN WHO HAD LOST ONE EYE IN A SHOOTING, HESITATED A MOMENT before he handed me the paper he wanted me to copy for his work-in-progress presentation to the class. There was a background buzz of conversation from the other inmate students as I stood in front of Omar and tried to answer his questions. Outside the window, a corrections officer walked by. Had he noticed the higher than usual noise level? I wanted to truthfully answer Omar's questions, but I also wanted the conversation to end so I could begin class and quiet the class down.

"Who's going to see it besides people in this class?" he asked me. It was not the first time I had been asked that question by an inmate student.

"No one but me, Omar. Why would I show it to anyone else? I'm a teacher, not an officer."

"Yeah, but what if you thought that someone had written something that was against the rules, that was dangerous? What would you do then?" He sat back and waited for my answer.

"I don't know, Omar. I don't have any interest in just 'turning someone in' because he criticized something about the facility or wrote about his experience here. You just have to trust that. If someone was in danger, that might be a different story." I tried to answer honestly. "It might depend on the situation—if I knew someone was in danger, I would have to try to avert the danger. Otherwise, you're just going to have to trust me."

"Can I have all the copies of my papers back when class is over?" Omar asked. "I don't want my story all over the prison."

After I read Omar's work, I could see why. He had written a piece about two inmates who had died because of negligence on the part of the facility; one inmate died because, according to Omar, an officer had not called a nurse when the inmate was in medical distress. Another inmate died in a fight in the kitchen, in plain view of an officer who did not move to stop the conflict. I was surprised at the amount of disclosure in this essay. I wanted Omar to trust that I would keep any writing he did private and that I would never turn stu-

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dent writing over to "the police." Was this really true? Were there situations in which I would—or should—"turn in" inmate writing? Would that put me on the side of the authorities and make it impossible for me to teach?

The complex and troubling questions of trust and surveillance Omar raised for me are just some of the complicated issues I had to struggle with as a teacher of writing in a college correctional facility program when I attempted to implement a critical pedagogy influenced by the ideas of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. I did this, however, without completely understanding Freire's ideas or the difficulty of enacting them in a correctional facility environment. I told Omar, for example, that he just had to "trust me," without realizing what a difficult thing I was asking Omar to do in the tense prison environment where trusting or not trusting someone can literally be a matter of life and death. I routinely asked students in my on-campus writing classes to share and publish their work; I had not considered that inmates might understandably not want their work "all over the prison," especially if that work presented a critique of the correctional facility system. Omar might indeed suffer consequences of his disclosure of the prison's negligence if his work was discovered by officers during a routine search of his living quarters; he might be harassed by officers or even locked up "in the box" or transferred to another prison. I had asked students to write about the conditions of their lives without considering the ramifications of that request; Freire, according to my knowledge of his work at that time, did not address the fact that "naming the world" might have negative consequences for students in the kind of highly regulated and controlled environment of a correctional facility.

I had not considered, either, that I might encounter student writing that indicated that someone might be in danger. What would I do in that situation? Could I continue to teach and maintain a trusting relationship with inmate students if they knew that I might "turn in" their writing? On the other hand, was I not obligated to warn someone who might be in danger? And just what did I do with the troubling knowledge that inmates were not being provided with adequate medical care or supervision? Would it endanger the college program if I contacted the state Commission on Corrections (a private watchdog agency) and told them about Omar's claims? I couldn't even imagine the different levels of authority—the dean of the correctional facility program, the dean of the college, perhaps even the facility and state prison administration—such a move would mean answering to. Because I did not know what to do—and because I feared the consequences of such an action—I did nothing and kept that knowledge to myself.

I expected that by using a critical teaching approach in my prison class that students' writing would became more complex and more interesting as they attempted to situate the personal within larger cultural and social forces. According to Freire, teachers and students

work together to develop "the capacity for reflection about their world, about their positions in the world, about the encounter of consciousness, about literacy itself" (81). I hoped that the students would be able to not only tell stories about their worlds but to reflect on the conditions of their own existence and in so doing, become subjects, not objects, of their educations.

What I had yet to learn, however, was that these investigations were not without risk for students; some chose to take this risk and others understandably did not. In order to understand some of the difficulties students were struggling with, I needed to see beyond students' texts to the substance of where the work was located, to the prison setting that influenced what and how students wrote as surely as their difficulties with academic prose. I needed to understand the conditions of inmates' lives as well as the peculiar circumstances of their position as college students writing in prison. Instead of focusing on, for example, struggles students were having with particular verb inflections, my attention and energy became centered on trying to understand what it meant for students to try to write as college students in a situation in which one institution, the prison, demanded that students did not disclose or reveal personal information or form relationships of any kind with other human beings. The inmate students already knew about the difficulties involved with writing in prison; I had to learn, for example, about the effect of facility surveillance on inmate writing and how best to respond to that surveillance.

A Code of Ethics

In the fall of 1989, I drove up the long driveway of the brand-new, medium-security facility for the mandatory teacher orientation and followed the signs for visitor parking. I had been teaching for several years in a correctional facility college program run by a local liberal arts college, and I was interested in learning what the new facility and college program held in store. Inmates in three facilities were offered bachelor's or associate's degrees in liberal arts or business. At that time, the students in the college program were eligible for federal as well as state financial aid; most of the inmate students received assistance from the state's Educational Opportunity Program. The college program was an open admissions program in the sense that students' past high school grades or records were not a factor in their admission; many students had received their GED degrees while incarcerated. However, prospective students were interviewed and screened by the college program counselors; inmates with serious psychiatric problems or a history of violent behavior while incarcerated were not admitted to the program.

This facility had just opened months before the beginning of the fall semester, and I was eager to be part of the new college program. Well-tended gardens of impatiens and snapdragons surrounded the large sign that welcomed visitors and inmates alike. The sprawling

cluster of new buildings, utility trucks, dark green prison vans contrasted with the colorful gardens, the blue Catskills in the distance, and the green landscape stretching to the horizon.

The contrast between the beautiful natural surroundings and the well-tended gardens and the ugly apparatus of imprisonment continued as I approached the administration buildings. The colorful flowers, wooden gazebos, and freshly planted grass clashed with the ever-present coils of razor wire, the barracks-like buildings painted an ugly, institutional shade of yellow, and the bags of garbage heaped outside the buildings. A surprising, noisy flock of seagulls screeched overhead and dived down for the scraps of food that littered the new sidewalk.

The orientation was held in an all-purpose room in the administration building. Signs in Spanish and English posted on the front door proclaimed that visitors could not bring in knives, guns, drugs, or anything else defined as contraband. The large, bright main lobby of the building had big windows that looked out on the Catskill landscape, large green plants and comfortable-looking chairs and couches. I walked down a hallway to the room where the orientation was being held. As I settled into my chair, the college counselor stood up in front of the room and began handing out the familiar sheets of volunteer regulations from the Department of Corrections.

"freshly planted grass clashed with the ever-present coils of razor wire"

A pleasant-faced sergeant with curly brown hair read from the sheet to the teachers. Along with information about bathroom passes, attendance records and dismissal times, he warned us about the nature of our relationship with our inmate students; I had heard this information and this warning at every orientation. The sergeant read the information to us in a loud yet friendly voice. The regulations warned us that "While working with inmates on a regular basis, a professional relationship should be maintained. Care should be taken to avoid becoming emotionally involved with inmates, and that you comport yourself in a professional manner" (New York State Department of Corrections: Division of Volunteer Services).

Because I had heard these words of warning many times before, I found my attention drifting. I looked around at the other tired-looking teachers, many of whom appeared as distracted as I felt. The new teachers, however, were listening intently to the sergeant, following along on their sheets of volunteer regulations. The officer sounded a little bored himself, his voice becoming monotone. When the sergeant finished reading from the sheet of rules, the dean of the correctional facility program stood up, passed out another sheet of paper and

then stepped up to the podium. The dean had passed out something called the "Code of Ethics" from the Correctional Education Association.

The first sentence of the "Code of Ethics" stated that "The correctional educator, appreciating the magnitude of responsibility inherent in the teaching process, accepts a unique challenge of providing equal educational opportunities for all and of motivating incarcerated students to realize their individual maximum personal, social and vocational potential." Under the section titled "Responsibility to the Student," the Code stated that "The correctional educator is obligated to promote a trusting relationship with each student. . . . Meaningful and relevant learning experiences relative to the ability of each student should be provided." I was surprised by the Code's emphasis on the humanity, dignity, and inherent ability of inmates. The "Code of Ethics" seemed to contradict what I had seen of the prison system's degradation, alienation, and dehumanization of inmates. The differences between the "Volunteer Rules and Regulations" and the "Code of Ethics" pointed to the contradictions inherent in the presence of educational programs in prisons, contradictions which would become apparent to me during my teaching at the medium-security facility.

The Contradictions of Prison Teaching

In her 1992 article "Participatory Literacy Education: AIDS Opens the Doors," Kathy Boudin, herself an inmate in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, encountered many of the same contradictions and complexities I did in her attempts to implement a Freirean approach in a prison class. Boudin's approach, one that asked students to become co-investigators into conditions of their lives that had importance to them, invoked for me my own experience of attempting to use a problem-posing approach in a prison classroom. Boudin, a woman in the unique position of being both an inmate and a teacher in the facility she was incarcerated in, describes Freire's work as "an approach that places literacy acquisition in the context of learners' daily concerns" (209), a goal that both she and I wanted to accomplish in our teaching. Boudin believed that focusing a prison Adult Basic Education writing class around the issue of AIDS, a new and pressing concern for women inmates at the time, would be an ideal way to approach literacy acquisition in the prison environment. Boudin's reasons for using a Freirean approach in the classroom echo my own: placing inmates' lives and experiences at the center of the curriculum meant giving more authority to students and acknowledging that they had expertise in areas I did not.

Boudin's problem-posing curriculum was very successful; the women in her class wrote and performed a play about AIDS, shared powerful writing around that issue and created an information brochure that was distributed throughout the facility. Even though her curriculum was successful in many ways, Boudin's work also points to the difficulties and

contradictions inherent in implementing a liberatory approach in prison. For example, even though her work had positive results, the prison administration abruptly withdrew support for Boudin's program even after beginning to plan an expansion of her project. Boudin explains the reason for the withdrawal of support for the program in terms of the contradictory nature of the prison itself. She writes that "Both the support and the withdrawal of the support for the peer education program can only be understood as aspects of the broad contradictions among the primary prison goals of control, punishment and deterrence, and that of rehabilitation" (228). The contradictory nature of the prison environment Boudin notes speaks to the kinds of issues and problems I encountered. Although my class occurred within a different context, and unlike Boudin, I was not an inmate, the class created similar complications; problem-posing pedagogy brought my students and me face-to-face with issues of facility control and surveillance even though this pedagogy was successful in generating powerful, interesting student texts and classroom discussions. Those texts and discussions, however, sometimes contained unsettling material I was not prepared to hear.

Stories I Did Not Want to Hear . . . But Had To

I had ordered for my composition class Columbo, Cullen, and Lisle's then-new anthology *Rereading America*, now a widely used text, because I was interested in the dichotomies many of the readings set up; for example, I thought I could pair Andrew Carnegie's "The Gospel of Wealth" with Kwame Toure's call for a separate black nation and economic system. *Rereading America* also included pieces by such writers as Malcolm X and Richard Rodriguez, who used autobiography not only to tell their stories but to investigate how their identities intersected with social and cultural forces. We would use these readings to explore the question of "what it means to grow up in America," the basis for our reading and writing for the semester. For the first paper, I asked to students to "tell a story about growing up in America as defined by the specifics of who you are in this culture that embodies what you want to tell your readers about what growing up in America meant to you."

I assumed that many students would be writing about their experiences of incarceration and growing up among the disadvantaged of America; I wanted them to bring their stories into our classroom discourse. This class turned out to be a lively group eager to share their writing and discuss the ideas of the texts we read. As students began to write about the conditions of "growing up in America," I began to learn more about them. I heard stories that surprised me, even though, after several years of teaching in prison, they should not have. Physical and emotional abuses were common; almost no inmate had a father living at home. Bishop, one of the few men in class who had grown up with a father, wrote about being locked in a closet by his father for hours on end, then being beaten when he was finally let out. Ray's

mother, a drug addict, forced her small son to shoplift for her in New York department stores. Giovanni's father, when he did come home, came home drunk, beat his children and sent them outside, naked, to spend the night. Young men who grew up surrounded by poverty and violence jokingly told stories of their own violent behavior. Matt Thorne laughed as he told me how he and his friends pushed old refrigerators off rooftops for fun.

"Weren't you afraid someone would get hurt by a falling refrigerator?" I asked him.

"Nah, why would we worry about that?" he replied in a puzzled tone.

I was taken aback by Matt's answer; how could he not worry about hurting—or killing—someone by the falling refrigerator? Even though I had asked for stories of students' lives, I found that I could not always understand the lives of violence, poverty, and deprivation these stories embodied and that the prison setting intensified. These narratives also made me feel helpless. Was the college program helping these young men change their lives or the environments they would return to when they were released from prison?

Prison teachers are not, of course, the only teachers who are confronted with complex and confusing situations invoked by student writing. In his 1998 article, "Ethical Issues Raised by Student Writing" Dan Morgan explores the difficulty of knowing how to respond to difficult issues raised in students' papers. Morgan begins his article with a story about a student who confesses to a murder in a paper he writes for first-year composition. While few teachers outside of correctional facility environments can expect to have their students confess to murder (Morgan himself questions the veracity of the student's claim), teachers in many kinds of institutional settings can relate to Morgan's statement that "we now live in a time when many more college students have 'special needs,' when we see a much higher proportion of students who have led nontraditional lives, a larger number of what I call "broken wing" students (321).

Morgan explores possible responses to writing done by such students. How should teachers respond to student texts that raise legal or ethical questions or writing that even implies that the student may be in danger? Should the teacher treat the paper as a "teachable" moment and help the student write better papers about substance abuse, dangerous family situations or murder? In order to address these questions, Morgan provides guidelines for teachers; he suggests that teachers can, for example, refer students to counseling, stress the importance of audience and purpose to student writers, assign specific topics or even forbid students to write about personal subjects altogether.

All of Morgan's suggestions for dealing with disturbing student papers are helpful and valid for teachers in many settings, including prison. However, the prison setting can intensify or complicate the question of how teachers should respond to these kinds of texts. Even though some inmates' work may be disturbing to read and difficult to respond to, prison

teachers hoping to enact a critical or Freirean pedagogy may find it almost impossible not to have students write about their lives in order to examine those lives and experiences and to contribute their knowledge and expertise to the ongoing conversation of the class. In the prison environment, reporting inmate problems to the authorities, even with the best intentions of helping a student, may seem to the student that the teacher is willingly participating in facility surveillance; the student's writing may become part of knowledge that is used to increase the prison's control over the inmate (and the teacher). Prison teachers, as well as teachers in all settings, need to make difficult and individual decisions based on the student, the consequences of those decisions, and the particular institutional site of composition.

However, even though I did not always feel comfortable with what inmates students had to say, I had asked for these stories; in order to understand the broader social forces at work in the lives of these men and to allow them to understand the forces at work in their own lives, I had to be willing to listen and encourage students to critically examine the conditions of their lives. Freire states that "Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men transform the world" (76). I had to be open to this naming, these "true words," unsettling as the stories and the serious social problems they invoked might be. Although I could never completely understand the lives and worlds of these men, I could listen to their words. Speaking the "true word," however, could have serious consequences in the carceral environment, and indeed, sometimes might not even be possible in an environment where security and control are priorities.

Surveillance

In addition to writing about their lives before their incarceration, some students wrote at length about the conditions of prison life and provided me with glimpses of their lives as inmates; even though there were risks involved in speaking, in telling the truths of their lives, many inmates did choose to speak. Dan, a young man in his early twenties with shaggy blond hair, wrote

> I have gained my perspective of the penal system through first hand experience. I am living as an active pacifist, believing what is said to be believed, and living with conditions that are both demoralizing and dehumanizing.
>
> Consequences, most definitely, are a major part of prison life. No matter what, cause, if we as inmates do not conform or comply, punishment is the result. Some of these punishments are through the very behaviors that bring people into prison. Surely the authority of our government doesn't license the exploitation of violence with violence? This is a common practice within the penal system, and can, most times, be avoided. I have witnessed some of these acts, but for the most part,

they are carried out in an isolated area, where there won't be witnesses. Injuries sustained in these beatings are blamed on fights with other inmates. Fatalities are recorded as "escapes."

Prison is more than solely physical captivity. It also captures and anesthetizes human emotion, therefore making it an extremely difficult task for one to feel, which in turn warrants growth. Regression, and the isolation of oneself from all that is real, is the end result of prison.

Dan tried to "tell the truth" of his experience and define who he is as shaped by the circumstances he found himself in. "Telling the truth," however, is not simple when the truth is a critique of a system that has enormous power over inmates. My efforts to have students locate their stories within the social and cultural forces they found themselves in brought me face-to-face with the reality the inmate students were writing in. Although I had always known that student work was potentially under surveillance, it was only when I asked students to investigate the circumstances of their lives that I became aware of the real consequences for inmates. I had not anticipated that my ignorance of the prison environment would cause problems for students.

One evening, Andy raised his hand in the beginning of class. His long hair was just short enough so that he did not have to tie it back as department regulations stated inmates must. He was a small man who seemed to make up for his slight stature with a loud presence in class.

"I'm sorry, Mrs.Rogers, but I don't have my paper for tonight."

I was surprised. Andy was a conscientious student; he had never turned in a late paper or homework assignment. It was not unusual for students to turn in assignments late, though; impossibly noisy conditions, guards who made inmates turn their lights off before the required "lights out," and time spent "in the box" were common excuses for missing or late work. Andy, however, had never missed work before.

"What's the matter Andy? Dog eat your homework?" One of the other inmates kidded him in a good-nature way.

"No, man. I was writing my paper in the computer room and the officer on duty came up and looked over my shoulder at what I was writing. He didn't like what he saw, so he took the paper. That's why I don't have my work for tonight."

"What officer was this?" I asked. I was still naive enough to be angry that the officer had imposed on my students' academic freedom and self-expression. I had an idea of what officer was in question; the same officer was always on duty in the school building. I promised to myself that I would call the dean of the program in the morning.

To my surprise, Andy waved away my concern. "No, Mrs. Rogers, forget about it. It's okay. I'll have my paper for the next class if that's okay with you."

"Andy, you should be able to write what you want for school. The officers shouldn't be doing this. Let me talk to someone about it."

"Really, Mrs. Rogers, let it go."

Clearly Andy was becoming uncomfortable. I let the incident go but still felt angry. Now, years later, I understand the source of Andy's reluctance; he knew better than I the consequences of revealing what officer had taken his paper. He would be the one to suffer the potential consequences from the prison: time spent "in the box," a disciplinary ticket, or even transfer to another facility that would most likely not have a college program.

Several weeks later Harry angrily told me in response to a question about what he "really thought" about an issue he had brought up in his paper that "Of course I'm never going to write what I really think. Do you know the kind of trouble you can get in for that?"

I was beginning to learn.

"Did you know, Mrs. Rogers, that last semester I had a teacher who turned me in? I wrote a paper for that course 'Black and White Relations.' The teacher thought it was 'dangerous' and turned it in. I had to go before the dean, the education director and other superintendents. They put my paper in my file as part of my permanent record." Harry's voice got louder and angrier as he talked, his Haitian accent becoming more pronounced. "Why would a teacher teach a class like that if he don't want you to write what you think?"

"he knew better than I the consequences of revealing what officer had taken his paper"

At the time, I had no ready answer for Harry. The other members of the class were looking at me, waiting for my answer.

"You know," Harry continued, "I know that another student was transferred to another facility, out of the college program, because of a paper he wrote for that same class. Why would they give a class that got people into trouble?"

Embarrassed because at the time I could offer Harry no analysis of the situation, I just said, "I don't know."

Harry folded his arms. The conversation was over.

I couldn't blame Harry for not wanting to write "what he really thought" if it was going to get him into trouble. Harry had pointed out the inherent contradiction in the situa-

tion: Why would the facility offer a college program, offer the class, and then forbid students to write "what they really thought?" Harry had achieved a level of trust with his teacher that allowed him to express his "dangerous" thoughts. That trust itself became dangerous. While constraints are present in all writing situations, for inmate students the stakes are high for violation of those constraints. So much was at stake; because of his dangerous paper, Harry risked being put "in the box" or even being denied release from the parole board. Harry was left with silences and unspeakable experiences.

I began to understand that the aims of prison and school seemed not to be the same. Good students did not necessarily make good inmates and vice versa. According to the prison, inmates should be silent, compliant, and dependent; I wanted students to be questioning, independent, individually responsible, and critical. Students need to feel free to express ideas; the prison, however, expects students to not express their thoughts and feelings. The aims of critical pedagogy—to have students become subjects of their own education through, as Freire says, "restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry" (58)—were antithetical to those of the prison, which enacted an extreme form of what Freire calls "banking" pedagogy, which "regards men as adaptable, manageable human beings" who are supposed to willingly "accept the passive role imposed on them" (60). Still, Harry did have a choice in terms of whether to speak or to remain silent; for his self-protection, he chose silence.

While the goals of the prison and of school seemed to me at the time antithetical, my later reading of the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault helped me understand that the underlying agendas of these institutions may not, in fact, be so different. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* defines the correctional facility system as a manifestation of a network of power distributed throughout society. In this work, Foucault examines the history of the penal system and speculates that while the focus of the contemporary correctional facility system seems to have shifted from the body, the "spectacle" of punishment, to what Foucault calls "the soul" and the use of the prison system to control and categorize those who transgress the law, the prison system still exercises a "technology of the body" over "those punished" (200). Foucault also believes that the "new system" of punishment provides a model of control that extends to the entire society. While Boudin notes the apparent tensions between the aims and goals of school and those of prison, Foucault believes that all prison personnel—even teachers and volunteers—are implicated in the network of power that controls the bodies of prisoners. According to Foucault, school in prison is part of the apparatus of the contemporary prison system. The school writing these students did caused some inmates to collide with the restrictions of the prison environment and raised issues for the students and myself of trust and surveillance. Inmate students' writing became part of what Foucault calls a "mass of documents that capture and fix" (189) inmates in the "normalizing gaze" of the

correctional facility (184). This kind of surveillance had many layers in the school program; Foucault points out the similarities between the control exercised over prisoners as well as students; he states that the "normalizing gaze" of the prison, for example, extends to "those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school" (200).

Although I regularly taught in the prison program, I had taught in the on-campus Educational Opportunity Program as well. I realized that both the prison and the school used writing to "capture and fix" inmates and students. Both on-campus and correctional facility students had to take a writing placement exam that admitted them either to the school's required first-year composition class or to the remedial, non-credit bearing Writing Program class; the same exam, a holistically scored, timed response to a prompt, was also used as an exit exam from the Writing Program class. Because the inmate students had to take the same exam as the on-campus students, the exam questions posed almost insurmountable difficulties for many of the inmates; the questions asked them to write, for example, about the difficulties of on-campus parking, the problems of juggling work, school, and family life, or how to respond to the problem of unsafe school bus drivers. Most of the inmate students were from New York and had never ridden on a school bus, most had not held regular jobs and attended college at the same time, and most certainly had not had to contend with problems of on-campus parking.

The writing exam functioned as a means of subjecting students—on-campus and inmate students alike—to a system of normalization that judged them as either "normal" or "abnormal" writers and attempted to elicit "knowledge" or "truth" about the writing abilities of those examined. For both on-campus and inmate students, writing became not a means of critically examining their lives or making connections between their lives and larger social issues, but also as the production of an artifact that classified and often punished them. While writing was used to "capture and fix" both on-campus and inmate students, it was difficult to ignore the fact that on-campus administrators seemed to make it almost impossible for the correctional facility students to pass the test. Many students did pass the test although it took multiple attempts and much directive coaching from the Writing Program teachers. Eventually, the college program declared that students in Writing Program were only allowed two opportunities to pass the exit exam; many inmates were therefore forced to drop out of the program. I began to understand that the placement exam was only one of the many ways in which writing became a means of surveillance in the prison (as well as the school) and contributed to what Foucault defines as the "panoptical" environment of the prison.

Foucault describes the panopticon, as envisioned by Jeremy Bentham in the nineteenth century, as a prison in which each inmate, placed in an individual cell, is always visible to an unseen supervisor who is located in a central tower. Foucault writes that "All that

is needed, then, is to place the supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a . . . condemned man . . . By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery . . . the panoptical mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately . . . visibility is a trap " (295). The power of the panopticon is constant and unseen, producing an interior state of surveillance and paranoia; physical functioning of the prison's machinery of power, therefore, is almost never needed.

While the medium security prison was not architecturally constructed as a panopticon, (there were no individual, backlit cells, no central tower other than the large guard towers), the constant camera surveillance (corrections officers sat in a room in the central administration building before a wall of cameras showing views of the yard, walkways and other areas of the prison), as well as the presence of corrections officers in all parts of the facility, and the use of writing as a means of surveillance, creates such an environment. Everyone in the prison—inmates, guards, teachers and administrators—is always being observed by an unseen observer despite the existence at the medium security prison of the flowers, gazebos, and graduation ceremonies that could cause one to temporarily forget the purpose of the prison. Surveillance was evident in the watch towers, the wall of surveillance cameras, the officers stationed at the entrances and exits of each building and the identification cards all inmates (as well as all other prison personnel) had to carry and produce upon request. The writing inmates did became part of that surveillance as corrections officers could at any time demand to see their work. Inmates such as Harry felt compelled to censor their work for their own self-protection. The surveillance of self produced by the panoptical environment manifested itself in me through my discomfort and worry over the teacher-student relationship and over my uneasiness, especially in my early years of prison teaching, over what was and was not appropriate to disclose.

While I told students they just had to "trust me," I knew I could not protect students from facility surveillance. I could not stop officers from searching inmates' cubes or reading over their shoulders as they sat at computers. I could promise that I would never share their work with "the authorities," but what would I do if confronted with work that hinted at real, potential danger to someone? In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire states that with a critical teaching approach, "dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialogers is the logical consequence." Freire goes on to define a trusting relationship by stating that "Trust is contingent on the evidence which one party provides the others of his true, concrete intentions; it cannot exist if that party's words do not coincide with his actions" (80). While I wanted my students to trust me, I could not promise them that I could shield them from the institution. I would do what I could to protect them and

their work, but I could not promise them safety. Perhaps my attempts at using a Freirean approach would always be limited by the extent to which students individually felt they could trust me.

What I could have done to at least begin to address these difficulties, and what I did do in later years, was to foreground the issues of facility surveillance, trust, and disclosure as part of an on-going classroom discussion. In one class, for example, we brainstormed individually and then as a group the categories of "writing for self," "writing for school," and "writing in prison." I tried to ask students to name their worlds and to define the contradictions of writing for school in prison as a problem that could be questioned; students could begin to ask why the conditions of writing in these three arenas were potentially so different. The questions and difficulties may not have been solved, but inmate writers were able to make informed and conscious decisions about the writing they produced. That writing, however, sometimes produced difficulties not just with the facility's surveillance of those texts, but with my relationships with the inmate writers.

Disturbing Relationships

I still was not sure how to react to the confusing and sometimes disturbing depths I sometimes found myself in. In order to ask students to write about their worlds, what they were authorities on, I needed to have human relationships with the inmate students. Creating relationships with inmates and crossing boundaries designed to prevent those relationships meant that unsettling information could be disclosed or relationships misunderstood. The correctional facility setting presented a challenge to me in terms of responding to the very few students who transgressed behavioral boundaries. Only one student during all of my years of teaching seemed truly dangerous, and even he did not threaten me. Responding to the student was difficult in a setting where I did not want to identify myself with the "authorities" or with the corrections officers with guns and badges. In another setting I might have responded differently to Dwight.

"Oh my God . . . look at that," Dwight exclaimed as he unexpectedly took hold of my thin wrist and ran his fingers over the blue veins that seemed, under his gaze, unexpectedly exposed and close to the surface.

"Please get off my desk and take your seat," I curtly told him as I quickly withdrew my hand. Dwight had come up to the desk to talk to me before class. Within minutes he was sitting on my desk and had seized my wrist, turning it over to examine it. Dwight was a small, slight, man, nineteen or twenty years old. He had a disconcerting habit of endlessly twisting his short dreadlocks around his fingers and spent most of his class time staring out the window. Recently he had taken to leaving his seat during class and sitting on the windowsill. He

did not respond to my requests that he take his seat; it began to seem less troublesome to allow Dwight to sit on the shelf by the window than to keep asking him to take his seat. He rarely participated in class or shared his work in the response sessions. He did share his journal with me, though. Instead of responses to the reading selections, his journal contained long, violent stories of maiming and killing, illustrated by stick figures spewing blood.

"I just like writing Stephen King stories, is all," was his response when I questioned him about the journals. Perhaps he did, but the inappropriateness of his response, the violence of the work, and his strange behavior in class caused alarms to sound inside me. I didn't want to ever "turn an inmate in," or get anyone in trouble; I never thought of myself as being on "their" side, the side of the officers and superintendents. I did not consider my students as especially dangerous. I never felt threatened by Dwight but wondered how much of a danger he might be to other inmates or even to himself with his disturbing behavior. I resolved to call the college counselor the next day and let him know about Dwight's unsettling behavior.

"a confession I did not particularly want to hear"

I was spared the call. Early the next day, the counselor telephoned me.

"I just want to let you know, Laura, that Dwight was transferred out of the facility to a psychiatric facility. That's why he won't be in class. From what I was told, he really is potentially dangerous. I tell you, out of all the inmates I've worked with, he was probably the most disturbing."

Dwight made me confront the unsettling depths and the complexities of teaching in prison. Ramon, although not frightening, also made me confront these discomforting realities. Ramon, a muscularly built man with a shaved head, asked me on the first night of class, "Where do you teach outside, in a kindergarten class or something?" His question, naïve as it might have been, seemed designed to construct me as someone relatively powerless. Ramon was a good student, a frequent and interesting contributor to class as well as a thoughtful writer. One evening, after answering Ramon's question about a paper after class after all the other students had left, the conversation veered off in an unexpected direction.

"I don't know how it happened," Ramon said. "I broke into the house . . . I didn't mean to . . . I raped her."

I found myself wanting to step away from this large man with weight-lifter arms. I wished the officer would come down the hall and wave Ramon out of the classroom. Ramon had not threatened me; I did not feel like I was in any danger. I took his statement as a confession. Yet, it was a confession I did not particularly want to hear. Ramon had committed a

violent act against a woman; I wondered who she had been. I realized that I rarely thought about the victims of my students' crimes; in fact, I rarely thought about their crimes at all. Ramon's confession brought me face-to-face with the reality that Ramon was a large and powerful man who could—who *had*—violated a woman. I felt relieved when the school officer finally appeared and signaled to Ramon that he should leave the classroom. I would have felt uncomfortable alone in any empty classroom with any male student who confessed to me he had raped someone, but the prison setting intensified the tremendously unsettling situation. As I drove home that night, I thought about how I hoped that no other students would make confessions like Ramon's to me. These were depths I did not want to sound but could not avoid if I wanted to begin to have at least a partial understanding of the conditions of my inmate students' lives.

These uncomfortable depths included the misinterpretation of relationships that seemed to me uncomfortably within the boundaries of prison regulations. Human relationships were so regulated, so fit into boxes of "appropriate" or "not appropriate," so unnatural, that perhaps inmates inevitably would want to transform the highly regulated teacher/student relationship into one approaching a relationship that would occur outside of facility guidelines. Interactions that might have been taken lightly in other settings became large and uncomfortable issues in a setting with such extreme strictures against human relationships; I had been warned, after all, by the Volunteer Regulations to "avoid becoming emotionally involved with inmates." Where was the line, however, between becoming "emotionally involved" and being a caring teacher? The Code of Ethics published by the Correctional Education Association urged teachers to remember that "The correctional educator is obligated to promote a trusting relationship with each student." As a writing teacher trying to enact a critical pedagogy, it seemed to me that forming "trusting relationships" with students was necessary for any teaching or learning to take place. A few highly discomforting misunderstandings such as the one that occurred with Ed, however, caused me to question myself and my relationships with my students.

Ed, a short man with curly brown hair, said to me one night after class, "You know, a friend of mine once told me that you have to be at least a little bit in love with your English teacher to learn anything about writing."

"Really?" I replied, at a loss for words. "I don't think so."

The words of warning about "close relationships with inmates" I heard at every orientation stuck in my head. What had I done wrong? Had I been overly friendly to Ed? Did I not seem professional enough? Did I not wear the right clothes? How could I be unfriendly and cold to students? I wondered how I should deal with Ed's remark. I imagined that students made flirtatious remarks to teachers in other settings; the prison, with its strict guide-

lines regarding human relationships and the serious consequences enacted for violating those regulations, made responding difficult. Technically, I was required to turn Ed in; I could not bring myself to take that action. Ed was not threatening; he would probably never make a similar remark. The serious consequences for Ed—a ticket, lock-up, or transferal—did not seem to equal his small transgression. However, what if someone found out, somehow, that Ed had made an inappropriate remark to me? Women teachers who did not report such behavior on the part of inmates were accused of complicity and fired.

Although I never felt threatened or in any real danger by any of these men, Dwight's story in particular alerted me to the harm that an inmate such as Dwight might pose to himself or to others. While I considered myself to be on the inmates' "side" and indeed could not imagine teaching and aligning myself with the corrections officers and prison administrators, I had to confront the fact that Dwight was potentially dangerous; he needed help. For me not to alert someone to the fact that Dwight seemed to harbor the potential for violence seemed irresponsible even though I agreed completely with Correctional Education Association's statement that "Confidential information about a student should be divulged only for compelling professional or legal reasons." What would I have done if someone had gotten hurt? What if Dwight had injured himself? I had mixed feelings when I heard that Dwight had been transferred to a psychiatric facility. On the one hand, maybe he would get the help he needed; it seemed questionable, however, that he would receive whatever therapy or treatment he required in the correctional facility setting. What I had read of Freire provided no guidance about what to do in this situation; what if someone's naming the world indicated the potential for violence? If Dwight had been a student of mine in a school setting, for example, I would have been less reluctant to alert someone to Dwight's potential for violence; I (perhaps mistakenly) would have had more faith that Dwight's problems would have been responsibly dealt with. I had little faith that the prison system would help Dwight.

While I never felt that Ramon or Ed posed any threat or danger to myself or anyone else, I found myself momentarily identifying with Ramon's victim even though my position as a white, middle-class teacher gave me a kind of power over Ramon. Ed's essentially harmless confession helped me to begin to understand the complex position of a woman teacher in a system where women who were objects of verbal and physical advances by inmates were routinely held accountable. The highly regulated and unnatural prison environment caused my interactions with Ramon and Ed to be constructed as larger and more disturbing incidents than they really were. Could I have begun to help Ramon and Ed question, define, and problematize their worlds? Could I have encouraged Ramon to write about the rape and investigate the conditions of why it occurred? Could I have helped Ed understand why he thought he was "in love" with a woman he hardly knew? It seems unlikely that this could

have occurred in the carceral setting where writing is routinely subjected to surveillance and teachers are officially warned not to create human relationships with their students. It would have been highly uncomfortable for me—and construed by the prison and perhaps the college program itself as inappropriate—to ask Ramon and Ed to write about their relationships with women.

Surveillance and Control Outside the College Classroom

The issues of surveillance and the regulation of human relationships continue to be pressing questions in the teaching I continued even after the college program was ended. Near the beginning of the 1990 spring semester, inmates and teachers alike began to hear disturbing rumors that because all state and federal funding for prison education was being discontinued, the college program was in its final semester. As spring approached, it became clear that the program would soon be over. Inmates began to stop attending classes; teachers tried in vain to convince them of the worth of finishing the semester. By the end of the semester, only a few students remained in the program. There had been much public opposition to the program; people always asked me about how I could justify a "free" college education to prison inmates when they could not afford to send their own law-abiding sons and daughters to college. Most of the people opposed to prison higher education failed to realize that inmates qualified for state and federal aid on a financial basis just as they failed to realize that inmates who attended a college program had much lower recidivism rates than those who did not.

When the college program ended, I had, however, the opportunity to begin a voluntary writing workshop. Prison writing workshops have been in existence for many years, and the work of inmate writers has been collected in such anthologies of work as Joseph Bruchac's *The Light From Another Country*, Belle Gale Chevigney's *Doing Time*, and Bruce Franklin's comprehensive *Prison Writing in America*. Over the eight years the workshop has been in existence, issues of surveillance continue to be pressing issue for writers; several members of the group, for example, have had their work confiscated. At least one group member was "in the box" as a result of writing that the administration felt was inappropriately critical of the prison system. Just two months ago, one member of our workshop came to the group and told us that officers had taken all of his notebooks and poems. "They don't know that I got it all up here," he said, pointing to his head. "They can't take it away."

He did not stop his writing and continued to attend the group until he was sent home on parole. The man who had been locked up for his work did not stop writing, either, and continued to be a prolific member of the group until he suddenly died of a heart attack while

playing basketball three weeks before being sent home. The members of the writing group are well aware of the potential dangers of writing in prison; that, however, does not stop them from writing. "That's the way it is," one group member told me one night after a discussion of facility surveillance of inmate writing, "One minute you're writing a poem, and the next minute they're slapping handcuffs on you." These claims are perhaps a little exaggerated; in the ten years the workshop has been in existence, officers have confiscated only three inmates' poems. Yet, the facility makes clear that literacy is potentially threatening; for example, every time we publish an anthology of the group's work, the administration asks us to remove at least one "inappropriate" poem. That request, though, does not stop inmates from submitting poems or publishing the book; the group has had many discussions about surveillance and its consequences. Inmates continue to write what they want in private but are well aware that any text intended for publication in our anthology, for example, is going to be scrutinized by the media review board and the administration. Inmate writers take it upon themselves to name the world, examine its contradictions and become subjects of their self-sponsored education; despite the potential consequences, many choose to be what Freire defines as "men engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human" even within the restrictions of the carceral system (52).

It may very well be that teaching in prison creates a situation that invokes the kind of restrictions and outright danger Freire faced as he taught Brazilian peasants not only to read and write, but to engage in what Henry Giroux calls in his introduction to Freire and Macedo's *Literacy: Teaching the Word and Teaching the World* " a necessary foundation for cultural action for freedom" (7). Although my initial reading of Freire's work was confined to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, my later reading of *Pedagogy of Hope* helped me understand that Freire's critical pedagogy originated in a situation where both he and his students were in peril; Freire was ultimately exiled from his native Brazil, only returning many years later. According to Ana Maria Araújo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, in their Introduction to *The Freire Reader*, both Freire and his students were identified by the dominant political party at the time as a "threat" (20). Brazil's military government terminated Freire's literacy program, The National Literacy Project, in 1964. Ana Maria Araújo Freiere says in her notes to *Pedagogy of Hope* that "For many of Freire's associates, then, as for himself, the choice was prison or torture, or exile" (223). Earlier, I had naively thought that Freire had not considered that a critical pedagogy might endanger all of its participants; my later reading of *Pedagogy of Hope* helped me see that Freire was all too well acquainted with the fact that "naming the world" put all involved in danger. That fact, however, did not stop Freire from his widespread efforts to promote critical literacy.

Enactment of critical pedagogy in the carceral setting carries with it certain risks; in

some facilities, it may not even be possible. Kathy Boudin, for example, was not allowed to continue her problem-posing curriculum in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. Although already in prison and not under the threat of death, the students in my writing workshop take real risks by participating in the group. By its continued surveillance of inmate writing, it is clear that the prison considers the existence of the writing workshop as a threat; the continuance of the group is never guaranteed. Although I am not faced with the kind of real danger Freire and his fellow educators were (although I do risk not being able to continue with the workshop), the members of the group know that they face the threat of sanctions if the facility determines that their writing transgresses boundaries. Still, the group members continue to write; the students in the college program, except for one or two, who, like Harry, chose not to speak, also continued to write and investigate their worlds.

Critical Pedagogy in Prison?

Kathy Boudin's attempts to use a Freirean pedagogy in her prison class point to the difficulties inherent in trying to implement a problem-posing approach in a prison writing class; even though this pedagogy facilitates powerful, interesting student texts, it brings teachers and students alike face-to-face with issues of facility control and surveillance. Perhaps because she was an inmate herself when she taught her class, and also perhaps because she was a woman teaching in a woman's prison, Boudin did not seem to face the same issues of trust, disclosures of unsettling personal information and misunderstood personal relationships I faced with my class of male inmates.

I was able to directly confront some of these issues during a semester when I taught a section of advanced composition in the college program's summer session. The inmates in this class were overwhelmingly capable, motivated, and talented students; most of them would have been successful students on many college campuses. I had chosen David Bartholomae's *Ways of Reading* as the text for the course; during the semester, we read the selection from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* on "banking" education that Bartholomae had included. One student, Lazaro, became intensely interested in Freire's ideas and wrote at length about how they applied both to his impoverished childhood in Columbia and to his life as an inmate. During one class discussion of Freire's work, Lazaro raised his hand.

"But Mrs. Rogers," he said, "We can't really have this kind of teaching here. Freire calls for revolution, for change of the oppressive situation. We're not going to do that."

I had to agree that we were not; I was not going to incite my students to armed riot or to stage a hunger strike or a refusal to go out to recreation in the yard in protest, for example. I would be endangering not only my position but the existence of the entire college program. True Freirean practice calls for the two elements of reflection and action; because we could not—or

chose not to—take the kind of action that might cause changes in the correctional facility system, perhaps I was not truly enacting a problem-posing pedagogy. Theoretically the students could take action, could riot. After all, the Attica prison riots—at a cost of human life—resulted in some significant changes in the prison system such as increased access to educational programs and activities such as writing workshops. We were not going to take that kind of action.

Henry Giroux points out in "Literacy and the Pedagogy of Political Empowerment," his introduction to *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, that "teachers cannot assume the role of critical intellectuals dedicated to a pedagogy of literacy and voice unless the proper ideological and material conditions exist to support that role" (26). These conditions certainly do not exist in the panoptical environment of the prison; there is probably no institution less devoted to helping teachers achieve a "pedagogy of literacy and voice" than prison. Real change in the prison system is not going to happen as a result of students' writing and critical reflection. However, even though the conditions necessary to create such a pedagogy do not exist, prison teachers can still reflect and theorize about their work, the conditions and restraints under which they teach, and can support students through real dialogue in their efforts to attain meaningful growth.

Even within limitations, the inmates in my class did seem to benefit from a pedagogy based on Freire's principles. While Kathy Boudin's program based on liberatory pedagogy was ultimately cancelled by the facility, the students in her classes benefited tremendously from her approach; they learned about a subject very important to them, became experts on the subject of AIDS, and shared that knowledge with their peers. Students in my classes often wrote powerful, interesting pieces about subjects that they were authorities on; uncomfortable as those pieces and those stories may have been for me at times, they were important for students to write and for me to listen to as we began the process of co-investigating the world. Complicated issues of trust, surveillance, and regulations of human relationships made those co-investigations difficult or even impossible. The fact that students both in the college program and in the voluntary writing workshop continue to tell their stories and investigate the conditions of their worlds points to the importance of the continuing process of becoming more fully human in their quest to, as Freire would say, "liberate themselves" (20). Even if that liberation cannot be complete—students remained inmates, after all—many students, like Dan, made important gains in understanding the conditions of their lives even though they could not really take action to change them. In his introduction, Giroux notes the importance of a pedagogy in which "teachers and students" can "recover their own voices so they can retell their own histories." Giroux goes on to say, however, that such a pedagogy needs to move beyond "a pedagogy of voice that suggests all stories are innocent" to one that connects students' stories to larger cultural and political issues as well as to "the interest and principles that structure them" (15).

Even though I tried to help students connect their stories to the "principles that structure them," as I look back, I can now envision how I might have responded to Lazaro's doubts about the applicability of Freire in our prison setting; I could have opened a door to an important discussion about the troubling issues of trust and surveillance that underscore all prison teaching. Without acknowledging the particularities of place, Lazaro and I could not begin to have a dialogue about how to learn and teach in prison. Lazaro raised important questions, and by not answering them, I perhaps unwittingly participated in his oppression. The students whose stories made me uncomfortable were also trying to communicate something important to me; the prison's unnatural regulation of human relationships made it difficult for me to hear what they were trying to say. Dwight's violent drawings might have been a plea for help; Ramon's need to tell his story to me may have been an important first step in his trying to understand his own actions. Foregrounding the overwhelming impact of the correctional facility setting could have helped all of us communicate.

While the prison environment offers unique and often harsh constraints for both students and teachers, all teachers and students must work within some institutional limitations. As Dan Morgan points out, increasingly, given the nature of our lives and of contemporary society, teachers must pay attention to "the complicated and thoroughly nontraditional lives led by most of our students, regardless of age or background," and "to issues of trust and responsibilities" that may push the boundaries of those limitations (324). While access to prison education has declined in many instances in the past few years, increased opportunities for access to literacy for many other students previously excluded from higher education increase the chances that the students sitting in our classrooms may have difficult, complex, and painful lives. Attempting to implement a critical pedagogy in prison has heightened my awareness of the constraints all teachers and students operate under as well as they try to problematize issues raised by those complicated lives and to difficult issues of trust, ethics, and power that most teachers are not exempt from. I took a risk in asking prison students to trust me and write about risky subjects while knowing that there was no way I could ultimately protect them from facility surveillance. We all ask students to trust us when we ask them to write, particularly when we ask them to consider the difficult conditions of their lives. Perhaps we need to consider the consequences

"the prison's unnatural regulation of human relationships made it difficult for me to hear what they were trying to say"

of that trust and to think about ways of responding to the complex issues raised in our students'writing.

While the prison environment restricts and oppresses, acknowledgement of those restrictions and of the students' expertise on the conditions of living in prison can begin a dialogue in which, as Freire says, "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" (67). My experience of teaching writing in prison while attempting to implement a critical pedagogy helped me grow as an educator; I came to a fuller realization of the importance of writing and critical reflection in students' lives. While some students, like Harry, understandably chose not to take risks and not to speak, other students like Omar, Dan, and Andy chose to speak and investigate the conditions of their lives in spite of those risks. In his article, "Composition and a Prison Community of Writers," Gregory Shafer says about his experience of teaching in prison that "Being part of this unique experience reawakened me to the role I play in allowing students to find liberation in their language"; he reminds his readers that "It is a lesson that should be remembered by all who teach composition" (81). It is a lesson that I hope I have been able to apply to my teaching "outside" of prison; I hope I have been to help all students find the importance in writing and investigating the conditions of their lives that my prison students were able to find.

Freire says, in his introduction to *Pedagogy of Hope*, that "One of the tasks of a progressive educator . . . is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. After all, without hope, there is little we can do" (9). Surely the inmate students in my classes and workshops, many of them young men facing long sentences for drug-related crimes, feel the pressing need for "opportunities for hope." Although the writing they do in their college classes and workshops cannot shorten their sentences or alleviate harsh prison conditions and restrictions, perhaps it offered them a chance to escape the de-humanizing prison conditions and engage in a process of humanization. While most of us do not teach in prison, we might have many students who might benefit from opportunities to both articulate their stories and to connect those stories to larger social issues. Freirean pedagogy in prison can raise many uncomfortable issues and may need to operate under certain restrictions; however, careful consideration of the conditions surrounding the site of any teaching can help both students and teachers, as they listen to each other, become more fully human.

Afterword

Boudin's work is only part of a growing body of literature addressing teaching in prison. This literature has provided me with the inspiration to look closely at my own experience as a prison writing teacher and has helped me think about that experience in different ways.

An example of the increased attention paid to teaching writing in prison and to prison writing is the Winter 2004 issue of *Reflections: A Journal of Service Learning*, guest edited by Tobi Jacobi and Patricia E. O' Connor; this special issue is devoted to "Prison Literacies, Narratives and Community Connections." In her Foreword, Tobi Jacobi notes that while much writing about teaching in prison describes the "material challenges" of correctional facility teaching, her goal in compiling the special issue was to make visible the "complexities of 'how it is' for prison writers and teachers" and to investigate the difficulty "of negotiating student and teacher agency in prisons, spaces shaped by many stakeholders with disparate goals and interests" (2). To that end, Jacobi and O'Connor include diverse material in their collection: stories, essays, poems, and artwork by inmates, articles about creative writing and drama workshops, prison graffiti, and book reviews. Several articles, such as Tom Kerr's "Between Ivy and Razor Wire: A Case of Correctional Correspondence," describe service learning collaborations between universities and correctional facilities (Kerr further details the effects of this correspondence on the women inmates participating in his article "Incorporeal Transformations: The Power of Audience for Women Writing in Prison," in *Writing on the Edge*). Jacobi's Foreword offers an overview of contexts for prison literacies, and O'Connor's Afterward discusses compelling issues raised by the texts included in the volume and ends with a call to readers to "work together with the incarcerated to devise pathways to productive lives and re-claimed communities" (207). Jacobi and O'Connor also provide readers with an extensive bibliography of print, electronic and film resources as well as a compilation of prison book projects in various states.

While the special issue of *Reflections* is an important resource, there is other work available that addresses both the material conditions of teaching in prison as well as examinations of specific pedagogical approaches. Almost all of this literature, including my own account, attempts to define the distinct nature of teaching in the prison environment and to provide the reader with some sense of what this environment is like. Some of these texts (my own, again, included) are concerned with finding a suitable pedagogy for teaching in prison and are often personal accounts of this experience that also provide a description of the unique setting for teachers and readers who have never taught "inside" as well as reflection on the problems, contradictions, and difficulties experienced in such a setting.

Judith Tannenbaums's rich and complex *Disguised as a Poem: My Years Teaching Poetry at San Quentin*, for example, is an intensely personal account of the difficulties and rewards of teaching a state-funded workshop. Anne Folwell Stanford's "More Than Just Words: Women's Poetry and Resistance at Cook County Jail," both provides an account of her experience teaching women inmates as well as a reading of the women's writing as construction of self and as an act of resistance. Frances Biscoglio, in "In the Beginning Was the

Word: Teaching Pre-College English in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility," also notes, in detailed diary format, the difficulties of teaching writing in prison as well as the important gains made by some students despite the restrictions and difficulties of the correctional facility environment.

Several writers address the success or failure of a particular pedagogical approach to teaching in prison. Louise Z. Smith, for example, in her article "Ethics and Writing: Teaching in Prison," foregrounds ethical issues prison writing teachers can expect to face, ranging from choice of texts to how to respond to the complex interpersonal dynamics of the prison classroom, and uses those concerns to shape a curriculum. Andrea Loewenstein outlines a teaching approach grounded in her women students' compelling need to express themselves. While Loewenstein does not define her approach as critical or liberatory, she believes that "Teaching writing from the inside out is no life solution for women who are imprisoned and oppressed in so many ways. But it is one way of taking back a little of their lost power and of regaining a sense that one exists" (48). Gregory Shafer, in "Composition and a Prison Community of Writers," describes how he adapted his first-year writing course to the needs of the women inmates he was teaching, focusing on his students' "need to answer grating questions about who they were and what they should do to feel a sense of happiness." Although he does not explicitly name his pedagogical approach as a critical one, Shafer refers to Henry Giroux's call for "instructors to foster the kind of learning context that will allow for personal expressions and investigation," and notes that teachers should strive to help students achieve "an active critical consciousness" (76).

All of this work offers prison educators or those interested in learning more about the conditions of teaching writing in prison much information about what Jacobi calls the "material challenges" of teaching writing in prison (1), whether that teaching is in Adult Basic Education classes, voluntary creative writing workshops, or in college courses. In addition to detailing these difficulties, all of these researchers address the need identified by Tobi Jacobi to reach beyond the challenge of describing the material conditions of teaching in prison to address the complex interplay between teacher, student, and the prison setting. This work has been valuable to me in terms of providing me with a better understanding of teaching in the carceral environment as well as the difficulties and successes other prison writing teachers have experienced. Stanford, Loewenstein, and Shafer explore pedagogical approaches that implicitly or explicitly define both their teaching and their students' writing as political activity and have been helpful to me in investigating my own similar approach. However, their interests are not strictly in exploring the possibilities or limitations of such an approach in a correctional facility setting. Their work, along with Kathy Boudin's important exploration of

a critical approach in the classes she taught at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, however, provides an important basis for a more detailed examination of the potential and limitations of a critical teaching approach in a prison setting.

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