Volume 4
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Open WORDS
Access and English Studies

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William H. Thelin

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Mark Sutton

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Helping Composition Students Enter and
Remain in the Public Sphere
Jennifer Beech and Julia Anderson

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Access and English Studies

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Editor's Introduction:
Impediments and Hope

I RESIGNED AS THE DIRECTOR OF COMPOSITION AT MY UNIVERSITY this past year after serving eight years in that capacity. In looking back, I recognize both the joys and responsibilities that came with trying to send a program in a certain direction and securing the investment needed to succeed. By the same token, I endured frustrations. Whether it was making little progress in the battle against adjunct exploitation, or seeing more than a few TAs regress to a modal or expressivist approach after leaving my practicum, or having the findings of composition research dismissed by some administrators because the research did not suit their agendas, the impediments to leading a program often seemed to block the rays of hope.

My experiences, which based on many posts to the WPA listserv appear not to be anomalous, reflect a disturbing trend in the humanities across the country. The corporatization of the contemporary university—often called the "business model"—has produced a disdain in many for the complexity inherent in the type of critical inquiry that drives programs such as women's studies, history, political science, and sociology. The politics that fuel movements like David Horowitz's "Students' Bill of Rights" erode the ethical judgments that come through critical thinking, especially in these movements' call for "neutrality" and "objectivity" in the presentation of subject matter and for the elimination of discussion of controversial matters that have no direct connection to the course in question. Attempts such as this to contain knowledge work toward simplifying it, in my estimation, making expertise among instructors less of a need (perhaps even undesirable) and reducing facts and theories to quantifiable answers needed for success on a test. Students become domesticated, not educated, in such a presentation of knowledge and too frequently, as a result, view the humanities courses still required for graduation at most universities as hoops through which to jump.

It should not be surprising, then, that composition programs face many obstacles in enacting progressive visions of writing instruction. Universities, colleges, and even departments can have plans to increase revenue or retention that do not take composition as a discipline seriously. It seemed during my time as program director that every initiative concocted by an administrator would need to include the composition program. Learning communities, distance learning, learning assistants, and dual enrollment come to mind, as well as a plan to create a separate program for students labeled "provisional." On this latter count, I opposed what I interpreted as the segregation of these students from the mainstream

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student body and further did not want non-compositionists to determine what or how we taught writing. While the course number would have still been the English department's, the plan involved a conception of dual supervision of this program with faculty and staff from another college. The only terms I ever heard were that I would be responsible for curriculum but that pedagogy and the hiring of faculty to teach it would be the province of the chair of associate studies, with my role reduced to that of consultant.

I remember a discussion I had over this matter with a former dean where he could not appreciate my claim that the pedagogy an instructor embraced directed the curriculum, not the other way around. After all, as I tried to explain to him, a top-down approach to teaching political topics in an argument/research course, for example, reproduces current-traditionalism and the possible silencing of students, not the critical school of thought that seeks to empower students. But the dean did not ask for any further explanation or research to support my claim. Instead, he insisted that I put together curriculum and that his joint committee from two colleges would decide the pedagogy separately. Ideas I wanted to pursue—Freirean-inspired problem-posing and a dialectal approach based in ebonics research that one of my colleagues had conducted—both required my control over who taught the sections, as the instructors would have needed much knowledge on the subject matter. Further, the teaching would have had to match the ideology of the two curricula. For example, an instructor teaching the ebonics-based curriculum would have had to understand the difference between correction and translation and possess the sensibility to learn from the students about nuances of their dialects and their connection to ethnic and class-based culture. Otherwise, students could have felt demeaned and even have experienced the imposition of a stereotype upon them. While colleagues in my department attempted to negotiate this pedagogical, curricular, and administrative separation, the hurdles were too great to overcome. We could not construct a consistent approach, set of goals, readings, or syllabi, and the majority of the instructors fell back to a modes of discourse model. The results of a study I conducted four years into the program's existence showed a deterioration in the retention rate of the provisional admits from their previous levels. This is but one situation that unfolded in my small corner of the country, but it tells a larger tale. Despite nearly a half-century since the unofficial establishment of composition as a discipline, the core of our field—the teaching of writing to first-year students—continues to carry with it the tag of "service course," those remedial or near-remedial sections that administrators pay lip service to as "important," but to which they desire simple solutions that do not require consultation with data or experts.

Such impediments have soured me over the past couple years. I have experienced a decline in my scholarship, as I have wondered, "Is the time I put in worth it? Is anyone listening?" Such questioning has frustrated many a co-author I have attempted to work with during this time (yes, Kara and Abbey, I'm talking mostly about you; sorry for the delays). Returning to full-time teaching responsibilities this past semester, I found that my teaching bored me, and I compromised many of my pedagogical beliefs in my first-year sections because I could not conceive they would make a difference. I looked at the program that I once led and saw what I had considered to be innovations swept away as if they had never existed. The collaborative projects I encouraged were now discouraged. My emphasis on learning rhetorical concepts was being replaced by the 21st Century's version of the modes of discourse—genres. My beliefs in locating writing within systems of discursive and bureaucratic power and challenging the status quo died with barely a whispered eulogy. I sought to remove myself from the field, to find another occupation where I might achieve personal satisfaction and then fight for the political beliefs I hold in an arena other than higher education. I floated in limbo, hoping an opportunity would arise.

Yet, as John and I prepared this issue (John having to prod and push me, it seemed), I discovered something. I read through these articles, and indeed, I saw versions of the various impediments that so challenged me as an administrator, such as the negative conceptions of writers, difficult locations for writing instruction, and budget issues. However, the articles here collectively comprise a narrative of an unwillingness to surrender to the dominant paradigm that undergirds the teaching of writing in higher education. The authors struggle, sometimes fail, yet they retain a glimmer of hope that pushes them to not give up. How could I shrug my shoulders in defeat when the writing instructors within these pages were carrying on the battle?

"comprise a narrative of an unwillingness to surrender to the dominant paradigm"

So in this issue, readers will certainly recognize some of the problematic situations these authors describe and the limitations institutions and varying ideologies impose on the authors' pedagogies. But readers will also encounter the vision of these authors and their determination to see it through.

Mike Rose's "Re-mediating Remediation," our first article (excerpted from his book, *Why School?*), addresses the "fairly standard media story about remedial students." Not only does Rose discuss a progressive pedagogy for basic writing classes, but he asserts the necessity in a democratic society for remedial courses in general. He suggests that universities cannot continue to detach themselves from the social problems in their communities by turning away from students who come to campus "underprepared." While he regrets, to an extent, the term "remediation," Rose's use of it gives the word new life and vigor.

Joseph Burzynski reflects on his experiences teaching inmates in his article, "Conflating Language and Offense: Composing in an Incarcerated Space." Burzynski examines the relationship among literacy, location, and pedagogy in light of federal and states' laws that turned educational opportunities toward degrees for offenders into job training. He advocates for the use of ESL and basic writing scholarship to "inform a progressive linguistic pedagogy that increasingly questions the place of English and its dominant varieties at the core of the incarcerated classroom." Ultimately, Burzynski analyzes the assumption that the learning of the language of the non-incarcerated will lead inmates toward better lives and suggests that writing pedagogy in prisons must—much more than with students in traditional places of learning—help negotiate hopeful futures from the fragments of failed pasts.

While the discontinuation of any successful program on a campus due to budget cuts could cause discouragement, Mark Sutton's review of the defunct studio model at the University of South Carolina instead sends a message of hope to other universities and colleges that currently use it. In "Messages to and from Third Space: Communication between the Writing Studio and Classroom Teachers," Sutton analyzes "dialogue sheets" to investigate how they mediate space between a classroom teacher and the studio leader in ways that allow for strong student development. In focusing on one student who had considerable trouble with writing, Sutton demonstrates that even students who fail or, like this one, withdraw can take away valuable lessons that can possibly only occur in the supportive studio environment.

Our final article is a collaboration between Jennifer Beech and Julia Anderson titled "Teaching the Obama Generation: Helping Students Enter and Remain in the Public Sphere." Beech and Anderson feel compositionists can build on the mobilization efforts of the Obama campaign to assist students in engaging in a wide range of literate activities that will meet the call in our discipline for public writing. Understanding some of the problems with previous models for public writing, Beech and Anderson urge compositionists to help students "recognize, locate, and strategize ways to enter a variety of public spheres . . . from more safe to more risky and from radical to more traditional iterations." Both recognize that instructors cannot hope for sweeping changes as a result of student public writing and projects. Yet, their examples demonstrate an unyielding faith in pedagogy's ability to invigorate students collectively and allow their voices to be heard.

We will always face disappointments in our endeavors to improve student writing and the conditions in which we teach. This issue of *Open Words* has reminded me that even in restrictive circumstances, our willingness to dig beneath the surface to explore complexity demonstrates our strength as a discipline—even when not recognized by those around us.

William H. Thelin
January, 2010

Mike Rose

Re-mediating Remediation

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KEVIN HAD A STORY SIMILAR TO A LOT OF YOUNG MEN FROM MY OLD neighborhood. He was a good student in poor schools, schools with old textbooks, scarce resources for enrichment, high teacher turnover. And like more than a few young men from such neighborhoods, he was seduced by street life, got into trouble, and spent most of his 16th year in a juvenile camp.

Upon release, he went back to school, worked hard, graduated, did miserably on the SAT, and went to college through a special admissions program.

I had helped develop the writing component for that program, and I taught in it. Kevin's first piece of college writing—the placement exam—was peppered with grammatical errors, and the writing was disorganized and vague. This is the kind of writing we see in media accounts of remedial students, and it is the kind of writing that academics and politicians alike cite as an example of how higher education is being compromised. And such writing is troubling. If Kevin's writing remained like this, he would probably not make it through college

The traditional remedial writing course would begin with simple writing assignments and include a fair amount of workbook exercises, mostly focused on grammar and usage. The readings used for such a course would also be fairly basic, both in style and content. Though they might not be articulated, there are powerful—and limiting—assumptions about language, learning, and cognition that drive such a curriculum: students like Kevin need to go back to linguistic square one, building skill slowly through the elements of grammar; simpler reading and writing assignments won't overly tax Kevin's limited ability and will allow a concentration on correcting linguistic error; complex, demanding work and big ideas—college work—should be put on hold until Kevin displays mastery of the basics.

No wonder remediation gets such a bad rap. And no wonder legislators and college faculty grumble about it.

The program we developed for students like Kevin held to a different set of assumptions, assumptions we had developed from reading current research on language and cognition and from our own experience in the classroom. We certainly acknowledged the trouble Kevin was in and wanted to help him improve his writing on all levels, grammar to organization to style. But we didn't believe we needed to carve up language into small workbook bits

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and slowly, slowly build his skill. And in Kevin's case, we were right. By the end of the twenty week program, Kevin was writing competent papers explicating poems by Gary Soto and Jim Daniels, comparing the approaches to reading presented in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Ben Franklin's *Autobiography*, and analyzing the decision-making in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

My co-workers and I began by surveying a range of lower-division courses to get a sense of the typical kinds of reading and writing assignments faced by students like Kevin in that critical first year. We then found readings from a variety of disciplines that were similar to those in our survey and created writing assignments that helped students develop the skills to write about them. Then we sequenced the assignments from less to more difficult and also so that they were cumulative: what a student learned to do in the first week fed into an assignment on the fifth. So, for example, early assignments Kevin faced required him to read a passage on the history of Eugenics and write a definition of it, and to read a passage with diagrams about income distribution in the U.S. and summarize it. This practice in defining and summarizing would later come into play when Kevin had to compare systematically the descriptions of becoming literate in the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Ben Franklin's *Autobiography*.

To assist students with assignments like these, we organized instruction so that there was lots of discussion of the readings and a good deal of in-class writing where students could try out ideas and get feedback on their work as it developed.

And because many of our students, like Kevin, did display in their writing all the grammatical, stylistic, and organizational problems that give rise to remedial writing courses in the first place, we did spend a good deal of time on error—in class, in conference, on comments on their papers—*but in the context of their academic writing*. This is a huge point and one that is tied to our core assumptions about cognition and language: that writing filled with grammatical error does not preclude engagement with sophisticated intellectual material, and that error can be addressed effectively as one is engaging such material.

Certainly not all students did as well as Kevin, but many did. Those who want to purge college of remedial courses would say that Kevin doesn't belong. He proved them wrong. And those holding to a traditional remedial model would be fearful that the tasks we assigned would be too difficult, would discourage Kevin. He proved them wrong as well.

Since we mounted those programs, some studies have emerged that confirm the approach we took. Successful remedial programs set high standards, are focused on inquiry and problem solving in a substantial curriculum, utilize a pedagogy that is supportive and interactive, draw on a variety of techniques and approaches, and are in-line with student goals and provide credit for coursework.

I certainly believe in this approach, have seen it work, have written about it. And I've experienced it. I came out of elementary school with a dreary knowledge of mathematics. Whether the cause was a poor curriculum or uninspired teaching or my own fear of numbers . . . who knows? I didn't pass algebra in high school, had to take it over in the summer, barely passed it then, was mystified by it. And things got worse after that. My SAT quantitative score was awful; my GRE score was even lower, the score of someone barely conscious. Needless to say, I avoided anything even vaguely mathematical through as much of my post-high school education as possible. Then came graduate school in educational psychology and a two-quarter requirement in statistics.

Educational researchers Michael Cole, Peg Griffin, Kris Gutierrez, and others have a nice way of talking about successful remediation. They refer to re-mediation—that is changing the environment and the means through which students are taught the material they had not mastered before. This definition certainly characterizes what I tried to do with the remediation programs I've developed, and it nicely describes what happened to me with the dreaded statistics.

"changing the environment and the means through which students are taught the material they had not mastered before"

I realize that my story does not perfectly match the typical remedial tale: I was not taking again a course I had taken earlier in my educational career. But the situation is similar: I had failed, barely passed, or avoided mathematics in the past and was now facing a higher-level course with dismal basic knowledge of mathematics. There's a further point to make here. Remediation occurs in many ways, on many levels, involving most of us at some time or another.

In the summer before I entered graduate school, I signed up for an introductory-level statistics course at UCLA Extension, and I hired a tutor. The course had a clear and meaningful goal for me. And having a tutor provided a huge amount of assistance, some of it in basic math, though in the context of statistics. And—no small thing—she offered a relationship built around mathematics, a human face to a subject that had scared me my whole scholastic life.

I was fortunate in that my graduate courses were taught by an excellent instructor who distributed to us draft chapters of a textbook he was writing, a clear and coherent text. In the text and in lecture, the professor continually provided concrete, real-world examples drawn from education. A few of us in the class formed a study group, providing another social context for learning. And during the first term, I kept in touch with my tutor, providing continuity and further, yes, remediation.

I ended up doing just fine in both statistics courses—to my great pleasure and surprise, I can honestly tell you. So I know the feeling of successful remediation, of re-mediating mathematics in a manner that countered a dozen years of failure and aversion. Of course, I had changed along the way and had powerful motivation to get the stuff this time around. Of course. But the scholastic graveyard is littered with folks who wanted desperately to master a topic and didn't. It takes more than desire. A complaint often leveled at remediation by legislators is that they are "paying twice" for instruction in material that should have been learned earlier. Fair enough, but when remediation, re-mediation, is done well, the material in a sense is encountered anew, in a new context, with new curriculum and new pedagogy. For some of us this makes all the difference in the world.

* * *

There is a fairly standard media story about remedial students. I have several laid out before me. The story is one of young people with a high-school diploma or GED mired in remedial math or English courses that they repeatedly fail. There are students like these for sure. But there are many others with a wide range of profiles in a wide range of institutions. Some are placed in remedial courses and some self-select into them. There are returning students who at one point had mastered the material in question, but need to revisit it. There are immigrant students who are building skill in English. There are students who are seeking new careers or who have served in the military and do need a few basic courses in English and math, but who find their way. And there are students like Kevin who are fresh out of high school with a less-than-privileged education who can catch up with the right intervention.

Do the courses work? Until recently there hasn't been very good evaluation of the effectiveness of remedial courses and programs, but more rigorous research is emerging. The findings are mixed, but do show that for many students who are not severely underprepared (particularly in reading, the core academic skill), remedial courses can make a difference in persistence and success in college. And as for the numbers of courses needed, many students require one or two courses to get up to speed—the remedial domain is not glutted with students hopelessly cycling through multiple courses.

I don't for a moment want to deny the gravity of underpreparation. And I'm not being dismissive about the cost; I spent too many years running programs to be blithe about resources. I also share the dissatisfaction with the kind of curriculum and pedagogy that too often characterizes remedial education. But there is, I think, a broader, important issue here, and that is the place of remediation in a nation that prides itself as being a "second-chance" society. This holds true on both a macro systems level, and on the level of the individual.

There have to be mechanisms in an educational system as vast and complex and flawed as ours to remedy the system's failures. Rather than marginalizing remediation, colleges should invest more intellectual resources into it, making it as serious and effective as it can be. The American college and university no longer defines itself in the classical sense of a place apart from society, an intellectual cloister; the defining word now is "entrepreneurial," and the institution is tied inextricably with government and industry. But there remains, I think, a tendency for colleges and universities to see themselves as detached from the social problems in their environment, and this tendency emerges in discussions of remediation. This orientation is certainly less salient in the community college—which defines itself as "the people's college"—though it is evident in the attitude of some community college faculty in the traditional liberal arts and sciences.

But in an open, vibrant society, the college can't set itself apart, for it is integral to a rich system of human development, reaching down through the schools and well beyond the point of graduation. Colleges and universities honor this connection in a partial way through teacher education, professional programs (e.g., for MBA's), and extension. But the connection is selective, not a fundamental way of conceiving an institution's mission. It is a terrible thing that so many students—especially those from less-privileged backgrounds—come to college unprepared. But colleges can't fold their arms in a huff and try to pull away from the problem. They are embedded in the social and educational surround.

> "integral to a rich system of human development, reaching down through the schools and well beyond the point of graduation"

This notion of a second-chance, of building safety nets into a flawed system, fits with a democratic and humane definition of the person, one that offers a robust idea of development: the person as changing, coming at something again, fluid, living in a system that acknowledges that people change, retool, grow, need to return to old mistakes, or just to that which is past and forgotten. Remediation may be an unfortunate term for all this, for it carries with it the sense of disease, of a medical intervention. "Something that corrects an evil, a fault, or an error," notes the American Heritage Dictionary. But when done well, remediation becomes a key mechanism in a democratic model of human educational development.

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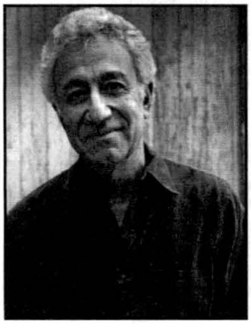

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Joseph Burzynski

Conflating Language and Offense: Composing in an Incarcerated Space

> *Further, just as in the English Only debates, the boundaries separating one language from another are imagined as fixed, so in representations of students, the language of the academy is seen as discrete from the language of the outside, associated with students' home neighborhoods or ethnic, class, and racial identities. Finally, the composition course, or a fixed sequence of required writing courses, is charged with moving students/foreigners to the academy toward that ideal state of competence in academic English writing through a predetermined set of stages of writing development. Writing itself, like language, is understood in reified form, rather than as a set of heterogeneous and shifting practices.*
> *(Horner and Trimbur 614)*

A familiar refrain

PERSONALLY, I WAS NOT PREPARED FOR THIS. NOR, MIGHT I ADD, was I trained for this. The first class was filtering out of the room, the students' newly issued text books, college-ruled paper, pens, and pencils all tucked under their arms. I noticed my breathing for the first time in over two hours. I released a long, slow exhale, the anxiety and apprehension lessening with each passing moment. I had just been introduced to the most linguistically, racially, and ethnically diverse class in my few short years of teaching. There were students from the Dominican Republic and Mexico. I met students whose parents were from Sweden, Germany, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. Others were from Appalachian Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky. There were students from urban Columbus, Cincinnati, and Dayton, Ohio. Some had dropped out of school years earlier and had recently passed their GED. Still others would not have been out of place with the "traditional" students in the last setting in which I had taught: my graduate program at a small, urban Catholic university in northwestern Pennsylvania.

As this first class ended, though, it was not the linguistic or cultural differences with which I was presented that gave me pause. Rather, it was the clunky, purple pendant that I fumbled with as I packed up. I could not figure out how to handle it without a finger or a pen coming too close to the grey button situated in the pendant's middle. One push of the button

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would send a signal somewhere to an officer sitting in front of a screen in a control room. The officer would then direct two officers to drop immediately what they were doing and run to my location. At that moment, I was instructing for Urbana University in GED room #2 in the lower level of London Correctional Institution, a men's minimum and medium security prison in central Ohio. Pressing the button would mean that I was in or anticipated immediate physical danger.

While I never accidentally or intentionally pushed the button—nor, I must add, did I ever feel threatened in the three years I worked at London—each of the students I had just met was an incarcerated offender, and they and the place presented a significant challenge to me. Not only did I have to contend with teaching writing and my students' linguistic backgrounds, but I had to work within this space that was designed to control, organize, and observe people. I knew that I wanted to teach these students a rhetorical approach to writing contexts, but as for working with offenders within this institutional location, I was at a loss. Further, I had had little time to prepare for this, pedagogically or psychologically. I had been offered these courses at the "prison," the most frequently used referent for London by the University community, a few weeks before the start of classes. My wife was a new, tenure-line faculty member in the English department, and the classes were offered to me as a favor of sorts.[1] At the time, I had no particular commitment to educating offenders. I especially had not considered any broader moral or ethical implications of the work, the space, or the students. Frankly, I was interested in collecting a paycheck for doing something exciting and considerably different than any teaching that I had done or considered doing. Aside from expecting to employ the methods I developed in my two years as a graduate teaching assistant and the basic writing scholarship I studied and wrote about for my master's thesis, I had little direction in those first semesters.

In this writing, I will trace a particular history of incarcerated education, broadly sketch the linguistic characteristics of incarcerated students, discuss how approaches to basic writing and ESL composition scholarship over the last few decades both inform and create tensions in this context, and call for a progressive linguistic approach to the correctional composition classroom that foregrounds the classroom as a community in which offender-students can examine their language(s) through economic, social, cultural, and political lenses. While I think that there are places where the incarcerated classroom's interests converge with those of the outs'[2] classrooms, I hesitate to assert transferable practices as my primary aim here. Rather, classes like the one that I encountered in GED room #2 seem to present important challenges to overly refined (intra)disciplinary boundaries of literacy education (e.g. composition, basic writing, English as a Second Language), especially in locations where material and political conditions appear to supersede pedagogical concerns. In an incarcerated setting, literacy—and education, generally speaking—is placed counter to the outward and visible signs of captivity and control. For instance, working with an offender to describe his ethos in a given text can be simultaneously enlightening (he is equipped with a rhetorical tool) and restricting (it may reinforce a connection between his literacy and his otherness as an offender). It is this relationship between literacy, location, and pedagogy that makes the incarcerated classroom worth reflecting upon.

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[1] Several years after my hiring, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the person who had recruited me for the classes, told me that my CV, which listed significant community, political, and labor organizing experience, gave off the "social worker" vibe that he was looking for. While I would have hoped that my master's work in basic writing scholarship would have carried more weight, this anecdote serves, nonetheless, to highlight the metaphorical associations that often accompany teaching in an incarcerated setting.

A localized history

Though London is only a half an hour away from Urbana's small, tree-lined residential campus, its barbed-wire and minimum and medium security offenders present a significant contrast. According to the Ohio Central School System (OCSS),[3] such college-level education programs—like others across the country—were started in the mid 1970s as a way to confront recidivism. This move also coincided broadly with the aims and *intensions* of the open admissions movement in higher education, as these programs took advantage of offenders' access to two different grants: the federal Basic Education Opportunity Grant—which was later subsumed into the Pell grant—and the Ohio Instructional Grant. Access to these grants was awarded in the mid 1960s, but there had been no institutional structure through which offenders could take advantage of the awards. From the late 1970s until 1994, prison programs were funded by these grants, and offenders could receive associates and bachelors degrees. When the U.S. congress enacted the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, the grant funding was eliminated ("OCSS-History"). Across the country, higher education in prisons was eliminated or greatly reduced. Over the next few years, colleges and universities closed their programs or cut them back to match whatever private or state level funding they could raise or access. In 1997, Ohio mandated that state-funded higher education programs could not offer degrees, and the remaining programs were renamed as Advanced Job Training programs, offering one-and two-year certificates. The courses remained college-level and transferable to other colleges and universities, but this turn was decidedly towards re-entry job training. Business curricula were mandated, and certificates

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[2] Prison slang for the outside world.

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[3] The Ohio Central School System is the school district that oversees all educational programs within facilities operated by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections.

with titles like "Business Skills," "Hotel and Restaurant Management," and "Leadership Skills Development" are now awarded. Today, the Ohio Penal Education Consortium consists of 17 colleges and universities that operate within this post-1997 mission and structure.

A correctional higher education setting and its economic and educational particularities present interesting and important questions for English Language Learning (ELL).[4] In this marginal space, pressures test theoretical and methodological practices that are taken for granted on the outs. Because funding has been drastically reduced from its high points in the 1980s and 90s, colleges that work within these correctional spaces operate with economic margins in mind, and the cost to educate each additional offender is considered when staffing, supplies, and curricula are concerned. Despite studies that indicate that improved education is one of the most cost effective ways to reduce recidivism,[5] legislators are reluctant to increase funding. This often means that colleges cannot afford to consider separate placement for students who on the college campus would be considered basic writers or English as Second Language (ESL) students. Space also plays a role, as even if colleges wanted to offer more or smaller classes, there may be no additional classrooms. Further, instructor availability is a factor, as instructors cannot visit an institution whenever they please, nor do they often live close to the institution, as such institutions tend to be away from large population centers. Because of factors like these, all students tend to be enrolled in the same curriculum. On the outs, this is called mainstreaming. In correctional education, it tends to be the *only way*. In Ohio, enrolling in a higher education program has more to do with offenders' correctional institutional status than their educational history. In fact, the model echoes an open admissions atmosphere. Only two educational factors determine placement: successful completion of high school or the General Educational Diploma and achieving a 12th grade proficiency on the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems reading test. These guidelines are assessed and regulated by the state of Ohio through OCSS. Beyond these academic qualifications, students' behavior and sentencing play a role in their eligibility. A student cannot be longer than five years from his[6] release date or parole board eligibility, nor can he have received more than three conduct reports within the last calendar year.

A few things are worth reflecting on before moving on: in total, these requirements represent an attempt to enforce a particular relationship between standards and access that

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[4] I use ELL to emphasize a broad notion of English teaching, beyond such divisions as composition or ESL.

[5] See especially Daniel Karpowitz and Max Kenner's *Education as Crime Prevention: The Case for Reinstating Pell Grant Eligibility for the Incarcerated*: http://www.bard.edu/bpi/pdfs/crime _report.pdf. Within this study are links to many state recidivism figures.

[6] Though I avoid pronouns where possible, some use, naturally, cannot be avoided. Because the majority of offenders are men and the institution in which I taught was for men, I will use male pronouns.

Tom Fox questions: "In the plural singular sense of the word, standards are like morals or values, you either have them or you don't . . . This plural singular sense of standards seeks essence, not contexts, seeks objectivity, not values that are contingent upon historical or material needs" (3-4). In correctional education, students either meet these criteria, or they do not. If any one standard is not met, then the student is not allowed to participate. Effectively and cumulatively, these standards seek to replicate, approximate, or even invent a college classroom in a space where administrators have to be concerned with educating while not appearing to grant access—a reward—to those who are kept from society because of their behavior. This tension is pervasive in correctional education. Simple syllogistic thinking fails: If a man has committed a crime, then he should be removed from society until he has served his penalty. Where, then, is the line at which the state should not provide a service? When does the service become a benefit that he does not deserve? But at what point does bestowing a benefit create a positive return for society?

> "concerned with educating while not appearing to grant access—a reward—to those who are kept from society because of their behavior"

Linguistic characteristics of incarcerated students

Compared to the scholarship of other disciplines, correctional education writing and thinking is particularly thin. Much effort in the field looks towards the effects of programming on reducing recidivism, and most scholarship revolves around secondary education and the parallel goals of the offender earning a high school diploma or a GED. *The Journal of Correctional Education* leads the field as a voice of the Correctional Education Association, but pausing for a moment to consider the large number of incarcerated offenders who do not have a high school diploma or GED in the US—and thus will be mandated to enter these programs while incarcerated—professional discussion is clearly not proportional to that of other fields.[7] Despite, or possibly because of, this marginalization, correctional and other incarcerated settings have been used to highlight classroom linguistic idiosyncrasies that cannot be approached in other settings, as questions of students' languages and institutional response to them are framed in terms of right/wrong or allowed/disallowed. In short, incarcerated students are supposed to have fewer rights. Hui Wu describes the students' and teacher's language use in a World War II Japanese internment camp. Though the subjects of Wu's article were not guilty of any crime against the state, they were incarcerated as though they were, and school-aged students were forced to study "the democratic ideal and to discover its many implications" (243). Wu writes of Virginia Tidball, a high school English teacher at one Arkansas camp, who, "teaching with her mouth shut, deployed silence as pedagogy, likely as a political strategy as well, to provide a forum where her students were able to express their political positions openly and freely without being patronized or judged by the teacher" (253). In a setting bound and created by the government to hold a population captive, student perceptions of judgment are important. In an incarcerated setting, students have already been judged by the state as having offended in some way. Because of this, the student-teacher relationship needs to be carefully negotiated, especially as those who are being evaluated have already been adjudicated or legislated as needing to be removed from society. Here, an important linguistic sensitivity is revealed: "implement[ing] the most proper strategies for working with students means that 'teachers cannot lambaste their homes or communities or first languages'" (Kinloch as qtd. in Wu 256). This may seem overly simple to a modern teacher schooled in appreciation of difference and the importance of asking students to situate themselves, but foregrounding this is paramount when approaching students whose home community or life before incarceration can be seen as directly causing their placement in an incarcerated setting.

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[7] For an interesting take on the possibilities of critical pedagogy in the prison class, see Laura Rogers's "Finding Our Way From Within: Critical Pedagogy in a Prison Writing Class" in the spring 2008 issue of *Open Words*.

Paired with an awareness of the implications of an incarcerated student's home language and culture is the sense of how metaphors of cure or recovery become associated with offender-student language in correctional education. In Jane Maher's reflection on her teaching at Bedford Hills, a women's correctional institution in New York State, she notes that incarceration presents a place where offenders go to be cured of disease, addiction, and aberrant behavior. In this setting, higher education in language can be associated with a cure for the poverty that caused or fostered these problems. This

> "matched by the centripetal forces of not belonging and being unworthy of education—even being unworthy of the notion that change is possible"

metaphor highlights change and recovery, but Maher wonders about where this change comes in the offender-student's life: "[Mina] Shaughnessy had talked about the 'last moment'; I began to feel that these students were beyond that already precarious point in their educational careers, perhaps even in their lives" (Maher 62). The sense of and desire for change are significant, but, as centrifugal force, one that spins outward in the world, it is matched by the centripetal forces of not belonging and being unworthy of education—even being unworthy of the notion that change is possible. Maher recounts ways that these forces play out in in-class correspondence with her female students about composition experiences important to them. In the following, each paragraph is a different offender-student author:

> I am going to write about my educational failures so others can be warned—no they are not my failures. I was told to take vocational classes because I am a woman. Because I am black. Because I had no one to look out for me.
>
> I want to be in college and need writing skills for that. Please help me. My way out of this life is an education. I have to start over when I get out. Be where nobody knows me. I will have to read job ads, find an apartment, find my children.
>
> Writing to my children's teachers. They are going to see the envelope saying the prison and the inmate box number. I don't want to bring more shame on my children but I have a right to know how they are doing. I want to know if they are getting extra help that they need. (Maher 64)

As read in these notes, much is wrapped up in language and literacy for the offender-student. Articulated in this writing are dueling senses of failure and growth. These speak of past failure and the specific skills that will allow advancement, of moving beyond a past self while negotiating ties that bind.

While I want to be careful to not paint too broad a picture of the linguistic forces at work in the incarcerated classroom, I think a few important generalities can be made. First, instructors need to be aware that the connection between language and home culture becomes complicated when the home culture carries negative associations due to the incarceration. This can easily lead to students shedding their language—and even culture—to move towards whatever is normal, law abiding, or dominant. Second, the desire to change and eventually move beyond and be released from the incarcerated space competes with the guilt associated with being confined. Often, students' desire to change their literacy and language are seen as possible cures for many of the difficulties they have had in life. This places a heavy burden on the incarcerated language classroom. It can be argued that this burden may be misplaced as addiction, poverty, or, as in the case of WWII internment camps, the federal government are forces that play a much larger role in a students' life than language and literacy. Nonetheless, students—and even administrators and policy makers—place this importance on this space.

Considering these contexts, how, then, can ELL inform this situation? How can the approaches and scholarship in the basic writing and ESL writing fields—those areas of composition and language acquisition that most speak to the margins where these students exist in US higher education—create classrooms that interrogate these forces in ways beneficial to students, teachers, and institutions? As indicated in my beginning reflection, the incarcerated classroom with which I was faced contained many language varieties—not to mention notions of home, work, and other languages.[8] Moreover, these students have fewer rights than students on the outs. They are positioned as wards of the state, as people who need to be monitored and regulated by the government. Perhaps more than other classroom settings, the incarcerated classroom brings to the surface questions of power and authority: teachers and administrators have it; students are lawfully kept from it. This structure compels the administrators and instructors to recognize their complicity in a linguicist discourse, of sorts. Here, Robert Phillipson's definition of linguicism applies: "linguicism involves representation of the dominant language, to which desirable characteristics are attributed, for purposes of inclusion, and the opposite for dominated languages, for purposes of exclusion" (55). There is further relevance in Alastair Pennycook's notion that discourses become tied to a language: "on the one hand . . . discourses become in a sense entwined with language, each mutually reproducing the other; on the other, these discourses support the role of English as the bearer of this discursive weight" (8). Given these post-colonial perspectives, if the centrality of English and its privileged varieties create classrooms and curricula aligned with the negative associations of pre-incarcerated language and with notions that the only way to improve is through changing language, then a dangerous—and likely very harmful—form of linguistic imperialism is imposed, one that leaves important social, economic, cultural, and political contexts unexamined. Moreover, the assumption that changing language will improve one's situation is too simplistic. I now turn to ways that basic writing and ESL writing scholarship can inform a progressive linguistic pedagogy that increasingly questions the place of English and its dominant varieties at the core of the incarcerated classroom.

The value of a broader ELL perspective

Because questions of language power and privilege are central to composition studies, linguistics and research on second language acquisition, and the associated divisions of and distinctions between TESOL, EFL and ESL, it would appear natural that some overlap should occur. It seems odd, then, that basic writing and ESL writing have not had much directly to do with each other in the history of higher education in the United States. Historically, part of this is related to the notion that disciplines do not cross, as disciplines in higher education tend to align vertically; however, language use is not something that can be vertically aligned.[9] As Bruce Horner and John Trimbur note, the separation of English departments from foreign language departments in the late 19th century created a "territorialization" of languages (597). This move compartmentalized language study. In fact, foreign language study was seen as a way for students to better learn English. This legacy is extant today. Further complicating these language questions in the post World War II years was the increasing enrollment of students who did not speak English as a first language. Paul Matsuda notes that the first ESL writing classes emerged in the 1940s, and over the next 20 years the profession moved towards establishing itself as a separate entity (707). Further, he mentions the organizational concern that

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[8] One of the more significant contact zones that offenders-students can identify is that of the courtroom or the legal arena, as this language represents the power that incarcerated them and maintains their incarceration. Within a correctional institution, offenders who can approximate legal discourse or who have collected legal

> since both composition studies and second-language studies have established their institutional identities and practices over the last three decades, attempting to consolidate the diverse practices in the two distinct professions would be unrealistic and even counterproductive. (715)

Of course, this is an organizational concern and not strictly a pedagogical one. The difference between the two seems particularly relevant in spaces where linguistic specialization is constrained by material concerns and, perhaps surprisingly, educational objectives.

While increased specialization may be important for more vertical concerns like discipline formation and decisions about which department is assigned to teach which classes on campus, it presents a significant problem for composition locations like the incarcerated classroom. In this space, a location that is likely well beyond the core concerns of its affiliated College or University, specialization is often an afterthought. In Ohio, for example, a state where every year thousands of offender students are enrolled in state funded higher education, increasing job skills and reducing recidivism are treated as the objectives of an incarcerated education. This approach leaves little room for forming an ESL or basic writing space that would allow for inquiry into language difference. The incarcerated class, then, is susceptible to reinforcing autochthonous, acontextual standards. Because it is a space where pedagogical objectives are intertwined with not re-offending—which implies changing the offender's physiology and psychology—supposed language standards and tacit monolingualism persist as a means to normalize the offender.

Though increased disciplinary division presents unique challenges to the incarcerated classroom, the high level of self awareness that marks ESL writing and basic writing can offer a way to talk back to those tensions. At the core of each field is the recognition that individual writers cannot be easily categorized and plugged into a curriculum. In reflecting on why she became involved in the initial Students' Right to Their Own Language policy statements, Geneva Smitherman recalls that scholars had begun to question bidialectalism, as it was only "for those on the margins" and that

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[9] In composition studies, movements like writing across the curriculum and writing within the disciplines periodically go in and out of vogue. Similarly, second language writing has moved in and out of the spotlight within ELL.

"supposed language standards and tacit monolingualism persist as a means to normalize the offender"

> it was clear that the charge to intellectual activists was to struggle for the wider social legitimacy of all languages and dialects and to struggle, wherever one had a shot at being effective, to bring about mainstream recognition and acceptance of the culture, history, and language of those on the margins. (18)

Today, language scholars can be heard speaking to similar linguistic tensions. However, the question now is not one of non-standard English varieties arriving in the classroom. Rather, it is about non-English languages arriving in the classroom. In the 1970s, when the Students' Right policy committee was meeting, Smitherman remembers Richard Lloyd-Jones comment on the interdisciplinary nature of the statement: "the statement had an intellectual base in sociolinguistics, but its energy came from support of social diversity" (26). It seems today like these same interdisciplinary forces are pushing beyond varieties of English and are taking on English's largely unexamined place as the language of discourse in the modern US classroom. No longer sufficient are questions of monolithic, acontextual English; rather, world Englishes—not just British or Indian but Chinese and Mexican—and other languages need to be engaged in the classroom not just for inclusion's sake, but to recognize and move beyond English's imperialistic history in the classroom.

Further evidence of reflexivity in these fields over the last 35 years can be seen in the list of Conference on College Composition and Communication's position statements on students' languages: "Students' Right to Their Own Language," 1974, reaffirmed in 2003, and "CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers," 2001 ("CCCC Position Statements"). Similarly, among the TESOL association's many position statements are "On Language Varieties," 1996 and "On Language Rights," 2000 ("TESOL Position Statements"). While the baseline intentions for these groups align closely, practices and approaches to preparing students for academic discourse in higher education in the United States widely vary. Regardless of how such language policy and classroom application are debated or written about, the general tenor never seems to wander too far from the continuum articulated by Antonio Gramsci in 1935:

> If one speaks (expresses oneself with words) in a manner which is historically determined by nations and linguistic areas, can one dispense with teaching this 'historically determined manner'? Granted that traditional normative grammar was inadequate, is this a good reason for teaching no grammar at all, for not being in the least concerned with speeding up the process of learning the particular way of speaking of a certain linguistic area, and rather leaving 'the language to be learnt through living it,' or some other expression of this sort. (Gramsci 283-84)

If language is a living, breathing, forever situating thing, then where do language teachers begin or end, particularly in overly normalizing spaces like the incarcerated classroom? Further, as Gramsci later asks, if certain varieties or languages represent power and indicate class, then why not encourage mobility through teaching students to speak and write as the ruling classes speak and write? After all, would not allowing for or honoring non-power language varieties be an act of keeping the non-ruling classes subjugated? Interesting, I think, to the greater ELL movement is basic writing and ESL writing's answer to this last question over the last twenty years: a resounding "no."

Here, though, the connections in an incarcerated curriculum between the dueling ideas of lessening recidivism and providing a progressive, of-the-moment pedagogy that invites questions of linguistic privilege seem strained. Perhaps there is no greater otherness mark than being removed from society as a direct result of one's actions, even required to live as an indigent class on $20 a month. On the first day of class, I often asked my students for a literacy narrative that situated their educational and composing histories with their expectations and goals for the class ahead. I was always stopped short by the reasons why students wanted to write "correctly," even if, grammatically and stylistically, some were already writing according to Standard Academic English. Some wanted to be able to write good letters home. Some wanted be more employable. And some wanted to succeed in their other course work. Of course, these responses could be attributed to students asserting the narrative of the curious, willing student, but I took away something more significant from this. Nearly all students began by positioning themselves as less than, some even asserting their "blank-slatedness" or their "empty canvas-ness." Regardless of an offender student's history, adjudication and

"a way for them to create a more perfect vision of themselves" incarceration tends to stigmatize all that has come before, including much of their lives. Learning composition in an incarcerated space is not just a way to overcome subjugation, if that is at all possible. For offender students, it is a way for them to create a more perfect vision of themselves, a vision that when created from autochthonous values serves to reinforce their otherness. The imperative for instructors, it would seem, is to foster an appreciation for language differences while providing a space that allows offender students to interrogate those areas of their discursive formations that have been detrimental—or even malicious. I use "malicious" quite intentionally here, as discussions of violence and harm that languages (and bodies) can do are not abstractions in a correctional setting. Inevitably, when class discussion turns towards any particular violence, offender students will invoke the mantra, "It's not about the past. It's about the future." While this may offer certain psychological comfort for the student, it adds no real substance to concerns that are very much about the past, particularly linguistic patterns and thinking.

The question for modern teachers, especially those informed by post-colonial linguists like Phillipson and Pennycook, is how do you create a classroom that balances the particular tensions of existing, working, and thinking within an incarcerated space, a student's right to his own language, and the study and application of progressive rhetorical and grammatical conventions? Modern composition theorists like Victor Villanueva revisit Gramsci's tension, which may be particularly relevant to the incarcerated classroom:

> In what [students] produce in the classroom, perhaps, they come to know more about an inequitable system, come to know—consciously and explicitly—that there is a dominant language and a dominant set of ways with that language that reflect power relations. And in that knowing, the students might consider change. (29)

Similarly, the disciplines within the greater second language acquisition field seem to be working through similar questions. B. Kumaravadivelu notes that TESOL took a similar critical turn in the 1990s, and that "it [was] probably one of the last academic disciplines in the field of humanities and social sciences to go critical" (70). Like composition's critical turn, the critical turn in TESOL

> is about realizing that language learning and teaching is more than learning and teaching language. It is about creating the cultural forms and interested knowledge that give meaning to the lived experiences of teachers and learners. (70)

In turn, each field's critical conscience presents an approach that foregrounds discussions of power and language. These questions of language power and privilege seem to have come to the fore when other questions seem to be answered (or regarded as unanswerable). In basic writing, Mike Rose's 1988 landmark overview of cognitive research on basic writers seemingly closed the door on cognitive theories of basic writers' language use because these theories "avert or narrow our gaze from the immediate social and linguistic conditions in which the student composes: the rich interplay of purpose, genre, register, textual convention, and institutional expectation" (48). Just as composition seemed to be moving away from questions of development, ESL seemed to open the door to these questions. In 1993, Tony Silva called for L2 writing specialists to "look beyond L1 writing theories to better describe the unique nature of L2 writing, to look into the potential sources (e.g., cognitive, developmental, social, cultural, educational, linguistic) of this uniqueness" (201). Similarly, Valdes observes that

> work carried out from a number of directions argues for a perspective on second language writing that takes into account what we know about basic skilled writers who are native speakers of English, that attempts to understand in what ways second language writers are different from these native language writers, and that looks closely at the actual writing process of second language learners as they write. (51)

Kumaravadivelu observes three major shifts in the last 25 years of TESOL scholarship: "(a) from communicative language teaching to task-based language teaching, (b) from method-based pedagogy to postmethod pedagogy, and (c) from systemic discovery to critical discourse" (60). Each of these shifts represents a move away from an autonomous, a-contextual sense of literacy and learning and towards a more progressive and contextually based pedagogy.

Beyond the progressive pedagogical turns that basic writing and ESL writing are making, the way that both fields approach the status of the English language is important to consider. This is especially true for the incarcerated space that naturally assumes the privilege of a variety of English that can best be described as non-incarcerated English. That is, language status is derived from the subjective position of the person who is speaking. If that person is an offender, then he has no status. This is complicated, of course, when an offender student's language is a non-privileged variety of English or another language entirely. While critiquing English's position is certainly implied in the approaches outlined above, questioning English's largely unexamined place as the language of discourse in modern US higher education is becoming increasingly relevant. As Horner and Trimbur note,

> at a point when many North Americans hold it self-evident that English is already or about to be the global lingua franca, we need to ask some serious questions about the underlying sense of inevitability in this belief—and about whose English and whose interests it serves. (624)

Important to this discussion is the need to shed the myth of competence: "we are hesitant to use the term competence to describe a speaker's language, since what constitutes language competence is itself arbitrary and continually subject to negotiation and redefinition" (612). Many of these myths, including the myth of a monolithic, practicable standard language, seem to be eroding within the composition classroom as world Englishes enter and force teachers and scholars to interrogate the linguistic structures in which—and values with which—they operate.

As a supplement to this progressive linguistic turn, however, I want to highlight an ESL pedagogical metaphor that seeks to transform an approach to the social, political, and economic examinations of language: the learning community. Increasingly, the positioning of the classroom is important to what takes place in the classroom, and this may have special relevance to the incarcerated classroom. Correctional institutions are violent places, and offenders are reluctant to expand their social circle beyond race, age, or where they live within the institution. Because of this, the classroom presents a setting that disrupts the safe, homogenous space that many offenders have so carefully and intentionally tried to create. The learning community metaphor, then, has obvious implications for the incarcerated classroom. For instance, in *Dialogic Approaches to TESOL: Where the Gingko Tree Grows*, Shelley Wong notes the history of learning communities and the important, though largely assumed, role that they have played in eastern and western educational traditions. First, she looks to Socrates' method of inquiry, "maieutic, from the art of midwifery" (42). She recalls that it is "through questioning [that] the student gave birth to concepts and understandings that were already in his mind" (42). Her eastern example is Confucius and his effort to "influence society and bring about cultural reforms" (44). Central to Confucius' thinking was "ren," or "learn[ing] to be an ethical person" or "to learn to be human" (45). Put together, the dialogic learning in community follows the best in each tradition:

"the classroom presents a setting that disrupts the safe, homogenous space that many offenders have so carefully and intentionally tried to create"

> "Community" implies a gathering of people who have long-term commitment to being together. "Learning" entails cognitive changes or the development of thought. "Learning in community" means that the cognitive changes come about because of relationships between people. "Dialogic" suggests communication—the reciprocal use of language. "Dialogic learning in community," then, implies that through talking

> and listening within the context of enduring relationships, cognitive changes take place. (48-49)

In the classroom, this is manifest in two ways. First, the language classroom should be seen as a community. This means that the teacher should create a space where no student is excluded or separated, "particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized by their race, gender, ethnic, social, and economic class" (53). The second way to approach learning in community is to create spaces for students to learn from communities outside the class: "a dialogic curriculum draws from both kinds of communities to expose students to diverse experiences, perspectives, and voices" (53).

Another significant re-vision of classroom community is found in Judith Rodby's work. Rodby turns to anthropologist and performance theorist Victor Turner's metaphor of "communitas" as a way to analyze the "relationship of marginals, outsiders, and liminars to social processes and social structures" (82). Rodby is centrally concerned by the false dichotomy between the classroom and the real world:

> The ESL literacy class should be seen as a whole in which the processes of social interaction, language acquisition (redefined as language appropriation), and reading and writing are dialectically related. If acquisition of standard English is seen as the privileged goal of the class . . . writing or composing is likely to be perceived by student and teacher alike as a practice activity as a "language exercise" rather than as a "social activity." (81-82)

As a way to move from exercise and towards a more authentic social activity, Rodby advocates for ESL classrooms to be consciously constructed on the boundaries and to consider the students as "liminars." By planning and inviting students to deliberately enter into this classroom space, "the outsiders become involved in a social process . . . which may give rise to communitas" (83). Rodby posits characteristics of this space. First, "the class should experience not only a spontaneous but normative communitas which is not random or unexpected, but routine, developed as part of the ongoing relations of the course" (92). She offers as an example students evaluating their own learning, collaborative activities that force students out of a passive role, and even allowing students to take part in daily activities like attendance, announcements or larger tasks like assignment creation or reading selection to infuse these things with a sense of group ritual. These processes break down barriers and power structures of daily life and free the group from conformity to the artificial, exercise-like nature of the language class. This approach to a classroom community—a notion that seems to be particularly articulated in ESL writing scholarship—encourages a classroom that treats language as the critical turn would intend; namely, as a living, breathing, continuously situated activity.

The incarcerated composition classroom would do well to be shaped by these traditions. An effective incarcerated learning community must first disrupt the offender student's local context, which is homogenized by a reaction to expected violence. The classroom should not only be framed as a safe space, but it should be framed as different from the dynamics at play in the rest of the institution. Further, the class-as-learning-community should be consciously situated within its institutional context. That is, it should not be set up to be a space that extends the harmful, counter-productive thinking that asserts learning the language (and values) of the non-incarcerated will somehow lead to an improved life; rather, it should be set up as a place that reflexively interrogates language choices and the way that those choices (in)form identity and whatever change may be possible in their lives.

Conclusions: Towards a progressive ELL classroom

I wish I could say that I was able to guide that first class at London with these things in mind. I know that I did not. At the time, there was too much to consider and take in. Entering a prison for the first time is an overwhelming experience, and entering a prison to educate for the first time is even more so. As I began to understand the nature of incarcerated education and my place in it in the years that followed, however, it became clear to me that substantive change for those who are incarcerated requires a rehabilitated correctional system. Educational programming offered by states is set up to fail when alternative life and language choices presented in the classroom remain secondary to surviving and existing while incarcerated. The questions that the incarcerated classroom's instructor is left with, then, are can these discussions from the margins of composition scholarship inform a pedagogy relevant to students whose bodies have been labeled as less than? Can this interdisciplinary legitimization of non-standard varieties of English and non-English languages in the composition classroom work within an incarcerated space? In many ways, this move away from a monolithic sense of right-and-wrong-language seems ideal for education within an imperialized space like that of a correctional institution. Further, approaching the classroom as a learning community, a space that embraces and makes conscious its liminality and the ways that the class works within itself and out into the world, may allow for a vital separation between the violence of the institution

> "Perhaps more than most students, incarcerated students need to negotiate a failed past with a hopeful future."

and the normalizing values of incarceration in the United States. Perhaps more than most students, incarcerated students need to negotiate a failed past with a hopeful future. Offenders need to recognize how their lives interact or (re)connect with society, and one way to arrive at some understanding is through a progressive language classroom where, as Villanueva suggests,

> students discover that they are constantly in tension with their environments and that these environments are affected by social, political, and economic circumstances and events. Personal lives must contend with social, political, and economic situations. (29)

This move, however, should not be mistaken as accommodating—or certainly condoning—offender students' pasts; rather, this turn allows for change through the conflict created by and within these contended spaces. This move also attempts to bridge the binary between privileged language varieties and critical approaches asserted by Gramsci. It creates a critical communal space through which students can study how power is tied to language, and it affords students agency in their language choices.

Before moving away from these tensions, I would like to spend a few moments framing my concluding thoughts through Frantz Fanon's thinking on the dynamics at work between the minority—the black slave—and the majority—the white master—as a way to approximate the thoughts of an imperialized subject. *In Black Skin/White Masks*, Fanon differentiates between the slavery abolition experiences of the French Negro and the American Negro:

> The upheaval reached the [French] Negros from without. The black man was acted upon. Values that had not been created by his actions, values, that had not been born of the systolic tide of his blood, danced in a hued whirl around him. The upheaval did not make a difference in the Negro. . . [T]he American Negro is cast in a different play. In the United States, the Negro battles and is battled. There are laws that, little be little, are invalidated under the Constitution. . . . And we can be sure that nothing is going to be given for free. (220-21)

I think that this violent, corporeal metaphor is apt for the linguistically sophisticated offender student. Here, Fanon contends that struggle created a more true liberation for the American slave. In this formulation of the master/slave dialectic, action against resistance educates while it frees, while being granted freedom instills passivity or, at the very least, creates a less transforming, a less significant change. Similarly, I have contended here that it is necessary to instill in a curriculum resistance to an easy, automatic waving of not just English privilege, but of the normalizing, corrective forces of incarceration. Without confronting—and in some ways inviting—linguistic tension into the classroom, students' languages and their perceptions are acted upon. As Fanon notes, "to educate man to be *actional*, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act" (222). I think that the progressive, community oriented model creates an actional space through which incarcerated students can struggle through and interrogate language(s) and their situation as incarcerated bodies.

Put together, the progressive examination of language within social, economic, and political contexts, Wong's notion of a dialogic community both within and outside of the classroom, and Rodby's embracing of the language learner's liminality create a space that seems to accommodate the main concerns of the imperialized, incarcerated students' complicated relationship to language. I do not want to imply that a classroom that derives its practice from this theory will solve all of the problems and associations of an incarcerated language student. I think, however, that the extraordinary circumstances within which these students often find themselves demand approaches that are informed by multiple perspectives, let alone disciplines. Certainly, I do not want to advocate blithely crossing the attributes of one group with another. There are already enough stereotypes that are hard to be rid of, and, concerning language, treating students as homogeneous or generalized groups is largely unproductive. What often is found by the scholar and the teacher, however, is that holding up a mirror to a discipline, the university, or to the classroom, often reveals that the problem is not with the students: it is with the structure or culture—of which we, as ELL teachers and scholars, are complicit.

Here, Gramsci's thinking on language is once again echoed:

> Every time the question of the language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganize the cultural hegemony. (282)

In the case of the incarcerated classroom, questions of language are not the primary problem; rather, these questions come to the fore because language is something that students, administrators, and teachers believe that they can grab hold of and have some influence on. Through an examination of and move to change offender-students' language—and their corresponding cultures, histories, and even offenses—the criminal justice system can say that it is helping the poor, troubled inmate overcome his many (non-linguistic) deficiencies. While this expectation may seem sufficient for popular understandings of criminal justice and composition, it hardly measures up for those who expect more from both.

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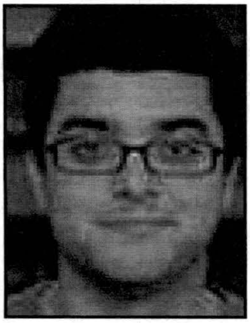

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Mark Sutton

Messages to and from Third Space: Communication between the Writing Studio and Classroom Teachers

"Studio articulation of thirdspace is built on communication."
(Grego and Thompson, Teaching *200)*

THE WRITING STUDIO MODEL FOR TEACHING BASIC WRITERS WAS developed in 1992 by Nancy Thompson and Rhonda Grego. A supplemental instruction approach, Studio programs set up workshops as a means of increasing students' understanding of academic conventions. At the University of South Carolina, these groups worked on assignments from the students' First-year Composition courses. Students were usually grouped across classrooms. Each group was led by an experienced graduate student, usually one who believed in the Studio philosophy and who participated in action research on the site with other staff members. During my last three years of graduate school, I had the privilege of working at the University of South Carolina's Writing Studio. I served as its last Assistant Director.

Studio philosophy "moves beyond the usual text-focused needs of student writing to explore ways in which writing programs can address the psychic needs of students and teachers" by giving students a safe place to voice their feelings (Grego and Thompson, "Writing" 75). Thompson and Grego argue students who lack "language to express their struggles as part of the intellectual scene of the academy" use emotions like "anger, frustration, the desire for success, [and] silence" to express themselves ("Repositioning" 71). If these emotions, particularly the anger and resignation many Studio participants feel, go unvoiced or unnoticed, these students can be struck "with one approach and one set of expectations for themselves and for the writing instruction they will receive." Those expectations are rarely positive ("Writing" 71). Once voiced, the facilitator can use the Studio space to "[work] to do justice to the complexity of [the students'] problems and bring the 101 instructor into these deliberations," thus "[helping students] reposition themselves as productive learners and developing writers" (72).[1]

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[1] For a discussion of how this view of developmental writers has existed historically, see Mike Rose's "The Language of Exclusion" and Hull et al.

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The University of South Carolina's Studio was a remarkably successful program; from 1992 to 2001, at least eighty percent of students who regularly attended group meetings passed their First-year Composition courses, which either matched or slightly exceeded the passing rates of all students in the program ("Results"). Peter Elbow praised the Studio model as a "seemingly utopian approach" that has been "used with success" (90). Unfortunately, budget cuts forced Studio to merge with the Writing Center in the fall of 2002. Differences in program philosophy and required staffing by people not committed to the Studio lessened its effectiveness. Nancy and I decided to shut down the Studio at the end of that semester.[2] Fortunately, similar programs exist or are being planned at several other institutions, including Midlands Technical College, the University of California-Chico, the University of Arizona, and Miami University Middletown, making Studio one of the major national models for teaching basic writers (Lalicker). In April 2005, John Tassoni started a listserv to discuss theory and practice of the Studio model, and a Special Interest Group dedicated to the approach began meeting at The Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2007. These communities show the influence the model still possesses.

While I have not worked in a Studio since graduate school, I still believe strongly in its power to improve both a student's skill at and attitude toward writing. Part of this power comes from the unique space that Studio programs can occupy in academic hierarchies. Thompson and Grego state Studio is "a site within the institution which generates both the possibility and the willingness for reciprocal learning on the part of the institution, teachers, and students" ("Writing" 68). They use Third Space, a concept from cultural criticism, to describe this zone's characteristics. Edward Soja, drawing on bell hooks, defines Third Space as "a space of radical openness, a context from which to build communities of resistance and renewal" across traditional boundaries (84). For developmental writing students, these boundaries include elements that prevent them from becoming effective college writers, such as their background, skills, and attitudes. Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson say that Third Space in classrooms is a "[context] in which various cultures, discourses, and knowledges are made available to all classroom participants, and thus become resources for mediating learning" (467).[3] By allowing participants to draw on this range of information, Studio Third Space increases the chance students will become flexible writers, aware of the range of choices available in any situation.

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[2] For a detailed history of the University of South Carolina's Writing Studio, see *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces: The Studio Approach.* The book's last chapter describes the Studio's last year in more detail than my current space allows.

[3] Third Space does not seem to be the same thing as Robert Brooke's idea of underlife. Underlife, to him, involves how people "show that their identities are different from or more complex than the identities assigned to them by organizational structures" (230). While Third Space allows for this showing of multi-faceted identities, it exists outside of traditional spaces that can force people into enacting a particular identity.

The University of South Carolina's Studio group leaders communicated from Third Space using Dialogue Sheets. Originally photocopied forms before we switched to email, Dialogue Sheets summarized the student's work in a session. In the process, they "[passed] information about the students' life circumstances, writing/learning processes, and written products . . . that can help an instructor understand the difficulties the student might be having, as well as strengths . . . less likely to emerge as clearly in the larger class" than in Studio groups (Grego and Thompson, "Writing" 74).[4] After the summary, Dialogue Sheets generally ended with some version of this statement: "we hope to maintain a dialogue with you in order to improve the quality of student education we can offer. Please help us coordinate our efforts in the Studio with yours in class by responding—however briefly—either in writing or email." Through this request, Dialogue Sheets "invite 101 teachers to share in [an] . . . emerging critical consciousness of the complexities of student writers and their work" (Grego and Thompson, "Repositioning" 80). Essentially, "Dialogue Sheets [are] mediators: between Studio and English 101, between Studio leader and 101 instructor, between the student and the academy" ("Writing" 74). This essay analyzes some of these efforts at mediation, and the other messages they inspire, to show how The University of South Carolina's Studio used them to try to create a space that could benefit students.

Methodology

For this project, I gathered all available communication between Studio group leaders and classroom instructors written during fall 2000 and fall 2001. These communications were divided into three genres: Dialogue Sheets, instructor's responses to Dialogue Sheets, and group leader responses outside of Dialogue Sheets. This classification allowed me to study different approaches to communication into and out of Studio, as well as to trace chains of conversation between the group leader and instructor. Because I wanted to emphasize connections between Studio and the classroom, I selected for closer analysis only those Dialogue Sheets for which I had a copy of the instructor's response or in which the group leader explicitly referred to an instructor's response. This created a sample of ninety-six Dialogue Sheets (out of an initial pool of 335), eighty-six instructor responses, and twenty-eight group leader responses.

This focused sample included at least one Dialogue Sheet from all Studio group leaders during 2000 and 2001, except myself. Though I have a complete set of my Dialogue Sheets and most instructor responses to them, I excluded them so that the analysis would not skew towards elements I emphasized. I did include two responses I wrote about my own classroom students, who worked with other group leaders. Because of the inclusion of every other group leader, the analysis hints at the particular kinds of content emphasized by the entire staff as we created our Studio's space.

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[4] In this essay, "instructor" refers to the classroom teacher. "Group leader" refers to the Studio staff member.

The set of group leader responses I found does not include all group leaders. I cannot tell whether this absence means some group leaders did not respond to instructors, that the responses were misfiled, or that some instructors did not write back. My sample also does not account for any communication outside of Studio records, such as hallway conversations. As a result, it is difficult to tell exactly how frequently this next level of communication occurred or whether the group leader or classroom instructor caused the break.

Despite the variety in these communications, they present only one side of the conversations in Studio, those between group leaders and instructors. Students, to my knowledge, were never given the opportunity to respond to Dialogue Sheets or instructor comments.[5] The student feedback surveys for fall 2001 did not include questions on the Dialogue Sheets. Unsurprisingly, no students discussed them in questions asking for a summary of a typical session and suggestions for improving Studio. Should my corpus have included these kinds of communication, the complexity of this space would have been further illuminated.

I coded the samples based on content, developing categories inductively through repeated readings of the documents, with modifications made as appropriate. The categories include requests for information, more detail on an assignment's goals, and discussions of student attitude. Each sample could, and usually did, contain multiple kinds of content. This focus on content means that the same content can appear in Dialogue Sheets, instructor responses, and group leader responses, though it may be used differently by each writer.

The next section of this essay discusses the most frequently seen varieties of content in Dialogue Sheets, classroom instructor responses, and group leader responses. While each genre contains some content the others do not, all show ways group leaders tried to create a space meant to help students grow as writers. This essay concludes by focusing on an extended exchange between an instructor and group leader that supported an at-risk student.

Analysis

The most frequently seen kind of content for both Dialogue Sheets (fifty-one examples) and instructor responses (thirty-two examples) conveyed information about the student's progress toward completing an assignment. In Dialogue Sheets, this information almost exclusively described students' actions during their session, both as the students worked on their own assignments and as they helped other group members.[6] The two samples below display this combined focus:

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[5] Other Studio programs, such as Miami Middletown, do allow students to review or add to a report before it is sent to the instructor (Tassoni and Lewiecki-Wilson 83).

> [Taylor] had with him today the draft of his image analysis paper with your comments on it.[7] He put it under the [document camera] so we could all see it, and he read it aloud, along with your comments on the one paragraph he picked out for us to work on. He said he needed an introduction, needed to take a stand, and needed to make it clearer throughout. Though there was more than we could do in our 15 minutes, we did help him figure out how to describe the ad better as a more complete set-up for the analysis and critique. Your comments asking questions about the ad were a very good beginning point for us. I think by doing that he could see a stand he could take. We talked about the picture, its colors, the big lettering, the smaller lettering, and the bottle of whiskey—and how he could show the relationship among all of these elements.

* * * *

> Albert brought the assignment sheet for his rhetorical analysis to Studio yesterday, and we reviewed with him the several argumentative appeals as well as the introductory paragraph to Updike's essay on Mickey Mouse. Although Albert ultimately decided he was not very interested in Updike's essay, he did seem to comprehend the various appeals and listened closely to a fellow group member. That member pointed out an appeal to values where Albert had seen mostly facts and reasons. Albert returned the favor by making numerous suggestions and remarks on his groupmate's topic of public prayer.

The frequency of this type of content demonstrates the primary focus of Studio space. In it, the group leader is tasked to "[explicate] assignments not only in terms located within the assignment itself . . . but also by simultaneously opening up the external pentadic analysis of such assignment in the field-discipline of composition and rhetoric . . ., in terms of the history of the course at the institution, in terms of what the leader knows about the disciplinary background of the students' teachers, in terms of the history of such courses overall, and . . . in terms of his or her own experiences as a writer who has negotiated similar assignments or teachers" (Grego and Thompson, *Teaching* 95). These samples demonstrate these kinds of links, with both the group leader and other group members acting as the "we" named in the summaries.

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[6] Three Dialogue Sheets discussed student needs as the group leader saw them, without prompting from the instructor.

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[7] All student, instructor, and group leader names in this essay are pseudonyms.

Taylor's group applied its knowledge of ad analysis essays—a common assignment in South Carolina's First-Year Composition program—to help Taylor create his essay. Taylor contributes his awareness of what he should work on. The instructor is also given a voice here, through the inclusion of his or her comments and through the group leader's validation of those comments. All of these elements should work together to help Taylor create a better essay. Similarly, Albert's peers point out other avenues for his analysis, as well as correcting his misunderstanding of terminology. He contributes his own experiences to help enrich his peer's argument. Helping each other gives students the opportunity to see how the concepts they learn in one class apply to others, an essential element of learning. Yet, creating a space for this transfer is hard "even inside the most pedagogically progressive classroom, since understanding contexts requires seeing the wide array of diverse and competing assignments, choices, and constraints, and listening to other students' and teachers' stories. In short, understanding 'place' requires a 'space' from which to view it that is both inside and outside its boundaries" (Tassoni and Lewiecki-Wilson 70). Studios are ideal for creating this kind of space.

"the opportunity to see how the concepts they learn in one class apply to others"

While much of the Dialogue Sheet's information in this category focused on the session, the type of information in instructor responses about students' work drew on classroom experience. The most common content in this category described the students' progress, or lack thereof, in class, usually in general terms. One instructor said that a student "does make useful contributions in class and . . . has made useful comments on his peer critique memos." Student progress on a specific assignment, such as saying the class had started discussing a new assignment or stating another "needed major help on his Rhetoric[al] Analysis paper," was the next most common type of content in this category, followed by student feedback on their experiences in Studio. This kind of information could be used to enrich the Studio space by including an additional level of information, as we saw in the earlier example with Taylor. His instructor's comments are integrated into the group's effort. Information on the students' classroom experiences also helps limit misunderstanding. Studio group leaders and members possessed a wide range of writing experiences, but they could not read minds. They could accidentally make suggestions that do not improve the draft or meet the instructor's expectations. They needed guidance from the classroom instructor to offer effective help.

The second and third most common kinds of content specific to Dialogue Sheets are administrative. Twenty-one Dialogue Sheets contained general requests for information, primarily about whether a serially absent student was still required to attend Studio. Administrative needs of the Studio, such as reports that a student missed a session or questions about how Studio participation factored into the student's classroom grade, appeared twenty times. Administrative issues also appeared in instructor responses. Sixteen dealt with attendance; usually, the classroom instructor promised to remind a student about attending Studio. Instructors wanted to verify how often a student attended sessions or if Studio would meet before a holiday break. The most common type of content in responses to instructor responses, eleven, acknowledged and answered these questions.[8]

These communications, while necessary to maintain Studio's records, helped solidify the connection between Studio and the classroom. Studio's placement in Third Space positions it outside traditional academic structures. In an ideal world, this separation would offer students some freedom from traditional concerns like grades.[9] This separation, however, meant South Carolina's Studio could not use grades as a motivator. We depended on instructors to motivate students to attend Studio. Some instructors used quiz grades, while others factored Studio attendance into class participation. Other instructors used no grade motivator at all. This variation allowed Studio to mostly remain a safe space for students, since the group leader in charge of it lacked the power to directly punish students. Of course, reporting non-attendance can lead to penalties for the student. This, and similar, issues show that "Studio space is frankly not utopian at all." (Tassoni and Lewiecki-Wilson 88). It may just displace the punishment outside the group.

Another type of coordination between the Studio and the classroom appears in the fourth most common kind of content in Dialogue Sheets: emotional reactions group leaders observed that may affect a student's success in the course or Studio group. References to student attitude appeared in nine dialogues.[10] One group leader reported that "Evan seemed very uninterested [in the session] . . . and mostly repeated that he 'hates English.' I think he may be a little burned out and ready for a break." While this example shows a student's negative reaction, other Dialogue Sheets described positive emotions, such as when a student was happy he or she earned an "A" on an assignment.

These types of statements reflect the emphasis Studio philosophy places on expressing and examining emotional responses. They are definitely part of our classrooms; as Susan McLeod notes, "one does not have to watch freshmen at work to know that writing is an emotional as well as cognitive activity" (426).[11] Often, though, the academy rejects emotions as an appropriate mode of communication (Grego and Thompson, "Repositioning" 64). Sharing them in a classroom space can be risky. Many teachers would respond negatively to being told a student hates their course, and some, regretfully, would punish the student instead of determining what is actually causing the anger. In these cases, group leaders can translate these feelings because they "stand on a border that allows them to look one way into the mind-set of undergraduate students . . . or the other way into the added perspective and experience of an instructor or even a more advanced undergraduate" (Grego and Thompson, *Teaching* 131). They can see signs of burnout they themselves felt and point them out as a cause, not a personal conflict with instructors.

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[8] This category also appears in four dialogues and two instructor responses.

[9] Students who participated in South Carolina's Studio could earn a Pass with Distinction, Pass, or Fail, primarily based on attendance. The instructor determined how this "grade" factored into the course.

[10] A reference to student attitude also appeared in one instructor response.

"teachers would respond negatively to being told a student hates their course"

Studio group leaders could attempt to provide a similar kind of emotional support when they described problems students faced completing an assignment.[12] One group leader reported that "Joan seemed to have some difficulties with this assignment but managed to make a few analytical observations." Another stated the group "let Gisele know that we could not tell from her [rhetorical analysis] essay what claim the author of her article had made." Students can quickly become frustrated with an assignment they do not understand, and this frustration can be hidden behind silence. As a result, teachers may not realize there has been a gap in communication. Studio space allows an instructor to hear, through an intermediary, how a student misinterpreted an assignment, with a lesser possibility of perceiving criticism of the instructor's teaching ability. The instructor then has a chance to respond through the group leader.

Many of the instructors in this sample took advantage of this opportunity. Twelve responses to Dialogue Sheets specified deadlines. Instructors clarified an assignment's goals in five cases. For example, an instructor who assigned a multi-genre collaborative paper used a response to explain how the different parts of the assignment, including the section a studio participant showed his group, should fit together. Five responses to group leader requests referred to questions or comments raised by group leaders about a specific student's

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[11] For a more recent example of how emotions can influence student writing, see Sally Chandler's "Fear, Teaching Composition, and Students' Discursive Choices: Re-thinking Connections between Emotions and College Student Writing."

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[12] These kinds of comments came both from Dialogue Sheets (4) and instructors (3).

work. In them, instructors reported things like a student's "proposal paper turned out well!" or that another "could make a concrete definition of the aims of medical science and show various ways that cloning conflicts with this [definition]." Some group leaders replied to these reports by outlining plans for the next session. One said he would "ask William about his new topic [which the group leader described] on Wednesday. Hopefully, we can get him moving in the right direction." That same group leader, talking about another student, said that "hopefully, in future sessions we'll discuss the necessity of substantial revision a little more."

Another sample of Studio space possibly offering emotional support appears in one of the most common kinds of content in Dialogue Sheets (thirteen examples): emphasis on student improvement. Early in my research, I expected this information would mostly appear in the student's final Dialogue Sheet. It reflected on the student's work throughout the year, making it a logical place to emphasize the students' strengths. However, closer analysis revealed this kind of content was provided during all four months of the semester, with the largest concentration in October. October was the first full month students participated in Studio, so perhaps group leaders saw more progress at a faster rate then. By informing instructors of this improvement, the group leader gives the instructor a chance to further encourage the student in class.

An Extended Conversation

Most of this essay has analyzed Dialogue Sheets and responses as isolated artifacts. However, Thompson and Grego hoped that Dialogue Sheets would begin a written conversation that extended throughout the semester, with ideas and issues recurring ("Writing" 74). My analysis suggests these conversations did sometimes occur, although I cannot definitively state how often or why they did not develop in some cases. When these conversations did occur, they had the potential to create a strong support network for students. To demonstrate this idea, I will focus on one chain. It was built by Kim, a Studio group leader for three years, and Betsy, an experienced graduate teaching assistant, as they worked with Scott, a student in Betsy's class. These exchanges show how group leaders and instructors can work together to help a struggling student.

Before presenting my analysis, I admit I knew both Kim and Betsy well. Kim had been on the Studio staff as long as me, and we frequently discussed the program's benefits. Conversations about teaching with Betsy led me to believe she was devoted to helping students. My experiences with them may have influenced my interpretation of their documents, though I have tried to limit claims to what can be supported by their texts.

The first move in this conversation, a Dialogue Sheet dated September 29, reports on

Scott's second Studio session. Most of it describes the group's work on Scott's essay analyzing the audience of the Declaration of Independence. Towards the end of the dialogue, Kim reports that "[Scott] admitted that he had written the essay in only a few minutes, and said that he wanted to rewrite it and turn in back in after he revised." Betsy's response—"This is not an essay that ordinarily can be revised. . . . But in Scott's case, I do want him to revise it."— clarifies her plans for Scott. In that same response, Betsy says, "I think he just needs extra time and attention and am a little worried about him, but I think we are doing all we can, and I believe he'll improve." By raising concerns about Scott's ability to pass the course, even though she cannot provide any specific evidence beyond her instincts, Betsy lets Kim know she should keep an eye on him. Studio's space allows for this kind of observation and intervention.

Kim refers to Betsy's goals for the Declaration of Independence assignment at the end of the next Dialogue Sheet, saying she will remind Scott to submit the revision. This comment concludes a report that Scott did not bring work from Betsy's class. However, he was still an active participant in Studio: "We did . . . discuss an essay he was working on in University 101. . . . Scott also participated in discussing other students' work." While Scott did not fulfill his obligations to Betsy's course, he still acted in a way that could help him grow as a writer and, as a result, succeed in her class. Betsy's response shows she accepts Kim's judgment: "I'm sorry he didn't have his Engl. [sic] work with him, but I'm glad he was an active participant."

Betsy's earlier concerns about Scott become more specific when Kim ends a Dialogue Sheet dated October 27 with a standard request: "Please continue to keep me updated about [Scott's] progress in your class." Betsy's response is one of the lengthier documents in the entire corpus:

> Scott is woefully behind on his papers. . . . He has turned in papers 2 and 3, but they are not complete, and I am going to have to give them back to him to revise before I can grade them.
>
> I am having some serious doubts about whether he can pass this class. I have not said this to him, of course, because he hasn't turned in enough writing for me to say that officially. He cannot seem to get it together. . . . I told him I was willing to give him more time on deadlines because I knew he was working hard (benefit of the doubt psychology here) but that he needed to get moving on his work. . . . I think he has a learning disability—or some kind of problem with language because he is often unable to articulate an idea on paper or verbally. In class, when he tries to contribute, he sometimes says things that are on topic and understandable. But other times, I do not understand what he is saying or how it relates to what we're

> talking about. Does this happen in sessions with you? There's always a certain amount of those kinds of remarks anyway—but this is a consistent pattern with him. Do you think he has a learning disability of some kind? If so, what should we do? It is a delicate issue.

Through outlining the problems Scott is having in class, Betsy makes concrete the concerns she raised in her response to the September 29th Dialogue Sheet and that Kim's later Dialogue Sheet, which describes his not bringing an English assignment to Studio, reinforced. She asks Kim for verification or more evidence, which Kim provides in the next Dialogue Sheet:

> I suspected Scott was behind. He couldn't seem to remember whether he had written papers two and three & what you said about them if he had. . . . Regarding the possible learning disability you mentioned, I'm not really sure. In Studio, it's not so much that he says things that are incomprehensible, but that he seems to be tremendously forgetful—perhaps that in itself has to do with a disability of some kind. For instance, this week he said that he did not have anything to work on. Then, with only ten minutes left to go, he remembered that he did, after all, have a disk with his 4th essay along. . . . I'm not really sure what to do with him (other than what we are doing, that is), especially if he does have a disability. Do you think I should talk with [the Writing Center director] about it?

Kim's response deals with the specific concerns Betsy raises by providing a different perspective based on Kim's experiences working with Scott. His difficulties could be more indicative of poor planning skills than a language-based learning disability, though the possibility remains in the discussion. To provide another form of help, she arranges to put Betsy in contact with a knowledgeable advisor. Studio, through its placement across spaces, allows making this connection easier.

"its placement across spaces, allows making this connection easier"

While I could not find the correspondence to or from the Writing Center director, Kim refers to it in a Dialogue Sheet dated November 6: "As you have probably surmised from [the Writing Center director's] email, I brought our concerns about Scott to her attention. Let me know if he does in fact become part of the Academic Skills program. . . . He also said that he was afraid to ask you about his second and third papers—I suggested that he do so anyway so that he could get back on the right track." This comment may be meant to encourage Betsy to continue reaching out to Scott, even though he is scared to ask her for help in the classroom. Studio, as discussed earlier, is designed as a space where emotions, including fear of failure, can be voiced without censure. By making these fears, possibly not mentioned in class, obvious to Betsy without casting blame, Kim gives Betsy a chance to deal with them.

While Kim tries to reassure Scott, she seems unable to overcome his fears. He did not attend his last two Studio sessions. Betsy reports that Scott's classroom attendance became erratic. Despite his disappearance, Kim continues to ask about Scott's progress in class and offering more help.

Scott's story has a semi-happy ending. Betsy arranged for him to withdraw from her class without penalty, as long as he worked with the Academic Skills program. While he did not complete Betsy's class, Kim's final Dialogue Sheet on Scott emphasizes the positive steps, how ever small, he made in order to earn a Pass in Studio: "When he showed, he participated fully, although he often seemed hesitant about working on his own writing." When Betsy asked permission to relay this "grade" to Scott, "because it would boost his ego," Kim agrees and restates that "I enjoyed working with him." As this last statement and Kim's other actions show, Studio remains a supportive space for Scott.

This chain of dialogues and responses allowed the possibility for an at-risk student to continue gaining support even after he seems to have given up. In my experience, at-risk students frequently respond to the difficulties in the classroom by disappearing and refusing to contact the instructor, just like Scott at the semester's end. The instructor is forced to fail them. Given the level of concern Betsy shows, she seems to want to avoid this outcome. While she thinks she knows how to help him, she wants to gather enough evidence to make an accurate decision. Kim's Dialogue Sheets and other written communications provide it. If Betsy were a less experienced teacher, Kim's recommendations for support services could be essential. Inexperienced teachers may not know they exist or understand how to refer students to them.

> "dialogues and responses allowed the possibility for an at-risk student to continue gaining support even after he seems to have given up"

In addition, Kim continually points out Scott's strengths, such as his willingness to help other group members. This information shows Scott is not necessarily a student with a bad attitude. This view may not be borne out in his classroom actions, where he demonstrates block-ing behaviors like not submitting work. In other situations, such as with a less experienced or understanding teacher, this information from the Studio group leader could create a more complete view of the student. In this case, both instructor and group leader want to help Scott, and these conversations give them a chance to support him as well as each other.

Admittedly, Scott must retake the course. His path to graduation is delayed. I feel, however, he has a better chance of graduating because Kim and Betsy were able to work together to get him the help he needed, a connection Studio space could facilitate. Instead of failure here, he only faces a temporary delay.

Conclusion

The chain of conversation I just analyzed demonstrates some of the ways that communication out of and into The University of South Carolina Studio's Third Space could create unique opportunities for supporting students. In an earlier version, this essay closed by calling for more of this kind of communication in other supplemental instruction environments. While I still believe it can be useful, I do not have the data to argue it always benefits students. That belief assumes an idealistic view of behavior, where instructors and group leaders act in the best interest of students without applying inappropriate coercion. It also assumes classroom instructors and group leaders will be professional enough to respond to the cause of negative emotions without using them as a rationale for punishing a student. Most importantly, my data does not include unfiltered student voices, which could show whether these efforts were actually seen as helpful. Other researchers, looking at other sites, would need to determine whether the utopian attitude implied in this essay is appropriate for these kind of communications.

Arguing for increased communication between classroom instructors and supplemental instructors at all sites also violates one of Studio's basic tenets. Thompson and Grego "developed 'Studio' as a writing program model that provides a highly adaptable approach" (Teaching 7). It specifies principles, not procedures. Because Third Space can be influenced by the spaces around it, Studio programs at other schools may need to make different decisions about how to connect, or not connect, their space to traditional academic structures. In places where grades may be extremely punitive, no communication may be appropriate in order to keep the space safe. Instructors who are sensitive to criticism should probably not be informed a student hates their course. Perhaps all this research can really show is how we at the University of South Carolina attempted to shape our Studio space through communicating with people outside of it, using strategies that other programs can consider.[13]

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[13] An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Fifth Thomas R. Watson Conference and appeared in the conference proceedings. I would like to thank the editors of those proceedings for their feedback and for their permission to republish. I would also like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers of *Open Words* for their feedback.

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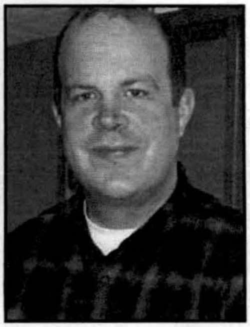

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Jennifer Beech and Julia Anderson

Teaching the Obama Generation: Helping Composition Students Enter and Remain in the Public Sphere

AS CHRISTIAN WEISSER NOTES RECENTLY IN *MOVING BEYOND Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere*, the new key word in composition studies is public. Indeed, for quite some time, critical pedagogues have been at a quandary in considering how to get students to think beyond single-authored arguments and problematic service-learning pedagogies that position students as saviors or as resume builders. We believe that compositionists may be at a kairotic moment for involving college students as active citizens in public discourse if we take our cue from the Obama campaign, which targeted a young counterpublic ignored by other political campaigns to recruit and retain volunteers effectively enough to resoundingly win the 2008 United States Presidential election. We want to make clear up front, however, that we are not advocating recruiting college students for a particular political party (one of us voted for Obama, while the other did not) or even for encouraging a party affiliation. Rather, we feel the amount of youth involvement in the Obama campaign and beyond suggests that this current generation of students is, perhaps, more ready to mobilize for the purposes of a wide range of literate involvement in participatory democracy than any we've taught within the last few decades. Further, we urge compositionists teaching at variety of institutions—from two-year business and community colleges to other open-admissions schools to more top-tier universities—to adapt a range of pedagogical strategies for involving students in what they and we might consider relatively safe to more politically risky engagements with civic discourse and collective action.

As Elizabeth Mendez Berry notes in "The Obama Generation, Revisited," the President's campaign successfully recruited a youth population overlooked by previous presidential campaigns, going for youth under thirty in previously ignored urban, as well as rural areas. Thousands of youth volunteered for the campaign, which empowered them with responsibilities previously only given to senior staffers or seasoned volunteers: "team leader, campus captain, data coordinator, phone bank captain or house party captain" (Berry 14). Charged with a range of real responsibilities, these volunteers felt empowered on the campaign and beyond the election-day victory, which secured an historical "66 percent of voters under 30, increasing the Democratic share of the youth vote by 12 percent over 2004" (13).

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Berry goes on to detail recent interviews with a range of volunteers, noting that almost all have continued their community involvement since the election: "As former staffer Marcus Ryan, 25, says, 'Once you turn on the community organizing perspective, it's hard to turn it off'" (qtd. in Berry 13). It is just this continued spirit of participatory democracy that we compositionists need to tap into.

Beyond Narrow Conceptions of the Public Sphere: Valuing Mini- and Counter-Publics

President Obama and his staff are no strangers to the public sphere, for, of course, they have access to the bully pulpit: they may arrange town-hall meetings, make television or radio addresses, and give news conferences at will. Our students and we, ordinary citizens that we are, do not have such ready access to what Jurgen Habermas has identified as the bourgeois public sphere. As Weisser and others have noted, having students construct political arguments or even write letters to editors does not necessarily result in our students' engagement with the public sphere. Suggests Weisser, "Letters to the editor are one-way assignments; students put effort into writing them but get little subsequent response. . . . They surmise that the public sphere is a realm where nothing gets accomplished—at least not by them" (94). If we want our students to value and achieve sustained engagement with the public sphere, we need to help them recognize, locate, and strategize ways to enter a variety of public spheres (plural)—from more safe to more risky and from radical to more traditional iterations.

Certainly, no serious composition theorist can ignore the concept of the public sphere as put forth by Jurgen Habermas in his ground-breaking *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, which posits an idealized 17th-century bourgeois public sphere in which everyone supposedly participated equally and bracketed their differences. DeLuca and Peeples' summary of the Habermasian public sphere is helpful for understanding its attractiveness to critical pedagogues wishing to help their students enter into it:

> [I]deally the public sphere denotes a social space wherein private citizens gather as a public body with the rights of assembly, association, and expression in order to form public opinion. The public sphere mediates between civil society and the state, with the expression of public opinion working to both legitimate and check the power of the state. This public opinion is decidedly rational . . . (128)

Key feminists, like Nancy Fraser and Susan Wells, however, have been instrumental in helping us understand the limits of access into this idealized public sphere for non-dominant groups, arguing, instead for the usefulness of theorizing sub-altern counterpublics—smaller, safer, alternative spheres of discourse where collective, local action works to address civic issues and injustices. For Fraser, such subaltern public spheres are necessary to increase the number of issues addressed in America's stratified society. According to Fraser, subaltern publics function both "as spaces where the oppressed can withdraw, regroup, and heal and . . . as 'training grounds' for the development of discourse or action that might agitate or disrupt wider publics" (Weisser 122-3). Along similar lines, Michael Warner asserts that "some publics are defined by their tension with a larger public" and "this type of public is—in effect—a counterpublic" (qtd. in Butler 60). For those not authorized in wider public forums, such counterpublics and/or mini-publics offer prime spots to be heard and to mobilize for collective action. To some extent, when we ask students to construct political arguments or to write letters to editors, we are asking them to imagine or literally enter into an intimidating wider public sphere, where they run the risk of attack or—perhaps worse—may simply be ignored.

"For those not authorized in wider public forums, such counterpublics and/or mini-publics offer prime spots to be heard and to mobilize for collective action."

Fraser, speaking from the perspective of a historically marginalized counterpublic—women—says that marginalized groups must find and use other mini-public spheres to get their concerns in the public ear. She gives the example of domestic violence, viewed historically as a private matter by the predominately white males who have traditionally dominated the public sphere. Feminists, tired of seeing their sisters abused and ignored, used journals, research centers, conferences, local meeting places and the media to bring this long-buried issue into the open and seek justice for battered women. Most importantly, feminists also negotiated with other public and private spheres to make domestic violence a legitimate common concern previously condemned in the public sphere. Effective communication with other, more prominent public spheres was the key to success here, and Weisser makes the point that different spheres must communicate with each other to be successful in promoting the common good. Indeed, Obama's volunteers effectively communicated with both smaller and larger publics to make his campaign successful; hence, we might, likewise, help our students locate and enter mini-, safer publics with the wider aim of them developing skills and strategies for eventually reaching out to ever-widening publics.

Weisser cites Susan Wells's article "Rogue Cops and Health Care: What Do We Want from Public Writing?" as his call-to-arms for championing entry into the public sphere (132).

Wells's powerful piece shows how an African-American Temple University student, Arthur Colbert, armed with knowledge of effective public communication, made a difference at the local level. In 1991, Colbert was an innocent victim of police brutality and racial injustice, but instead of being intimidated into "not making trouble," he used his college education and training to make enough trouble to topple the police force. The pen was mightier than the police! This was change on the local community level by a newly-minted member of the educated middle class. Colbert effectively used the police department's own sanctioned weapon—a complaint form provided and obtained at his corrupt local police station—to effect change for the common good simply by writing a coherent complaint: "The officer in charge was impressed: unlike other complaints against these policemen, Colbert's was 'coherent and concise, loaded with details'" (Wells 325). Wells expressed pride that this student had learned his skills at her university. Certainly, while we hope that none of our students finds themselves in similar situations, every composition teacher would be proud to have worked with that student because he effectively applied the skills he learned in his composition classes. Yet, Colbert's example is still that of single-authored authority, which in that instance was successful but in many instances would not be. Hence, we would argue for research projects and writing assignments that help students appreciate the value of a multi-pronged approach to civic discourse that combines more locally-based collective action with single and collaboratively-authored discourse.

Helping Students Locate, Research, and Collectively Enter Local Mini-Publics

Think of the college classroom as, itself, a mini-public sphere, composed of the instructor and students from various races, classes, and (trans)genders, with various (dis)abilities and affiliations, and other competing/contradictory subjectivities. Capitalizing on this generation's success in entering various public spheres, instructors can act as further catalysts for getting students involved and maintaining the collective action momentum. Obama's volunteer slogan embodied the "Respect, Empower, Include" invitation, one which has potential for the college writing classroom as well. Using the college classroom to recruit students to actively participate in local or campus mini-publics can be a safe way for students to get their feet wet. Instructors who want their students to actively participate in the public sphere should teach WIIFM (What's in It for Me) as a motivator at the college level. They can assign Susan Wells's article to showcase her example of a college student who successfully changed the system by writing a factual, well-thought-out complaint, which for our purposes is an argument. Julia, who teaches basic and professional writing at a business college, shares excerpts from Wells's article, summarizing the rest for her students as a way to engage them in discussions about the possible uses for writing beyond the classroom. When Jennifer teaches a junior-level rhetoric and writing course comprised mostly of non-English majors, she assigns the entire article before beginning a unit on "Writing for Community and Civic Purposes." In essence, then, we make use of articles like "Rogue Cops" and other "success" stories to help our students believe that they can use writing to make a difference in their and others' lives. As writing teachers, of course we buy into Steve Benton's contention that, "Argument skills are portable. . . . Argument may not help you fix a carburetor, but it can help you negotiate a bank loan, which you can then use to open your own garage" (253); however, simply making such a claim to our students is not always or often convincing. Teaching, as we do, Southern students from mostly working-class backgrounds (whether they consciously claim that affiliation or not), we feel it is important to seek a range of strategies for helping student recognize the value of public discourse for fighting injustice, for as Patrick Finn has noted, often students from the working class have developed the "you can't fight city hall attitude" (86-87). Also, for students who come from communities where folks often depend upon collective authority (be it from front porch networks, church groups, unions, etc.), collective action projects present an especially empowering way for students from non-mainstream backgrounds to learn argument and other writing skills. As Alexandra Hidalgo contends, "Group work helps working-class students feel more comfortable with the learning process by recreating in the classroom the values of the collective over the individual that they grew up with at home, thus making their transition into college life a smoother one" (11).

Further, as a number of composition scholars have argued, too often we tend to dismiss students as apathetic when, in fact, we fail to recognize and capitalize on what does concern them. Benton cites Gerald Graff's "Hidden Intellectualism" in which Graff argues that the reason teachers face glassy-eyed students on a regular basis "is not so much that students lack the necessary fire in the belly when it comes to matters intellectual as that teachers often fail to make good use of the intellectual fires students already have going" (Benton 251). Graff's method is to get students to argue about what interests them, pointing to topics like sports, which professors have tended to underrate (27). In "Hoods in the Polis," Julie Lindquist takes Graff's challenge a step further, contending, "Engaging in argument does make you part of something. . . . Maybe we should direct our energies into exploring how argument and inquiry serve community needs, how they work to constitute publics, rather than treat argument either as the irreducible expression of social quirks or as a Habermasian route to civic truth" (268). Like Graff, Lindquist believes we should capitalize on what turns students on but not simply for the purposes of getting them engaged in argument in order to create traditional intellectuals, but rather for the sake of improving the community (creating public or Gramscian organic intellectuals). Lindquist continues, "We who teach first-year writing cannot help but make the relationship between what happens in the university classroom and what happens in larger public domains our central concern" (269). Lindquist cites Nancy Mack, as wondering if "fake fights must be some kind of upper-class preoccupation" for practitioners of academic argument (Mack, qtd in Lindquist 269). To become passionately—and permanently—involved, students must feel that their arguments matter and they must feel equipped to effectively communicate—not to embarrass themselves, get in trouble, or be ignored.

Instructors who use the Obama campaign's recruitment strategies, coupled with best practices garnered from composition scholarship on collaborative writing, can multiply this success rate. That is, we need to crossbreed with the Obama campaign's crucial recruiting strategies to instill fervor in our students. Unlike the McCain camp, Obama's campaign targeted 17-year-olds in states like Iowa who could participate in the state caucuses—and won the primary. Instructors can target every student to become an active citizen engaged in individual and collective action. Different aspects of Obama's charisma—his persona, background, issues, vision, and style—appealed to different young volunteers. In the classroom, different causes will appeal to different students. Berry notes that story-telling was a key recruiting strategy for the field campaign: local Obama field organizers met individually with prospective volunteers and shared stories about why they were attracted to the campaign—creating instant bonding (14). In effect, my story and your story became our story: I + I = We. Likewise, teachers can hold in-class and individual conference-style brainstorming sessions to find out where students' interests and strengths lie; this is a pedagogical strategy similar to the use of generative themes that Shor has often borrowed from Freire (see *Empowering Education* and *When Students Have Power*). In the classroom, after discussing the success of a student like Colbert, we can share articles like Berry's, which details the success stories of the overall Obama campaign and the continued civic involvement of the initial volunteers. Hopefully, like Zack Exley of MoveOn.org, our students will be inspired with the Obama field campaign's "leap of faith in ordinary people" (qtd. in Berry 14).

The teacher can be the next to share her own exciting success story to build an ethos and rapport with students and, of course, encourage students to share any success stories of their own. Start small, and lead by example. For instance, Julia often shares stories of her participation in canine rescue networks, noting that she alone cannot save as many animals as she is able to by working with others. She relates the role that single and co-authored discourse plays in a multi-pronged approach to animal rescue: from recruiting brochures to animal locator websites to letters to elected officials and more. Likewise, Jennifer shares with her students the multi-pronged collective action approach taken on her campus in conjunction with the nation-wide Campus Equity Week to work to avoid the abuse and over-use of contingent faculty, relating her English department's success in converting multiple adjunct positions into continuing lectureships with retirement and health benefits. While we discuss such traditional civic discourse strategies as employed in writing letters to editors and elected officials, we emphasize that these work best when combined with other types of collective discourse: public tabling events, town hall meetings, petitions with many signatures, roundtable discussions, co-authored brochures and flyers, on so on. Because of the negative connotations often associated with the word "activism," we tend to emphasize "active citizenship" in a variety of potential local communities, and we emphasize discourse designed to bring more participants to the table, as opposed to activities that seem designed to shut folks up or out. For instance, our students seem especially predisposed to view negatively and wish to avoid anything involving "protest." Hence, students were more willing to view the activities of Campus Equity Week in a positive light when they were discussed as a "public awareness" campaign than when in a different semester, Jennifer had used the language of "protesting the abuse and overuse of contingent labor." Students tend to resist taking on the subjectivity of "activist," but are much more willing to think of themselves as responsible citizens effecting positive change on a local level.

Like the Obama youth organizers, we can target every student by asking for success stories from their home communities. Once students have a taste of success in the public sphere, ideally, they'll want more. As Berry notes, this is in fact what happened with the Obama volunteers: "In interviews with thirty young people around the country who worked on the Obama field campaign, almost all said that they continued their activism well after the endorphins of winning wore off" (13). Others went on to work in non-profit, while some returned to college and yet others are currently unemployed; still, most have had some continued engagement with the public in varying fashions.

One safe and fairly traditional academic approach is to assign students to research and share collective action success stories. This can be done as a stand alone assignment, but ideally it will serve as a pre-cursor to a collaborative project in which the students will actually communicate with a campus or other local mini-public. In her English 300: Intermediate Rhetoric and Composition course, for example, Jennifer assigns students to conduct and write up an "Analysis of a Mini-Public" (see Appendix A). The assignment, itself, was inspired by Weisser's call for compositionists to "highlight the ways in which material forces shape what gets said, who gets heard, and how these forces have structured public discourse throughout history" (98). This assignment asks students to pick a local or campus issue or organization and to investigate a range of questions concerning the current public conversations around the issue, as well as to consider possibilities for continuing the conversation and moving it toward productive action. Students must write up the answers to a series of questions around the topic, as well as advocate for a range of discourse strategies and activities that a collaborative group might engage in with the public. Students need significant help in brainstorming for a range of issues, and we feel it useful to begin by having them identify the various communities to which they already belong or have affiliation. Instructors can ask what concerns students or their fellow community members, and what they would like to see change or improve. We feel this assignment is important for helping students understand the historical value of others' experiences with civic discourse and collective action; students need not reinvent the wheel, so to speak.

Here is where class guests are also useful. Instructors can invite local organizers from political and non-profit groups to share stories of successes and pitfalls they have encountered when working with others to enter the public sphere. It is important to invite a range of guests so that not all visitors seem clearly leftist or radical activists. Online resources, like YouTube, are also handy for watching and discussing public demonstrations and interviews. In spring 2009, Jennifer participated with her campus union in a demonstration designed to ask the public to encourage the governor to adopt national stimulus funds for higher education. Prior to the demonstration, she invited to class one of the union stewards so that he could share the multi-pronged approach the union was taking with this issue: from press releases to local news media to banners to sound bites to petitions and letters to the government. The students had time to ask questions of both the steward and their professor. Jennifer was surprised by how little the students in one of her classes knew about unions. Following the demonstration, then, the students watched in class the online clips from the news stories run by local television stations—clips that actually showed Jennifer, other professors, and students communicating with passersby and the media. Again, we assert the importance of modeling for our students our own engagement with the local public.

The first time she assigned this analysis, Jennifer required every student to complete it individually; then, she used the analytical reports as a way to brainstorm and form collaborative groups. The next time, however, Jennifer plans to have students conduct and write up this analysis collaboratively so the process more realistically mimics that way collective action works. A follow-up assignment asks students to join with like-minded peers in the class to implement a collective action project (see Appendix B). Since students are going to be much more motivated if they choose a cause that truly interests them, the class might first narrow down 4-5 projects they think worthwhile pursuing and then sign up for the topic that best fits their interests, or they might form groups and then choose a topic. (We have had success with either approach). During the campaign, Obama field organizers asked each new volunteer to commit to handling a project, something that felt empowering as a "first big responsibility" (Berry 14); volunteers weren't restricted to perceived busy work, like answering the phone or handing out flyers as happened with Kerry and McCain's campaigns. Likewise, the teacher will need to help groups delegate authority and responsibility. The Obama field staffers had faith that their new charges would deliver, and they essentially told their green volunteers, "The work won't get done unless you do it. Barack won't win unless you help him" (Berry 14). Classroom instructors can use this call to action, too: "Things won't change unless we work together to help change them."

As much composition scholarship on collaboration has taught us, students need guidance in learning and implementing successful collaborative skills (see Rebecca Moore Howard). Teachers must help structure collaborative assignments and put into place mechanisms that hold students individually, as well as collectively accountable. This is where we utilize the "Collaborative Contribution Self-Assessment" sheet (see Appendix C), which requires group members assess their own and their group members' contributions; while the group project will receive one grade, the self-assessments will aid the instructor in assigning individual participation grades. As with any type of collaboration—whether in class or beyond—there are always differing levels of participation and investment in the projects. In the four different classes Jennifer has used this assignment, there have been usually two groups where members have reported a couple of group members doing less than their share of the work. Because this is an issue that is likely to come up in community collaboration, we spend some time in class discussing delegation of authority and strategies for having a back-up plan should members fall ill or simply fail to perform. The groups will assign roles and tasks, give a plan and timeline to the instructor, give a presentation to the class (and periodic updates) detailing what they did and what resulted from it, and turn in a portfolio of documents created for the project. Students can investigate anything from campus bookstore price gouging to how to change the campus food choices to increasing local recycling efforts to how to recruit more participation in the campus Baptist ministry (all topics that students in our classes have, actually, investigated)—whatever genuinely, passionately interests them. Because of the latitude given by the assignment, students tend to, but not always, group up with more politically like-minded students. Conservative Christians, for instance, have felt comfortable with creating recruitment materials for the campus Baptist ministry. And, in-class brainstorming has helped them understand possible resistance to the organization that they'd want to address in their materials. In a write around activity, students list their issue or organization and their discourse goals on a sheet of paper. Other students are asked to play "devil's advocates," listing possible counterarguments or reasons to resist. So, for instance, several students wrote that campus residents may not want to go to the Baptist Center for fear of "being preached at" or "made to feel guilty." Others expressed concerns about whether non-Baptists or non-Christians would be welcomed. The Baptist ministry group, then, addressed some of these concerns in their materials. Likewise, when another group intend-ed to address human trafficking, they were surprised at how many of their classmates felt that it was not a local issue or one of much concern for students; several wrote that it seemed a "problem out there." This provided a good opportunity to discuss how to generate interest in what might be an apathetic or resistant audience; as a result, the group decided to use a viewing of the movie *Taken*, along with statistics about human trafficking in Tennessee and Georgia, as a way to open up discussion of the topic on campus.

Our students have tended away from more risky ventures, like picketing abortion clinics or protesting immigrant labor. However, like any assignment that asks students to engage with contemporary issues, there is always the chance for students to take stances on issues that make a teacher feel uncomfortable. Here, Richard Miller's discussion in "Fault Lines in the Contact Zone" is useful for reminding us that teaching practices that shut down such politically offensive stances or treat them as fiction are not productive. Again, this pedagogy is not about steering students towards any one political persuasion so much as it is about encouraging ethical engagements in the public sphere. The mini-public analysis, along with the write around activity, help students give considerable thought to the stances of various stakeholders and to strategies that have had more or less success in the past. These pedagogical strategies, while not fool proof, tend to discourage off-the-cuff jumping into the fray of argument and encourage, instead, civil discourse.

For the students to be more successful in transmitting their messages to the public sphere, they also need to use technology and, like the feminists on the domestic violence issue, target counterpublic communities. Students can use Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, blogs, e-mail, text messaging, neighborhood or community meetings, students at other schools—however they feel they can effectively spread their message. Students can start with smaller public spheres and work their way up, and—if the students' message is compelling enough—the smaller spheres can network with each other too. To avoid disappointment, the students must target the right segment(s) of the public or counterpublic—people who should favorably respond to the students' message, for as Weisser writes, "Public writing consists of more than expressing your opinion about a current topic; it entails being able to make your voice heard on an issue that directly confronts or influences you" (94). In her Nation article, Berry cites Professor Peter Dreier "who teaches community organizing at Occidental College and trained Obama campaign workers, [as saying] that the key change from previous presidential elections is the difference between marketing a product and activating a community. 'This campaign was about building relationships among people that last beyond election day'" (14). A politically-active community is an ongoing, sustained effort based on relationships and dialogue among individuals, groups, publics, and counterpublics. For the field campaign, that relationship building started first amongst field organizers, who "an ongoing, sustained effort based on relationships and dialogue among individuals, groups, publics, and counterpublics"

built welcoming offices that became hangouts for their young volunteers; networking began with the very small mini-local public of the organizers in a specific area. Likewise, successful classrooms need to be safe public spheres where students can bond over their collective action projects, and in-class time must be reserved for collaboration. In essence, the classroom is a campaign office for multiple campaigns. The instructor cannot simply sit back and wait for the students to complete the assignments; the instructor must be a mentor, cheerleader, and coach who supports, encourages and guides the students. If the students feel their teacher is just going through the motions, chances are they will perform half-heartedly, too. Hence, the instructor must balance the classroom schedule between discussion days for rhetorical and civic strategies, collaborative work days, and peer review days where different groups can share and get feedback from each other.

The Organize for America website reminded us of the JFK campaign's timeless plea: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." The current message on BarackObama.com is, "Now is the time to meet our responsibilities to ourselves and to our children and serve a better, healthier future for generations to come. That future is within our grasp. So, let's go finish the job." Composition instructors can use this mantra to inspire their students, no matter what their political persuasion. At its core, the president's message is change, not politics.

Julia, who teaches English at a career college, which requires that she take more of a current-traditional grammar-based approach to writing instruction, offers students in her English I course the opportunity to earn extra credit when they participate in the vocabulary-building exercises available on FreeRice.com. The site, which allows users to identify the meanings of increasingly difficult vocabulary words, announces, "For each answer you get right, we donate 10 grains of rice through the UN World Food Program to help end hunger." Julia and her students have found the site addictive, yet one of her students recently expressed the concern that the rice went to feed people in distant locales, rather than people in our own home communities. Julia picked up on this comment to lead a whole-class discussion about area food banks and how the students might affiliate with them in order to take their community action local. Ideally, then, she would have invited guests from the food bank, but the fast-paced curriculum of a six-week course did not allow for it. But, this is what we mean by starting small and working within the material restraints and conditions of our institutions. Some of us may only be able to have such extra-credit assignments and brief class discussions. Others of us may be able to assign or summarize articles like "Rogue Cops" and "The Obama Generation, Revisited" and share our own success stories with collective action. Still, others of us may be able to assign the types of analyses of civic campaigns we discuss above or even the collective action project we detail.

For the collective action project, Jennifer's students have engaged in a variety of discourses with the campus public on a range of issues and concerns: created recruitment materials for campus organizations; engaged in public awareness campaigns to help education majors recognize and address signs of child abuse (some of their materials have been borrowed by Education professors); created web sites to educate citizens about the stances of local politicians; and other challenging engagements with the campus mini-public. The one group that got the most enthused over their project and even generated the engagement of others on campus was one that addressed price gouging in campus convenience stores. Early on, group members took a list of products ranging from personal hygiene to food and school supplies and compared prices to a variety of off-campus stores, discovering that in almost every case, products were marked up 50 to even 300 percent. Then, they created a colorful tri-fold display for a tabling event in the University Center. In class, we discussed the challenge of getting passersby to actually stop and look at the chart, as well as how to motivate others to action. Based upon feedback from other groups, this group then created a price guessing game that offered free candy to passersby who guessed which store offered an item at a cheaper priced. What seemed most exciting was that the tabling even garnered positive feedback and 100 signatures on a petition directed towards the campus food service. While, perhaps, none of the projects have resulted in sweeping changes, we hope the biggest change is in the students' confidence to successfully engage with others in the public.

We heed Weisser's caution that activist intellectuals should not expect sweeping changes when they and their students participate in the public sphere: "We can only hope to enable the fifty or more students we come into contact with at least once a week to become more critical of the world around them. And we cannot expect to make changes in more than a few of their lives each semester" (128). Weisser thinks that teachers are able to influence a few students each semester—a hundred or so over a teaching career—and, as a result of these students, change will happen gradually, starting at a local level in the educated middle class. However, we are enthusiastic about the current generation of students with whom we are working, and we encourage others teaching writing to take that leap of faith in their students by starting small and going for more challenging engagements with civic discourse.

Appendix A

Analysis of a Mini-Public

Genre:	Analytical Report
Length:	2.75-4 pp. single-spaced, typed, with headers, in memo/report format
Audience:	Fellow participants in English 300
Due Dates:	Peer Review Feb. 23 Polished Version Due March 2

Purpose: In *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse*, Christian Weisser urges us to "recognize that culture, politics, and ideology shape public conversations," and he adds, "We should highlight the ways in which material forces shape what gets said, who gets heard, and how these forces have structured public discourse throughout history" (98). Hence, Weisser advocates taking a strategic approach to civic discourse:

> Such an approach will necessitate that writers research the histories of the issues they choose to address to find out how the conversations surrounding them have been shaped. At the same time, they will need to consider what is not said, whose voices have been excluded from the conversation, and how ideology has normalized certain features of public discussions they're entering. (99)

Conducting such an analysis may help you and those with whom you will collaborate to strategically plan for more effective, rhetorically savvy discourse. It may help you to reach a wider audience and to devise ways to bring more stakeholders into the conversation.

The scope of your analysis will depend largely upon the history and complexity of the conversation you propose to enter (or to start). Conducting research will help you to create a CALL TO ACTION and a multi-pronged PLAN FOR ACTION. Later, your collaborative groups will choose from amongst plans created in this class for Portfolio2.

Formatting Considerations and Parts of the Analytical Report:

Consider this report a public, informational document and, thus, format it so that information and various key parts are visually accessible. Headers, as well as careful use of white space, font size, bullets, numbers, visuals, etc, help readers gain quick access to different parts of your analysis. If you cite any sources, coordinate those with a Works Cited list near the end of your document.

Key Questions to Research/Analyze:

1. Who has been speaking about this issue recently and what have they been saying?
2. What is at stake? (what happens if nobody or few people act or if different actions are taken?)
3. What kinds of arguments are being made about this issue?
4. Who are the potential audiences for debating or weighing different takes on this issue? Who should care?
5. What kinds of texts does the issue/organization need?
6. Under what budget constraints will you/the organization be operating?
7. What kinds of appeals will work best with various target audiences?
8. What might be your collaborative group's role in addressing this issue?

Parts of the Report:

- Memo Header (addressed TO: English 300 Participants)
- Introduction: identify/briefly summarize the issue to be addressed and the need to address it
- Long and Short-Term Goals (headers may reflect these)
- Headers for each step/action/text you propose: explain/detail the proposed action, along with possible dates, times, locations, costs, types of text and activities, number of people involved, etc. and follow each with a short rationale.
- Conclusion: Should include a call for others to join you in action, invitation for feedback, and any contact information (director of an organization, names/addresses/phone numbers of people who will need to be contacted, your email).

Other Considerations:

To be strategic, plans need to include a variety of discourse and/or actions. Propose a combination of at least 4 (3 of which must be written) forms of discourse/action: petitions, news releases, buttons, flyers, tri-fold displays, brochures, handouts, letters, direct actions, puppet or street theatre, etc....

Appendix B

Portfolio #2: Writing for Community and Civic Purposes

Purpose and Audience: This unit of our class gives you the opportunity to write for audiences beyond the academy—for the communities (local, regional, and/or national) and organizations to which you belong. Your writing may serve a variety of purposes: community building, recruiting, organizational, protest or promotion of an idea, practice, or cause, etc. Your primary audience might be restricted to members of the immediate community (as in the case of a church bulletin or organizational newsletter), or it might include a broader public (as in the case of a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine). Keeping a clear sense of purpose and primary, secondary, and even tertiary audiences in mind will help you better choose from options for tone, style, content, design, and delivery.

Communities may be geographic places, but you should think more broadly in terms of communities as groups of citizens brought together out of common interests, values, and concerns. Thus, a sorority or fraternity or other campus organization may be a community to which you belong. A church or volunteer organization may be yet another. You may be a member of a disenfranchised group. As a registered voter and literate person, you have civic responsibilities as a member of our democratic community.

For this portfolio, you must include: One set of collaboratively produced civic/community texts (2-4 writers may work together): a set of texts designed for an activist tabling event; a set of texts for a civic/community organization; a set of texts for a political campaign, etc. Remember to take a multi-pronged approach, producing/arranging for 4 or more types of action/texts (at least 3 texts). Depending upon what is needed, your group may produce even more texts.

Design Considerations: Keeping with our emphasis this semester on giving serious consideration to document design in order to increase the rhetorical effectiveness of the texts you produce, for each piece of writing you produce, you will want to make conscientious design choices. Sometimes, with fairly standard genres like letters to elected officials, letters to editors, and news releases, your design options are limited to following the standard organizational structure of the genre. With other texts, like flyers, tracts, brochures, bulletins, tri-fold displays, etc., you have more room for creativity in design and should, therefore, apply much of the design advice we have discussed this semester.

What to include in your portfolio:

- preliminary and polished versions of each text
- peer review sheets

- a writer's statement for each text, identifying: target audience(s), purpose, context in which the document would be presented or appear, and any other design features you want to call attention to; notes about the range of actions you engaged in. ****collaborative contribution assessments

Appendix C

Collaborative Writing Contribution Assessment

Individual's Name ______________________________

Names of Your Team Members ______________________________

____

Project Description (tell us the problem/issue/organization you designed texts to address, noting the range of texts the whole group produced):

____

____

____

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____

Detail below all of the ways you contributed to the project:
Brainstorming for topics and/or types of texts

____

____

____

____

____

Meeting in class with peers (tell which days and what you did in class on that day)

____

____

____

____

Meeting outside of class with peers (tell where you met, with whom, and what you did)

Working independently on the project (fact finding, creating preliminary drafts, sitting at a table, revising a text, securing a table....any/all things you did by yourself)

List below names of all other participants and describe each person's contributions to (or lack of contributions to) the project:

1)

2)

3)

4)

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Julia Anderson *teaches developmental English and professional writing at Chattanooga College. For the past seven years, she had been heavily involved in animal rescue, fostering, transporting, and re-homing dogs, cats, and the occasional rabbit. (Gizmo, also pictured here, was one such animal rescued after being left for dead in an animal shelter following an attack from a large dog.) Recently, she has volunteered grant writing and tutoring services for Northside Neighborhood House, a non-profit dedicated to educating and assisting people in need in the Chattanooga area.*

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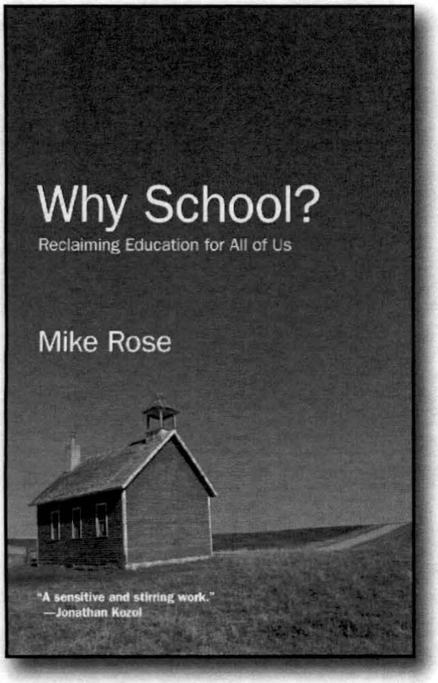
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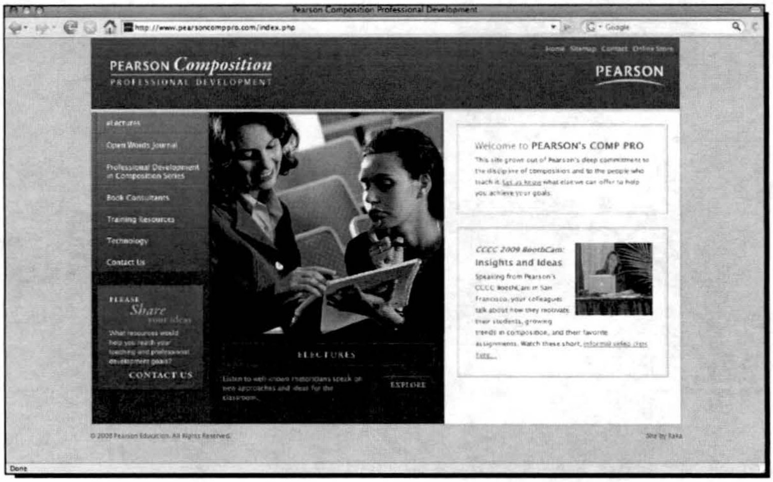

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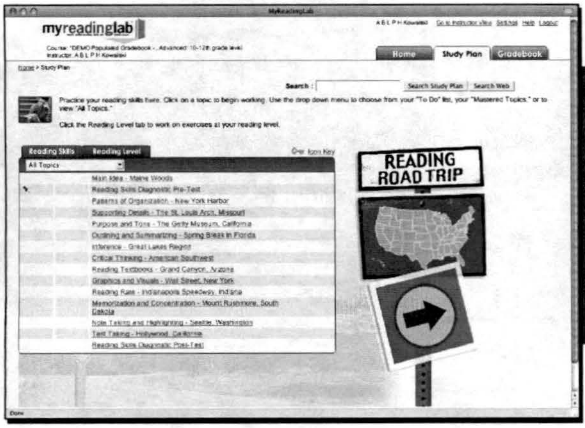
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Click the Reading Level tab to work on exercises at your reading level.

Main Idea - Maine Woods
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Supporting Details - The St. Louis Arch, Missouri
Purpose and Tone - The Getty Museum, California
Outlining and Summarizing - Spring Break in Florida
Inference - Great Lakes Region
Critical Thinking - American Southwest
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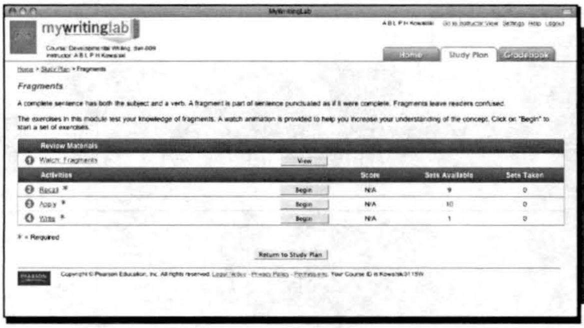

Home > Study Plan > Fragments

Fragments

A complete sentence has both the subject and a verb. A fragment is part of sentence punctuated as if it were complete. Fragments leave readers confused.

The exercises in this module test your knowledge of fragments. A watch animation is provided to help you increase your understanding of the concept. Click on "Begin" to start a set of exercises.

Review Materials				
① Watch: Fragments	View			
Activities		**Score**	**Sets Available**	**Sets Taken**
② Recall *	Begin	N/A	9	0
③ Apply *	Begin	N/A	10	0
④ Write *	Begin	N/A	1	0

* = Required

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