On the English classroom as discourse community : an inclusive pedagogy
by Perri Wilson Sherrill

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English
Montana State University
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Abstract:
Our use of language provides us with a means to negotiate our interactions with the world. For many new college students, learning the language necessary to participate in academic discourse is a barrier to success. The idea presented in this thesis of an inclusive pedagogy primarily bridges the gap between the discourse used in academic situations and the various discourses students bring with them to academy. Since identity cannot and should not be erased from students' studies and work, we must conceive of ways to break down the binary opposition between students' academic and nonacademic identities. Simply stated, teachers can include all students by inviting them to examine the experiences upon which their prior knowledge is built, thus helping them see their experience as a path to transformation and new learning.

A struggle for a diverse group of learners, brought together in an English course not by common interest but by the need to fill a university requirement, is to find a common language in which each individual member of the group can thrive. So, an initial lack of shared knowledge is an obstacle to the kind of inclusive pedagogy I advocate. Classroom communities of introductory courses have the potential to engage students in the shared purposes, understandings, interests, and language of particular disciplines. Therefore, I propose introducing students to the characteristics of different discourse communities and sharing the expectations of the particular discourse inherent in a given discipline—English in this case. Demystifying the concepts of discourse and discourse communities, by reading, writing, and speaking about them, will help students understand more about the knowledge we all already have as language users and thus begin to bring together the different ways of knowing they practice.

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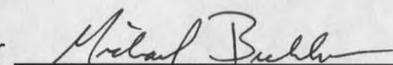
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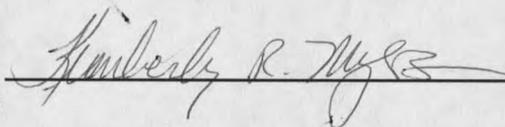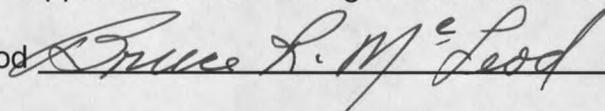
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Our use of language provides us with a means to negotiate our interactions with the world. For many new college students, learning the language necessary to participate in academic discourse is a barrier to success. The idea presented in this thesis of an *inclusive pedagogy* primarily bridges the gap between the discourse used in academic situations and the various discourses students bring with them to academy. Since identity cannot and should not be erased from students' studies and work, we must conceive of ways to break down the binary opposition between students' academic and nonacademic identities. Simply stated, teachers can include all students by inviting them to examine the experiences upon which their prior knowledge is built, thus helping them see their experience as a path to transformation and new learning.

A struggle for a diverse group of learners, brought together in an English course not by common interest but by the need to fill a university requirement, is to find a common language in which each individual member of the group can thrive. So, an initial lack of shared knowledge is an obstacle to the kind of inclusive pedagogy I advocate. Classroom communities of introductory courses have the potential to engage students in the shared purposes, understandings, interests, and language of particular disciplines. Therefore, I propose introducing students to the characteristics of different discourse communities and sharing the expectations of the particular discourse inherent in a given discipline—English in this case. Demystifying the concepts of discourse and discourse communities, by reading, writing, and speaking about them, will help students understand more about the knowledge we all already have as language users and thus begin to bring together the different ways of knowing they practice.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Inspiring Literacy

It could be said that as teachers of English we probably are proficient writers because we are voracious readers. Our willingness and enthusiasm to embrace the intellectual work required for literary studies stems from our love of the written word. Therefore, it would follow that if we, as teachers, could somehow engage students in reading prolifically, then they too would become better thinkers, speakers, and writers, not only in our discipline but in other subjects as well. A goal of the English classroom must be to encourage students to engage in an abundance of reading and a variety of responses to it.

In my fourteen years of experience as a teacher both at the secondary and post-secondary level, though, I have seen fewer students share my own love of literature and writing. Indeed, more and more, I have seen students disengage from academic pursuits, often unmotivated or unable to read and write about the works that are assigned. Given these postulations and circumstances, what we have students read, how we have them respond—what we have them write or discuss—and how we inspire them to do both is of utmost importance.

There is a danger in using words like inspiration, motivation, and encouragement when talking about English pedagogy; it could seem as if I am

suggesting panacea solutions to the problem of attracting students to our discipline. If it were simply a matter of having students read a lot and write a lot, faculty, administrators, and, even later, employers would not still be bemoaning the fact that students don't read and can't communicate competently. However, I postulate that students who in the end read and write are the ones who learn to appreciate the written word, who gain pleasure from reading the sentences of others and creating sentences of their own. This cannot and will not occur magically; teachers must consciously assign readings and writings that serve to evoke excitement about language. To be truly literate, we must encourage students to recognize the beauty of their own language and of the language of others. Loving the written word, both to read it and to write it, is to embrace the very soul of language. Placing appreciation for the way readers and writers use language at the center of English curricula, then, seems key to involving students in the world of literature and composition studies.

To facilitate this invitation to participate fully in the study of language and literature, teachers must first meet students where they are. While some students come to us already sharing our passion for reading and maybe even writing, we cannot assume that by having students read often that they will eventually like to read and subsequently like to write, nor that they will master either. To the contrary, some will be very hard to reach. Students often come to us with a variety of preconceived ideas, previous experiences, and obstacles to learning. Acknowledging what "baggage" students bring to the English

classroom could mean overcoming years of failure or years of loathing reading and/or writing. It could mean helping a student come to terms with issues of the way English is used at school compared to the way it is used at home. It could be as simple as dispelling insecurities or as complex as competing with social concerns for students' attention.

Ideally, classrooms are places of change. Teachers of English, especially, have the potential to effect change in attitudes towards literacy and impact literacy practices. We are often charged with the responsibility of preparing students to think, read, speak, and write so they might perform well across the curriculum and go on to function as productive citizens of both the academic and larger community. Taking this charge seriously forces us to examine closely who our students are, what they require to be successful, and how our pedagogy best addresses their needs, as well as society's.

Considering Diversity

A factor to consider today is that the student population we serve has become increasingly and undeniably diverse. Today, diversity goes far beyond race, gender, and class and includes ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, and language. Diversity complicates the classroom, and because of this I have seen some teachers who would have students check difference at the door. Raymond Wlodkowski and Margery Ginsberg, who together completed a study on the relationship between culture and motivation to learn, emphasize the

responsibility educators have to consider the diverse backgrounds of the student population. They believe, "...higher education has a moral obligation to accommodate diversity, to transform itself as the society it serves is being transformed by the vast array of cultures that compose it" (xi).

In order to accommodate the needs of diverse student populations, we must realize that in this transient society, geographic diversity plays a significant role in how students approach their education. We must acknowledge where students come from and see *place* as a basic grounding for self and cultural development, which makes *place* a key component in teaching and learning. Knowledge and growth are situated in particular environments and with particular people in those environments. Ellis Marsalis, noted artist and teacher, explains that "places and their people have knowledge and wisdom" (10). Marsalis taught a course at the University of Montana School of Fine Arts in the summer of 2003 that explored the issues surrounding how to interact with our students' grounding in place.

Because our society is more mobile than ever before, considering the relationship of place to one's identity is pertinent to many students. Some students will have a strong sense of place while others will grapple with issues derived from being *re-placed* or even *dis-placed* at some point in their life. In fact, identity may be discovered as a result of examining either strong roots or the opposite, the experience of placelessness. It is also important to keep in mind that students may either revere or abhor the traditions of home and place;

that is, sense of place and home is not always positive. Changing attitudes towards home/culture/ language causes us to continuously define and redefine identity, and leaving home to attend college may bring up, for the first time for some students, how self derives from place.

Pedagogical Implications

Students' background and their own sense of home/culture/language have implications for pedagogical practice and student success, particularly how students relate to the language of the academy and its various disciplines. James Paul Gee's work in the field of social linguistics describes how as a result of the increasing ethnic, class, and social diversity in our schools, more and more students struggle with the language required of them in academic settings ("What is Literacy?" 57). Kenneth Bruffee in his 1984 article, "Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind," tells how, since the mid 1970s, college faculty throughout the country have become aware that students entering college had difficulty doing as well in academic studies "as their native ability suggested they should be able to do." He explained that while some students are not prepared academically, many have "on paper excellent secondary preparation." According to Bruffee, the common factor between the ill prepared and well prepared seems to be the difficulty students have "adopting to the traditional or 'normal' conventions of the college classroom" (395).

I believe this phenomenon can be attributed to unfamiliarity or resistance

to the demands of the various academic discourses[1] new college students encounter across academic disciplines. A case in point is Gerald Graff, himself a renowned educator who writes prolifically about pedegogical issues. In a chapter of his book *Beyond Culture Wars*, entitled "Disliking Books at an Early Age," he writes of his own inability either to find pleasure in or comprehend what he read in his youth, and he blames his difficulties on feeling alienated from the academic talk that schools and colleges reward. Addressing the kinds of difficulties with literacy Graff describes and many students experience begins, then, with familiarizing students with our "talk."

In a recent discussion on writing about literature in the composition classroom, Mark Richardson agrees that familiarity with the world of academic discourse is a primary indicator of success for first-year college students (290). For students relatively unfamiliar with the varieties of academic discourse, one way to facilitate success is to recognize prior knowledge. Richardson advocates allowing students to bring to their studies "the confidence and conviction that flows from knowledge—if, that is, they can be made to believe in the application of their knowledge as valid" (291). In order to overcome this discontinuity between prior "ways of knowing" and new ways of reading, thinking, speaking, and writing needed for academic success, teachers have to recognize that new

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[1] In discussing discourse, I will draw on the definition linguist James Paul Gee offers. He explains that discourse refers to "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network'" ("What is Literacy?" 51). The socially meaningful group is a discourse community, used here in reference to a particular cultural or academic situation with its own linguistic norms.

college students have still-emerging literacy skills. Therefore, it is essential to consider how we can enable students to access the knowledge they already have. Doing so encourages educators to empower students' own literacies, including the language they bring with them to the academy.

An Inclusive Pedagogy

"There is not nearly enough practical discussion of ways class-
room settings can be transformed so that the learning experience
is inclusive."
- bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

For many students, learning the language necessary to participate in academic discourse must seem like an initiation into an *exclusive* club. I believe, however, that our aim as educators should be to create a sense of *inclusion*. My idea of an *inclusive pedagogy* primarily bridges the gap between the discourse used in academic situations and the various discourses students bring with them to their studies. Since identity cannot and should not be erased from students' studies and work, we must conceive of ways to break down the binary opposition between students' academic and nonacademic identities. Simply stated, teachers can include all students by inviting them to examine the experiences upon which their prior knowledge is built, thus helping them see their experience as a path to transformation and new learning.

Here, I turn to the work of Paulo Freire and bell hooks to provide a theoretical framework for this approach to teaching. I am inspired by Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, especially his deep respect for learners,

and hooks herself was profoundly influenced by the Brazilian educator's

liberatory pedagogy. [2]   Through Freire, we learn of "authentic education" as an

activity that investigates thinking and ways of being in the world (82-101). A

helpful explication of Freire's pedagogy is offered in Victor Villanueva's essay,

"Considerations for American Freireistas":

> We know that his [Freire's] pedagogy begins with private, lived
> experience. Past events affect how present and future events are
> read. Present events affect readings of the past. These personal
> accounts become generalized. In generalizing personal events,
> we find that they are not value-free, cannot be apolitical, are never
> not affected by and affecting our conduct as citizens of the various
> communities we travel within and through. (624)

Freire stresses that a "critical literacy" grows out of the experiences of those

that develop and express it, and is, therefore, authentic and meaningful.

bell hooks, too, believes that beginning with real experience allows the

teacher to value the students' views and ultimately to create a dynamic learning

experience for all. In *Teaching to Transgress,* she speaks of the "passion of

experience," a phrase she uses "that affirms the specialness of those ways of

knowing rooted in experience" (90). For the English classroom to be inclusive,

students must be "seen in their particularity as individuals ... and interacted with

according to their needs" (hooks 7). She says, "... as a classroom community,

our capacity to generate excitement [I would claim to inspire and motivate] is

deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices,

in recognizing one another's presence" (8). If we, as teachers, try to

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[2] The writing and theories of both Freire and hooks are more multifaceted than I go into for the
purposes of this project; in no way do I mean to over-simplify their positions.

homogenize experience, we are denying presence and privileging absence. Ignoring difference reveals our pedagogical practice as exclusive. If the teacher genuinely values each student's presence, the "authority of experience" (hooks 90) usually granted to "teacher" is essentially dis-placed.

While disrupting or redistributing authority ultimately empowers students, they may feel uncomfortable with the change when this actually occurs in the classroom. Being genuinely acknowledged and then performing as fully present is both demanding and difficult and may result in some students resisting inclusion. It is necessary to balance the tension between each individual's authority and presence and the goals of the collective community. The classroom community becomes a site of collegiality when we are able to create a learning environment where students honor self and at the same time recognize others. Ideally, "Learner expression and language are joined with teacher expression and language to enable the perspectives of all learners be readily shared and included in the process of learning" (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg 288).

The English Classroom as Discourse Community

> The imagination that produces work which bears and invites readings, which motions to future readings as well as contemporary ones, implies a sharable world and an endlessly flexible language. Readers and writers both struggle to interpret and perform within a common language sharable imaginative worlds.
> — Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*

A struggle for a diverse group of learners, often brought together in an English course not by common interest but by the need to fill a university requirement, is to find a common language in which each individual member of the group can thrive. So, an initial lack of shared knowledge is an obstacle to the kind of inclusive pedagogy I advocate. Classroom communities of introductory courses have the potential to engage students in the shared purposes, understandings, interests, and language of particular disciplines. The responsibility to invite student readers and writers into the "sharable world" of which Morrison speaks falls upon the teacher of such introductory/required courses.

One way of "inviting" students into the unfamiliar world of academic discourse is by introducing them to the characteristics of different discourse communities and sharing the expectations of the particular discourse inherent in the discipline—English in this case. It is the classroom's discourse that establishes the epistemology (what constitutes knowledge) in that setting. Different disciplines might behave according to different epistemes (how knowledge is pursued). Discourse communities demand certain ways of speaking and acting, at least while one is participating in the discourse. James Paul Gee claims that if students don't adopt the ways of the discourse, they might not count as being a part of it ("What is Literacy?" 52). In other words, the student realizes that his or her participation in the classroom community—in any discourse community, really—is dependent on language usage.

Laying bare for students the concepts of discourse and discourse communities will help students understand more about the knowledge we all already have as language users and thus begin to bring together the different ways of knowing they practice. Having students examine their familiar discourse communities, from where their identities and language emerge, can lead to what Gee refers to as *metaknowledge*; that is, students can see how the discourses they already have relate to those they are attempting to acquire and how those relate to self and society. As Gee explains it, metaknowledge is "liberation and power; it leads to the ability to manipulate, to analyze to resist while advancing ("Literacy" 452). His concept is highly relevant to Freire's ways of thinking about formal education as a path to social liberation. The challenge for teachers is to facilitate appreciation of students' prior discourses while simultaneously introducing them to formal academic ones.

It seems appropriate to study communication through the examination of the life of the community in which we are immersed. In composition courses the idea of "community" is often used to invoke an image of common purpose and shared effort. Since the 1980s composition practitioner-theorists, such as Patricia Bizzell, David Bartholomae, and Joseph Harris, have expanded on the idea of community more extensively. They have applied principles of interpretive communities (as forwarded by Stanley Fish) and speech communities, borrowed from the literary-philosophical and sociolinguistic fields respectively, to student participation in academic discourse. Patricia Bizzell

asserts that writing and thus all forms of communication can only be understood in context of community. Therefore, the main business of English studies should be to investigate the nature of discourse communities ("Cognition" 373).[3]

David Bartholomae offers further explanation for this concept: "The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (589). So, in the academic community, a common purpose must be articulated, and then language appropriate to the discourse in this setting must be acknowledged and practiced. The university, or a course, or a classroom becomes "our community" and our various discourses combine to become "our language."

An application to English pedagogy is the idea that when a student enters our classroom, he or she is expected to learn the different languages of literary analysis, critical theory, various writing modes, and standard English, to name a few. Gerald Graff, in *Professing Literature,* explains that students need background in theoretical concepts "in order to be able to make sense of literature and talk about it intelligently" (3). We can see authors of the literature

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[3] Early in her career, Patricia Bizzell, who has been teaching first-year composition since 1971, wrote extensively on the topic of teaching academic discourse as a means to impart "critical consciousness" (a term she learned from the work of Paulo Freire) in her students. In the introduction to her book, *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness,* which was published in 1992, Bizzell chronicles a change in her in thinking, noting that she has become skeptical about the "potential causal relationship between academic discourse and critical consciousness" (3). Nonetheless, I am indebted to her early work concerning discourse communities in relation to composition instruction, as it spawned my own thinking on the application of the conventions of discourse to the foundation for student success in all areas of our discipline and other academic discourse communities.

we read as making a contribution to a larger conversation being carried out by writers and readers in the English classroom—a literate community that students belong to by virtue of the literature they read, write, discuss, and value.

Unfamiliarity with the expectations of our discourse community could be compared to coming late to Kenneth Burke's parlor, where "others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion … too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about" (Burke 4). Failure of some students to put forth the effort to learn in our discipline potentially creates troubling exclusions, avoidable if we take time to include them in the on-going discussions in which we expect them to contribute. Understanding better the origins of some students' disinclination to fully participate allows us to help them overcome difficulties and become more comfortable with new learning. Viewing our students' problems with language use as a result of natural difficulties associated with joining an unfamiliar discourse community (Bizzell, "Cognition" 373) forces us to consider the characteristics of the English discipline's particular discourse. To do so within an inclusive classroom environment has additional implications for pedagogical practice as we see what kind of teaching might emerge from looking at English as a distinct discourse community.

Passion and Purpose

I feel as though I have been preparing to contribute to this conversation since the first day that I stood before my own students over fourteen years ago. I

became a teacher because I loved learning about the world. I became an English teacher because I loved reading, writing, and talking about literature. I love being a teacher because I care deeply about my students—the ones I've had the pleasure to know in the past, the ones I am getting to know right now, and the ones I will have the privilege to touch in the future. Such passions are crucial to our teaching practices at any level we may teach and can become an important part of our pedagogical theories.

Some would argue that passion, which has a kind of physicality about it, has no place in the classroom, but I contend passion in the classroom cannot be kept out of our discussion concerning pedagogical theory. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks totally re-envisions teaching practices by daring to use words like "eroticism" and "ecstasy" in the same breath as pedagogy. She claims that self-actualization (in body, mind, and spirit), which she defines as a process that promotes a teacher's individual well being so he or she may teach in a manner that empowers students, should be a goal of all teachers (15 and 199). hooks, amid a discussion of the power of language, cautions that "society would have us believe there is no dignity in the experience of passion" (175). She is able to recall, though, some of her early teachers who disregarded this societal constraint: "I can remember vividly the faces, gestures, habits of being of all the individual teachers who nurtured and guided me, who offered me an opportunity to experience joy in learning, who made the classroom a space of critical thinking, who made the exchange of information and ideas a kind of ecstasy"

(202). hooks would have us shake up the very essence of teacher identity and then have us create a new one.

My thesis project rises from passion, and its origins can be traced to my own experiences teaching composition and literature while at the same time to studying pedagogical and composition theories. The intersection of my experience and my scholarship, the site where practice and theory have converged, is where I begin. First, I propose utilizing fictional examples to illustrate for students how characters in novels, films, short stories, etc., navigate unfamiliar situations upon entering new discourse communities. Next, I expand on the idea that successful articulation into the academic community can be accomplished by determining where students come from, both physically (geographically) and culturally (linguistically). I discuss how, in designing an introductory course for new college students, I would utilize the memoirs as students explore their own "passion of experience" by writing it and at the same time reading other writers' experiences with place, language, and literacy. A focus will be to specifically examine how students and other writers view the many discourses in their lives as either competing or complementary. Interwoven with memoir, I will review other works of literature that deal with place, language, and identity that would be excellent additions to a syllabus that examines discourse.

In these introductory pages, I have suggested the enormity of our charge to inspire literacy among diverse student populations with diverse backgrounds,

with diverse skills, in a diverse world. I have also made some suggestions for fulfilling that charge, primarily by adopting a *pedagogy of inclusion* in our community—the English classroom. Passionate interactions in the classroom will serve academic purposes when our "own capacity to generate excitement" engages students with literature, ideas, and learning within our discourse community and beyond.

CHAPTER 2

ESTABLISHING INCLUSION

Entering a New Discourse Community: Relieving Student Angst

"Books must be provided that hold out some link with the young
reader's past and present preoccupations, anxieties, ambitions."
                                        - Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*

Because English, in at least some form, is required in almost all post-

secondary core curricula, we could say many students find themselves in an

unfamiliar discourse community not by choice but by circumstance. Therefore,

the place we first meet our students may be a site that is disconcerting to them

in many ways. When students' familiar knowledge or beliefs are challenged,

they are thrown into a state of disequilibrium, a state of feeling unsettled. This

discomfort is necessary to motivate new learning, new understanding, and new

attitudes.

Patricia Bizzell recognizes this phenomenon and so sees new college

students as initiates into the academic discourse community ("College" 193). If

students see themselves this way—if they view the experience of adopting a

new way of speaking, thinking, reading, and writing as an initiation rite—they

may have some natural fears associated with joining a new academic discourse

community. While some students who experience initial angst upon having to

participate in difficult academic discourse overcome their apprehension and

move forward with their studies fairly quickly, others seem to linger in this state,

disengaged or unconfident. How this transition period, this liminal state, is handled, either as a natural rite of passage or a brutal awakening, impacts students' long-term academic success.

Anthropologist Victor Turner offers pertinent insight into the workings of "rights of passage" in terms of transitions in social status, which entering a new discourse community arguably is. He speaks of "initiands" as moving from a previous social state or condition to a new state or condition. He explains, "The passage from one social status to another is often accompanied by a parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to another" (25). The application to this discussion is how both teachers and the students themselves deal with the parallel move from one way of knowing to another and from a previous place, home, to the new place, the college setting. During the time of transition, it could be said that our students "pass through a period of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo" (Turner 24).

Part of our responsibility then as English teachers is to create a space where the transition can be a smooth one. We can do this by demystifying the conventions of the academic discourse community (Bizzell, "Cognition" 370). I am sure that most teachers try to do this when they outline course objectives and tell their college freshmen, for example, what new kinds of work will be demanded of them. There must be more, though, than merely being cognizant of introducing students to a course via a well-written syllabus. We might start by asking what kind of preparation is necessary for a student to function in this

discipline or specific classroom environment. I believe it would be effective to utilize examples from literature—fiction, novels, short stories and film—to illustrate how characters navigate unfamiliar situations in entering new discourse communities.

Members of discourse communities are likely to share common interests, values, and ways of seeing the world, as well as particular ways of using language. If students don't understand the language of literary studies, neither did Dorothy understand the discourse of Oz; Alice the linguistic presumptions in Wonderland or the world behind the looking glass; Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy the behavioral expectations in Narnia; nor Marty McFly the cultural norms when he journeyed *Back to the Future*. What these fictional characters all have in common is their ability to ultimately negotiate new language demands within a foreign environment.

The main character(s) in *The Wizard of Oz, Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass, The Chronicles of Narnia,* and *Back to the Future* all develop the language skills necessary to participate in their new discourse communities and, in the end, all contribute to the quality of life in the given fictional society—an outcome we desire for our students. Positioning a brief discussion of one or more of these works (all of which transcend age and grade level) at the beginning of the semester provides a fairly straight-forward example for students to consider. These "texts" have the potential to foster confidence in students' own abilities to join in new discourse situations since

they are unthreatening, in terms of difficulty level, as well as highly accessible to all learners.

What then might a study of a fictional discourse community look like in practice? After defining discourse and discourse communities, the students might first be asked to observe how the character Dorothy, for example, negotiates new discourse communities in the 1939 MGM film version of *The Wizard of Oz*. Students will notice that as Dorothy lands over the rainbow, she is clearly uneasy and confused. "I don't think we're in Kansas anymore, Toto," she proclaims. At their first meeting, the exchange between Glinda, the good witch, and Dorothy, the mid-western farm girl, is fraught with challenges in communication. "Are you a good witch or a bad witch?" Glinda asks. "Why, I'm not a witch at all," Dorothy responds.

Her kind mentors eventually facilitate Dorothy's lessons on the linguistic and behavioral norms in this strange world, where she will be expected to interact and survive amidst witches, Munchkins, flying monkeys, and talking animals. The particulars of each new discursive situation she encounters on her journey are explained directly in song lyrics ("Follow the Yellow Brick Road" and "….that's the way we while the day away in the merry old land of Oz"). Along the way she regularly compares the language and behaviors of the strange worlds of Munchkin Land, the yellow brick road, and the Emerald City to the familiar ones of home. Upon embarking on the yellow brick road, Dorothy constantly speaks of the "strange" or "odd" place she has landed and yearns to

have the chance to appreciate Kansas again, where Aunt Em tells her what to eat and how to act and Uncle Henry makes her do chores. As Dorothy's anxiety builds, so does her knowledge. She responds to the Wizard after he awards the Scarecrow brains, the Tin Man a heart, and the Lion courage, "Oh my! I don't think you have anything in that bag that will send me back to Kansas." By confronting the challenges presented to her, Dorothy completes the difficult task of retrieving the Wicked Witch's broom, killing the witch and thus freeing the citizenry of Oz in the process. Then, she realizes she has the power to help herself; she can return home.

After viewing *The Wizard of Oz*, the students will be able to recognize places where Dorothy encounters difficulties because of unfamiliar discourse and comes to terms with her surroundings. The students can realize that Dorothy masters the discourse needed and is able to meet her goals. If Dorothy had not been forced to leave home and then thrust into the state of disequilibrium, she would never have seen what was offered by the other—other place, other culture, other way of thinking her place in the world. So it goes in the case of other fictional examples mentioned here. The students can evaluate how each character forms a relationship with a benevolent mentor (teacher), learns the language of his or her current world (academic discipline), and negotiates meaning (gains literacy) within that community in order to participate fully and ultimately find success and contribute something significant to the community. Additionally, after being recognized as a member of a new

discourse community, the characters are able to return home and appreciate anew its merits.

These relatively simple examples serve the function of uncomplicating some very complicated issues of using language in new settings. Employing such texts to ease the difficulties inherent in entering an alien discourse community would allow students to compare the feelings experienced by fictional characters, forced to participate and survive in discourse communities in which they are unversed, to their own attitudes upon beginning study in a new discipline or in one where they've experienced previous failure.

Inclusion might also be established if students had the opportunity to see how another student felt in the same situation upon entering a new academic discourse community. Langston Hughes' poem, "Theme for English B," is an excellent example of a text that probably closely resembles what Rosenblatt refers to as our students' "past and present preoccupations" and "anxieties." The poem was written as a response to an English assignment that Hughes was given when he first entered Columbia University in the 1920s. The assignment as Hughes relays it, read: "Go home and write/ a page tonight/ And let that page come out of you--/ Then it will be true." In the poem he produces for the instructor, Hughes anticipates potential difficulties entering the new, almost all-white discourse community at Columbia at that time. He points out right away, "I am the only colored student in my class" and wonders, "So will my

page be colored that I write?" He also points out that while his own discourse "will not be white" his instructor is white and "somewhat more free."

Even though only some of our students' apprehensions will be tied to issues of race, worrying about how they will be perceived by the instructor and compared to others in the class will be common. Regardless of gender or ethnicity, students today will have notions about authority and possibly feel that the instructor is "somewhat more free." Having students discuss Hughes' circumstances and his response to the assignment can help students see angst as natural when entering the unfamiliar world of higher education, especially if that world is culturally unlike their own. Then, by having the students respond to the same assignment that Hughes' English instructor gave him, remaining discomfort can potentially be uncovered and again be revealed as natural or even necessary for the student to proceed with and be included in new learning.

Competing versus Complementary Discourses: Honoring Prior Ways of Knowing

"The world is richer than it is possible to express in any single language."
- Ilya Prigogine

Quelling initial apprehensions is a starting point for merging prior ways of knowing and using language with new ways of knowing and using language. For some students, though, this transition is a slow and often difficult process. In fact, a heightened awareness of the difference between familiar and formal discourses in their lives can at first present disturbing choices and feelings of

guilt about leaving behind ways of knowing and speaking, as well as the culture or people associated with those ways of knowing and speaking.

Sadly, when students fully participate and become assimilated into a particular academic discourse community, they often have the feeling of being disloyal to culture, family, or peer groups. This is common in situations where English is not the language spoken in the home or in cases where students may become more educated than members of their familiar discourse communities. It cannot be our goal to have students leave one discourse community in order to participate in another. In other words, we cannot ask students to give up their language in favor of our academic discourse.

Just as Dorothy recognized that she had joined an unfamiliar discourse community but never forgot Kansas, our students too must learn to read, write, think, and speak in new situations, as would "a traveler to an unfamiliar country—yet a country in which it is possible to learn the language and the manners but remember from where we came" (Bizzell, "Cognition" 386). If we ask students to leave their previous discourses behind, then we would create a situation that would be akin to rewriting the resolution to Dorothy's story. If she had to totally disavow the language taught to her by Auntie Em and Uncle Henry in order to participate in the discourse of Oz, then she couldn't go home again.

Further application of Dorothy's story brings to mind questions of respect for students' own language, whether that is "street talk," a foreign language, or

an ethnic, cultural, or regional dialect. A problem is that the ways language is
used at home and in the students' immediate world matches poorly with the
literacy expectations of school. This is not only apparent when English is a
student's second language but also when students are deeply entrenched in a
dialect, such as Ebonics or even in common street or schoolyard lingo.

In the following poem, written for the unusual collaborative Presidential
Address, given at the 2002 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
Convention, on the theme "Celebrating the Languages and Literacies of Our
Lives," Barbara Flores articulates the challenge for teachers:

ONLy Time wiLL tEIL...

U see,
I come from
Cultural and Linguistic Wealth,
Centuries of wisdom,
philosophy,
mathematical genius,
literary and artistic greats
physicists, indigenous
scientists
agricultural innovates.

O-ra-le Teacher,
Let's see if you are different
If you care?
If you'll respect me and my gente?

OR

Will you come in
perceiving,
thinking, and talking

D E S R E S P E C T – O

As the poem seems to indicate, even though most of our students' familiar speech patterns do not replicate standard written English, there is creative and intellectual history as well as usage to be considered—to be respected. Bearing in mind this challenge, we must learn to teach students the structure of academic language without threatening the other discourses they use.

Teachers of English are in the unique position of judging a student's academic worth by the language they use. Even if we don't think of ourselves in this light, it is probably true that our students do. They see us ready to pounce on their every misspoken word and every grammatical error. They may even fear that we will criticize the only English they know or force them to disavow their first language. Teachers must understand that often the students who appear to be unable to learn are in many instances choosing to maintain their sense of identity in the face of what they perceive as a painful choice between allegiance to "them" or "us." Therefore it is important to keep in mind that our opinions and attitudes towards a student, perceived or real, can either present one more obstacle to engaging with the material of our discipline or serve to inspire that student to add layers of language to their repertoire. If we accomplish the latter, then we can help students celebrate the many languages and literacies of their lives.

Questioning how we address issues of differences between students' familiar discourse and requirements of Standard English usage in academic settings is not new. During the 1960s and 70s there was an emphasis on

connecting structural linguistics to composition instruction. Many thought

learning the structural elements of language would enable students to

understand the structure of discourse, making them better writers. An offshoot

of this philosophy was the 1972 CCCC position statement "Students' Right to

Their Own Language," which grew out of concern for the gap between the

language of academia and the language of nontraditional (in terms of race and

class) students.

More recently, the polemic has centered on whether we need to respect

our students' right to their own language or to teach them the ways and forms of

academic discourse (Harris 105). The choice between one or the other

polarizes our dialogue; it pits "'common' discourse against a more specialized

or 'privileged' one" (Harris 103). In 1996 the Oakland School Board decided to

officially recognize the language variety spoken by many African American

students and to take it "into account in teaching Standard English." This

decision caused a public debate that resulted in a resolution by the Linguistic

Society of America (LSA) on the issue. The following is extracted from that

1997 resolution:

   a. All human linguistic systems—spoken, signed, and written—are
      fundamentally regular. The systematic and expressive nature of
      the grammar and pronunciation patterns of the African American
      vernacular has been established by scientific studies over the past
      thirty years. Characterizations of Ebonics as 'slang,' 'mutant,'
      'lazy,' 'defective,' 'ungrammatical,' or 'broken English' are
      incorrect and demeaning.
   b. The distinction between 'languages' and 'dialects' is usually made
      more on social and political grounds than on linguistic ones...

c. There are individual and group benefits to maintaining vernacular speech varieties and there are human advantages to linguistic diversity. For those living in the United States there are also benefits in acquiring Standard English and resources should be made available to all who aspire to mastery of Standard English…

d. There is evidence …that speakers of other varieties can be aided in their learning of the standard variety by pedagogical approaches, which recognize the legitimacy of the other varieties of a language…(Delpit, Appendix 223-224).

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) also supports the position that the language of scholars should be taught and students' familiar discourse can be honored at the same time. This is evidenced in several of the organization's specific Standards:

○ Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

○ Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.

○ Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

While both the LSA and NCTE are addressing language usage in the classroom in earlier grades, the ways in which the two organizations address the issue is applicable to post-secondary settings. By taking the guidelines presented here to heart, teachers are predisposed to respect, even embrace, students' diverse linguistic practices, another way our pedagogy then becomes inclusive.

If we, as teachers, make students aware that they do not have to give up one way of knowing in order to add layers of language to their repertoire, then maybe they will be able to appreciate the many discourses that make up their own. Joseph Harris shares this view in *A Teaching Subject.* He explains that,

"in terms of helping students move from one community of discourse into another, then, it might prove more useful (and accurate) to view our task as adding to or complicating their uses of language" (103). Students are then empowered to think critically about the discourses of home, school, work, friends, etc., "to which they already belong" (Harris 104-105). Therefore, looking at the various languages used by students as complementary discourse, instead of competing discourse, is extremely useful.

An additional benefit of viewing the literacies of students as complementary discourse, in terms of establishing inclusion, makes the usual boundaries between facets of a student's identity permeable. Likewise, boundaries between others and self will also begin to break down (Morrison xiii). Gerald Graff explains it this way: "It is a matter of finding points of convergence and translation, moments when student discourse can be translated into academic discourse and vice versa, producing a kind of 'bilingualism'" ("Hidden" 23). In some ways as students become comfortable with academic discourse they are creating new identities as much as uncovering ones that were already there.

A goal of both composition and literature studies, then, is to have students explore their world through language, both their own and others'. By reading literature about others' experiences and writing about their own experiences with language, students will, as Patricia Bizzell advocates, delve into the main business of English studies, investigating the nature of discourse communities. If

to enter the academic community a student is required to "learn to speak our language," to adopt our ways of doing things with words, we must ask how exactly he or she is to do this. With this in mind, the next chapter will answer pragmatically questions of how students come to recognize their prior ways of knowing and speaking in order to have a foundation upon which they will layer new ways of using language and ultimately attain literacy within academic discourses.

CHAPTER 3

PASSION OF EXPERIENCE

Reading about Place, Identity, and Language

Louise Rosenblatt would have students read out of experience as a way to improve their "literary experience" (xvii). Generations ago, Rosenblatt wrote, "Certainly to the great majority of readers, the human experience that literature presents is primary. . . .The reader seeks to participate in another's vision—to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible." Thus, Rosenblatt claims, "The literary experience has immediacy and emotional persuasiveness" (7). In this vein, the English Classroom as discourse community includes each member in the human experience.

In developing this section of my thesis, I have chosen for the purpose of exemplification, literature that has the power to build a sense of belonging as the classroom community explores together familiar and unfamiliar characteristics in a variety of discourse traditions. On a textual level we can choose authors based on the insights they offer about how we use language within different discourse communities. As students read literature in a variety of genres (both fiction and non-fiction), the "passion of experience" in this setting becomes the foundation for appreciating complementary discourses—all the ways of knowing students already possess and will eventually acquire.

As an area of study literature itself is subject to a wide range of discourses. Novels, short stories, poetry, film, non-fiction—all the texts we study—can be excellent examples of the ways in which discourse contributes to our understanding of the world. We can have students investigate the nature of discourse communities through the many literary works that attempt to do the same. As I discussed earlier, literature provides a wonderful opportunity for students to explore how characters, or authors themselves, are defined and shaped by particular discourses. It may be easier for students to first analyze, for example, how a character is being defined and shaped by the discourse that surrounds him or her before bringing the same scrutiny to their own identities and specific historical, geographical, or cultural contexts. As we read literature that reflects the experience of characters and authors in the contexts of their lives, we can also experience their ways of talking, their ways of thinking, and their ways of seeing the world.

I believe that an author's life itself can serve pedagogical functions. There are intersections between an individual life and the various settings in which it is lived that inform the writer's work and identity. Reading literary memoirs, or fiction or poetry representing a writer's autobiographical experience, can serve as models for young college writers to emulate and also help students take on their own identity as writers and scholars. Students may relate to the past experiences the writer is bringing into the present, ways the writer has represented these experiences, or the interpretations of experience the writer

offers. The benefit of looking at a writer's particular personal experience, I think, helps students engage literature not across some abstract distance but with immediacy, not as untouchable or impenetrable but as language interacting with the world—just as their language is.

At least initially, fictional examples may serve as a safer way of engaging some students, for, unlike the memoir, the literary genre of fiction does not focus on actual events. Fictional events exist within a world created by the writer, one through the act of reading we can either effortlessly or with effort share. Writers of fiction, more often than not, place readers right in the middle of a time, place, or culture, often using unfamiliar language, forcing students to evaluate quickly what they know about the particular questions and concerns of that or those discourse communities.

A commonality of all the works I include here, regardless of genre, is they are about finding a language and thus a place or "home" in the world, just as we are asking students to find a language and thus a place or "home." Each work presents us with quite different discourse communities; the selections are representative of the diverse backgrounds of society and the student population we serve today. Years ago, Louise Rosenblatt recognized this need in saying, "In our heterogeneous society, variations from group to group and from individual to individual require a wide range of literary materials that will serve as the bridge from the individual's experience to the broad realms of literature" (69). For this reason, the writers I employ here have grappled with voicing difference in race,

nationality, class, gender, and language in a way that in the end will not erase difference but instead create a presence for themselves and others.[4]

Literature

I have already demonstrated how I would use film and poetry (*The Wizard of Oz* and "Theme for English B") to ease students' apprehensions in order to start establishing inclusion. It is important for me to convey at this point that the literature I am introducing here will be assigned simultaneous to the students writing their own memoirs (a project that spans much of a semester-long course). I have struggled with how to order the discussion of these works of literature in this narrative. For the purposes of organization, I will present them in a chronology of how I envision them in my own pedagogical practice (for instance, how the literature is ordered on a course syllabus) and review each writer or work in terms of illustrating experience with place, identity, and language within distinct discourse communities.[5]

I have chosen the works of fiction and non-fiction I include here based on the heterogeneity of discourse, in terms of time, place, culture, and language. In designing this curriculum, I would place first a contemporary piece of fiction, J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye,* followed by multicultural works by Sandra

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[4] Even though a focus of this project is on finding languages, I am unable to do justice here to the emergence of unique race, ethnic, national, or gender-specific language. I do, however, want to acknowledge new ways previously marginalized groups are making their voices heard. One result of this trend is new scholarship—critical race theory for example (Bloom 13).

[5] In this narrative, I do not attempt to describe what specifically I or the students would be "doing" with these texts; rather, my intent here is to provide rationale for including them as part of the English classroom discourse community for the specific pedagogical purposes I have outlined.

Cisneros, Richard Rodriguez, Alice Walker, and Amy Tan. Additionally, I have

selected poetry by Seamus Heaney and include "The General Prologue" from

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales.* Ultimately, each of these writers contributes to a

larger conversation about complementary and competing discourses. This list is

limited by time and space and is by no means exhaustive, but inclusion of these

voices in the English classroom discourse community would be valuable as

students consider their own relationships with and participation in discourse

communities.

The first work I include is now sometimes labeled a period piece and not

taught as often as it once was. J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye,*

perhaps more than any other twentieth century American novel, problematizes

language for the speaker, the writer, and the reader. For this reason, I discuss

thoroughly here how new college students can utilize it to analyze discourse

communities. Holden Caulfield, the narrator and protagonist of the book,

illustrates that when moving from one discourse community to another, along

with the threat of giving up one way of knowing or speaking, questions of

selfhood and identity are at stake. Holden distrusts adult language, just as

some new college students may doubt the form of adult academic discourse we

are asking them to utilize; therefore, he is uncomfortable accepting it as part of

his repertoire.

Recovering from a mental breakdown, Holden begins by saying he's

leaving school, Pency Prep, where in his view the teachers, alumni, and

students are all phony. Holden ventures away from his familiar discourse

communities, where his ways of knowing have caused him strife, to seek more

comfortable worlds. There is an irony here, as the discourse in which J. D.

Salinger has Holden engage has made many feel uncomfortable as well; the

novel has a long history of being censored for its strong, often profane

language. It is exactly Holden's own analysis of how he and others use

language in various ways that makes this novel such an intriguing selection for

students examining discourse communities to read and discuss.

The Catcher in the Rye also provides an excellent model of James Paul

Gee's acquisition of metaknowledge, as Holden is hyper aware of his language

usage in various situations. Within the narrative, Holden accuses himself of

having a "lousy" vocabulary. In an article about the language of the novel, David

Costello contradicts Holden's own assessment but not before claiming that

"goddam" is Holden's favorite adjective and that "hell" is the most versatile word

in his vocabulary (15). The reader finds that Holden's vocabulary is very

adaptable to the many different kinds of discursive situations in which he finds

himself. His awareness of the phoniness of his own, as well as other's language,

he says, "drives me crazy" (5) and demonstrates his concern for how he uses

words.

Gerald Graff, in his article, "Hidden Intellectualism," suggests teaching The

Catcher in the Rye to "find points of convergence and translation" (22) between

students' non-standard English and our discourse, the discourse Holden would

call "phony." Graff advocates using students' everyday vernacular as a vehicle into more intellectual language. Graff worked with a high school English teacher in suburban Chicago to develop a unit of study on "becoming an intellectual." The unit plan called for students to contrast Holden's colloquial voice to the more intellectual language he associates with school. For his history paper, Holden uses a "flat, padded prose," one that "indicates Holden's alienation and disengagement from academic work" (Graff 33-34). His personal language, on the other hand, seems to ring more true to Holden himself and, as Graff's project showed, seems more authentic to student readers, even if—or maybe precisely because—it is littered with obscenity and profanity. Through class discussion of this dichotomy between Holden's version of school discourse and his personal talk, students may begin to see how differences in language "imply choices of the kind they may face between different identities and views of life" (32-33).

In the novel, Salinger gives justification for learning the language of academic discourse at all, but it doesn't come from Holden; rather, it comes from a highly suspect source, one of Holden's old teachers. Mr. Antolini offers Holden the following advice:

> Educated and scholarly men, if they're brilliant and creative to begin with—which, unfortunately, is rarely the case—tend to leave infinitely more valuable records behind them than men do who are merely brilliant and creative. They tend to express themselves more clearly, and they usually have a passion for following their thoughts through to the end. (246)

As Graff acknowledges in a comment about this passage, the advice could be intended to be read either as another example of the phoniness Holden

gets from adults and disdains, or as Salinger depicting academic discourse in a positive light (34). No matter the author's intent, the question of the validity of the teacher's advice to Holden should be broached in the context of the story Holden is telling.

Graff shares a series of useful questions to pose to students as a way to get them to reflect on their own language:

- What is gained or lost by expressing oneself in Holden's personal register? In the register of the school paper? In the register of the teacher who speaks of 'educated and scholarly men'?
- What are the gains and losses in being able to translate Holdenspeak into Intellectualspeak? Is it possible to blend both into a single discourse?
- Can students talk the talk of the intellectual world without giving up their own ways of talking and being? (34)

Questions such as these help students to analyze any opposition between their academic and non-academic identities. Looking at Holden Caulfield as a resistant participant in academic discourse might help students come to terms with ways to keep an authentic voice no matter the demands of any particular discourse community.

Just as Holden Caulfield acts as narrator in *The Catcher in the Rye, The House on Mango Street* is a story that Sandra Cisneros has her adolescent character, Esperanza, tell. Both character-narrators have in common their sense of self as emerging writers and an underlying quest to find a voice within multiple discourse communities. *The House on Mango Street* is about a fictional girl with a fictional name but is strongly rooted in the real conversations and experiences from Cisneros's own growing up years in the Latino section of Chicago. Through

powerful language and "passion of experience" Cisneros investigates ways of

knowing and speaking that find their origins in both culture and place.

Cisneros' experience growing up in a variety of physical and cultural

places has influenced what she writes about and the voice she uses when she

writes. Cisneros herself had two types of experiences with place. Early in her

life she never stayed in one place long enough to feel at home, moving often

between crowded apartment living in Chicago and her grandmother's home in

Mexico. Later, her family moved into a more permanent residence, but it is far

from what she dreamed it would be. It is this home and Cisneros' experience

there that became the basis for *The House on Mango Street.* Told in a series of

vignettes, the opening lines of the novel tell this part of Esperanza's/Cisneros'

story:

> We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived
> on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler.
> Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that I can't remember. But
> what I remember most is moving a lot. . . .The house on Mango
> Street is ours, and we don't have to pay rent to anybody, or share
> the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not to make too
> much noise. But even so, it's not the house we'd thought we'd get.
> (3)

Esperanza feels disappointment as the promise of a house, "a real house

that would be ours for always so we wouldn't have to move each year" (4), turns

into the reality of the small place with crumbling bricks and only one washroom

and one bedroom for all six family members. Reading *The House on Mango

Street* is not only advantageous to those who readily recognize themselves on

the pages; the reading also offers students from different backgrounds "the

opportunity to question the distances between their lives of privilege and the character Esperanza's life of marginalization" (Ryan 187). Even if students don't see self in this text, the opportunity provides a glimpse at alternative ways of knowing.

Students, especially those of privilege, must learn that individuals and groups are marginalized only in their relation to what is other. Esperanza, as narrator, painfully illustrates this point when describing the reaction of a nun from her school to one of the places she and her family called home:

> Where do you live? she asked.
> There, I said pointing up to the third floor.
> You live *there*?
> *There.* I had to look to where she pointed—the third floor,
> the paint peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so
> we wouldn't fall out. You live *there*? The way she said it made me
> feel like nothing. (5)

Esperanza's overwhelming desire to have a house, one she can be proud of, can be largely attributed to incidences where she is made to feel other (less than) because of where she lives, and thus—in her mind—who she is.

Many readers would probably consider Esperanza's neighborhood a "bad" one. *The House on Mango Street* is rife with accounts of Esperanza's commentary on her own discourse community, where she lives and understands and communicates. She describes a common phenomenon that occurs when people venture into unfamiliar communities, especially those made up of people who are different or perceived as different:

> attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost
> and got here by mistake.
>   But we aren't afraid. All brown all around, we are safe. But
> watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees
> go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our
> eyes look straight. (28)

Here and elsewhere in the novel Cisneros enters into the text through her

character Esperanza. Her voice emanates from a certain cultural discourse

community but also carries across cultural boundaries.

After living in the Mango Street house for over a year, Esperanza knows

the place well but won't claim it as her own:

> You live right here, 4006 Mango, Alicia says and points to
> the house I am ashamed of.
>   No, this isn't my house I say and shake my head as if
> shaking could undo the year I've lived here. I don't belong. I don't
> ever want to come from here.
>   No, Alicia says. Like it or not you are Mango Street, and one
> day you'll come back too.   (106-107)

Esperanza dreams of leaving her house behind. What Esperanza does not

realize as she wishes this, however, is that like the "four skinny trees" on her

block, she has grown there, in that place, in that house, "despite concrete" (75).

The novel ends with Esperanza dreaming of her departure and at the same time

already anticipating her return. In *The House on Mango Street* we find an

example of a young girl envisioning the world through the lens of a place,

evaluating it in relationship to herself, and ultimately forming her own identity

based on how she wants more than that place offers.

Like Holden Caulfield and Esperanza, Richard Rodriguez, a highly

educated first-generation Mexican American had difficulty reconciling the

differences between the demands of the competing discourses in his life. Rodriguez had difficulty relating to his own family and cultural heritage after he joined academic discourse communities. Rodriguez, in his massive personal narrative *Hunger of Memory*, which has been praised for discussing he impact of language on life, articulates the difficulties in his relationship with his Spanish-speaking parents as he navigates the U.S. educational system.

Unable to speak English when he first started school, Rodriguez writes about his specific childhood experience moving between languages as he went from home to school. Rodriguez eventually went on to have an acclaimed career as a literary scholar, but his academic and public language alienated him from his family, even though they had wanted him to "go far." In *Hunger of Memory,* Rodriguez describes his success as loss: "A second grade student, I was the one who came home and corrected the 'simple' grammatical mistakes of our parents. Proudly I announced—to my family's startled silence—that a teacher had said I was losing all trace of a Spanish accent" (62). He continues, "But the working-class child . . . goes home and sees in his parents a way of life not only different but starkly opposed to that of the classroom. He enters the house and hears his parents talking in ways his teachers discourage. He cannot afford to admire his parents" (64-65). It ultimately mattered to Richard Rodriguez that education was changing him.

As Rodriguez became a member of the academic community, he felt forced, as Harris would say, to "give up one way of knowing." In this case he

gave up knowing the discourse of his family and culture to the competing educational discourse community, because he "wrongly imagined that English was intrinsically a public language and Spanish an intrinsically private one." As students consider Rodriguez's experience with competing discourse communities, we might ask: What difference would it have made in Rodriguez's life if the teacher had shown respect for the beauty and intellect of his first language in addition to praising his use of the English language? How would Rodriguez (and others like him) have different experiences if his teachers had helped him layer many valid discourses atop his existing ones? How could Rodriguez see his discourse communities as anything but competing? Rodriguez felt, as many of our students do or will, the pull of two or more communities at once, of needing to accommodate two opposing conditions of discourse.

When students see their own discourses as competition, students may choose a "winner," giving up one way of knowing or speaking for another. While Richard Rodriguez struggles with issues of loyalty to his familiar discourse community, Alice Walker, in her often-anthologized short story, "Everyday Use," presents a different perspective from Rodriguez's, as similar circumstances are told from the unschooled, instead of the schooled, point of view. At the beginning of the text, Mama, who is narrating, seems to measure herself through the eyes of Dee, her educated elder daughter. Mama wants to be respected by Dee, but Walker portrays the use and abuse of language as

Dee's use of language disrespects her family and her culture. Upon re-placing

herself in her original discourse community—home—Dee's educated discourse

becomes oppressive as she tries to manipulate to achieve her own purposes.

At first is seems that Dee wants to honor her family's heritage by taking

on an African name and desiring to display the family's quilts. Mama comes to

realize, however, that in reality when Dee arrives home from school she is

"forcing words, lies, other folks' habits, whole lives upon us, sitting trapped and

ignorant underneath her voice . . . She burned us with a lot of knowledge we

didn't necessarily need to know. Pressed us to her with the serious way she

read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to

understand" (2389). Nancy Tuten, in her critical essay about this story further

explains, "Walker stresses not only the importance of language but also the

destructive effects of its misuse. Clearly Dee privileges language over silence,

as she demonstrates in her determination to be educated." This is something

we would normally see as positive, but as Tuten continues, "Rather than

providing a medium for newfound awareness and for community, however,

verbal skill equips Dee to oppress others" (126). Dee unabashedly rejects her

familiar discourse in favor of her educated one. In the end Mama comes to see

education as "putting on airs" and the educated daughter as superficial.

For poet Seamus Heaney, not unlike the other writers and characters I

have discussed, the academic world represented that which was not home.

The poet feels uneasy about the way a university education has estranged him

from his family and influenced his perception of home, Mossbawn, a small

farming community. This tension was at first a family matter. Like both

Rodriguez and the fictional character Dee, Heaney's education causes a gap in

ways of knowing between him and his parents and the siblings he left behind.

Coming from a place he labels in conversations as "not illiterate but non-literary"

seems to generate some guilt in regards to his literary success (Parker 2).

In the fourth poem of "Clearances," a sonnet sequence Heaney wrote for

his mother after her death, he addresses the sense of alienation from his family

that he felt as they grew apart. The poem tells of how, in order to make a

connection with his mother, Heaney would, in her company, change the way he

spoke, betraying the educated part of himself by returning to his native

discourse. Andrew Murphy tells us that this was a sort of unspoken

compromise: "The effect of the compromise is to keep mother and son 'allied

and at bay'" (77). The verse, which I've included here, is not only about

Heaney's own use of language in a certain place and situation; it also concerns

his mother's use of language:

> IV
>
> Fear of affectation made her affect
> Inadequacy whenever it came to
> Pronouncing words 'beyond her'. *Bertold Brek.*
> She'd manage something hampered and askew
> Every time, as if she might betray
> The hampered and inadequate by too
> Well-adjusted a vocabulary.
> With more challenge than pride, she'd tell me, 'You
> Know all them things.' So I governed my tongue
> In front of her, a genuinely well-

> Adjusted adequate betrayal
> Of what I knew better. I'd naw and aye
> And decently relapse into the wrong
> Grammar which kept us allied and at bay.

An irony is the sense here that in some ways Heaney's mother too knows "all them things" but is not willing to risk being pretentious, especially if the reader takes the word "affect" in the first line to mean *pretend*. The impression that Mrs. Heaney would have her son denounce his educated or academic talk appears to be incongruous, particularly taking into account the fact that "she was fascinated by language and etymology" (Parker 3). It is obvious that some subtle and not-so-subtle struggles between competing discourses are at play in Heaney's attempt to reconcile his self-identity as writer with his self-identity as son. He writes, "Maybe it began early when my mother used to recite lists of affixes and suffixes, and Latin roots, with their English meanings, rhymes that formed part of her schooling in the early part of the century" (qtd. in Parker 3).

The question of identity, often grounded in rural Ireland, is a theme underlying most of Heaney's work. He says of himself, "Whatever poetic success I've had has come from staying within the realm of my own imaginative country and my own voice" (qtd. in Parker 1). In his poetry we can see him work out his relationship to his first discourse, the world of the familial and the local (Murphy 11). It is also important to note that Heaney's work cannot help but to have political connotations because of the place it is lived. So, in later works, staying true to his Irish voice, a national identity emerges; in addition to a

local quality in his writing, there becomes a political weight to his language. In

Seamus Heaney: The Making of a Poet, Michael Parker explains Heaney's

rootedness: "Although he broke with familial tradition in becoming a writer, a

city-dweller, a member of the middle class, his poetry to the present bears

witness to a continuity of spirit with his parents and a fidelity to his origins of

race and place" (28).

In "Belfast," an early essay collected in *Preoccupations,* Heaney
explains:

> One half of one's sensibility is in a cast of mind that comes from
> belonging to a place, an ancestry, a history, a culture, whatever
> one wants to call it. But consciousness and quarrels with the self
> are the result of what Lawrence called 'the voices of my
> education'. Those voices pull in two directions, back through the
> political and cultural traumas of Ireland, and out towards the
> urgencies and experience of the world beyond it. (35)

This double vision is also the theme of his later essay "The Sense of Place,"

which appears in Heaney's same collection of prose:

> I think there are two ways in which a place is known and
> cherished, and two ways which may be complementary but which
> are just as likely to be antipathetic. One is lived, illiterate and
> unconscious, the other learned, literate and conscious. In the
> literary sensibility, both are likely to co-exist in a conscious and
> unconscious tension." (131)

Looking at Heaney's difficulties negotiating the demands of competing

discourse communities, with all of the accompanying feelings of guilt and

betrayal, may be illuminating to students in the midst of similar personal

conflicts; such concerns transcend boundaries of nationality and particularity of

place. As Heaney himself notes:

> We have to understand also that this nourishment which springs from knowing and belonging to a certain place and a certain mode of life is not just an Irish obsession, nor is the relationship between a literature and a locale with its common language a particularly Irish phenomenon. ("The Sense of Place" 136)

Thus, the reader of Heaney's poetry and prose is able to enter a conversation between the life of the man and the life of his work that illuminates a consciousness of language, where two or more tongues engage in "conflictual dialogue" (Andrews 61).

Another writer who confronts the phenomenon of conflicting tongues is Amy Tan, author of the largely autobiographical *Joy Luck Club*, as well as other works that deal extensively with language usage as subject. In many of her writings she analyzes the multiplicity of discourses she uses and her attitudes towards those discourses. She writes about the fact that it took a long time to understand the English of her home—the English she learned from her mother—as just one of the many "Englishes" she uses. In her personal narrative "Mother Tongue," Tan places as central to her life and writing career feelings concerning her immigrant mother's "broken" English. She shares with us ways this descriptor concerns her, saying, "It has always bothered me that I can think of no way to describe it other than 'broken,' as if it were damaged and needed to be fixed. I've heard other terms used, 'limited English,' for example. But they seem just as bad, as if everything is limited, including people's perceptions of the limited English speaker" (133).

The English spoken in Tan's home had a profound effect on her, not only as a writer, but also as a student, a professional, a wife, and a daughter. For a time, she was alienated from her past; she spent her college years rejecting the language of home before she learned, as a writer, to draw on "all of the Englishes she grew up with" when she recognized her mother as part of her public audience. Oddly enough, it was the discourse she and her mother shared that became her writer's voice: the "simple" English Tan spoke to her mother, the "broken" English her mother spoke to her, Tan's "watered down" Chinese, and her mother's translation of Chinese. All of Tan's discourses, familiar and formal were woven one atop the other, as complementary to one another.

Tan was able to come to place where she could appreciate all of the ways language was used in her life and all of the discourse communities in which she was a member; she built her life as a writer on this appreciation. All of our students, in some form or another, also use different forms of English, and we can use Tan's experience to help students realize the richness of all of them while at the same time encouraging them to gain mastery over the formal English needed for success in academic and other formal setting. For this reason "Mother Tongue" and the longer *Joy Luck Club*, which addresses some of the same issues, would be wonderful pieces to use in conjunction with students writing their own memoirs. These works may be especially relevant to students where English is not the first language spoken at home. Just as Tan

came to value the essence of her mother's language as full of intention, passion, imagery, and rhythm and move seamlessly between all of her Englishes, students too should be encouraged to thrive in multiple discourse communities.

In a course where a primary purpose is to bridge the gap between familiar and unfamiliar discourses, while at the same time helping students become accustomed to the conventions of our academic discipline, it is vital that the syllabus culminates with literature that presents more of a challenge than selections earlier in the course. The benefits of including Chaucer's medieval *Canterbury Tales* are twofold. First, it demonstrates that the phenomenon of entering a world of multiple unfamiliar and competing discourses is not unique to modernity. Furthermore, in *Canterbury Tales* students can see that his pilgrims are a diverse group of language users thrown together in what would have been unnatural circumstances, traveling together with others from unlike social stations, crossing the boundaries of familiar and formal ways of both speaking and behaving. Studying this canonical work provides a very different picture of discourse communities than previous ones I've discussed, as the sojourners hail from all spectra of the social hierarchy, each with his or her own discourse norms.

By asking what kind of discourse is produced by each of the pilgrims and how they understood each other in light of their differences, conversations about difference can occur safely so far removed from the conflicts in our world. The

stories are of many kinds, some befitting to the teller and the company and some inappropriate to the teller and the group. The reader learns each individual's place in society and understands that the pilgrimage itself in some ways counters the medieval order; that is, the reverence for a hierarchical worldview at the time has an impact on how each of the pilgrims receives the others. This knowledge will help students see the rivalries among many of the pilgrims as the result of their roles in competing discourse communities. The reader must know, and the travelers themselves surely realize, that a "religious pilgrimage was the one occasion in the Middle Ages when class barriers could to a certain degree be overlooked, and when the association of such diverse classes as a knight, a prioress, a London cook, and a vulgar miller was conceivable" (Baugh 229).

Chaucer explained how individuals from such varied backgrounds understood each other: "Diverse folk diversely they seyde" [but] diversely understood what others seyde" (qtd. in Knapp 15). Certainly, the pilgrims came from sharply differentiated discourse communities, and students can learn how much the identity of each of the storytellers is shaped by contrasting each to the others'. For example, as students read of the storytellers, they may gain a sense of the tensions between the world of the tavern and the world of the cloister during Chaucer's day. Or, they may see how the Knight's discourse of nobility is dominant over the Miller's discourse of the common man, when Robyn the Miller interrupts the Knight, breaking propriety. A discussion of the tensions among the pilgrim's various discourse communities has the potential to lead to an

understanding of the tensions among the discourse communities to which students belong.

In the case of introducing students to the concepts of discourse in an introductory course, I would assign students only the "General Prologue" of *Canterbury Tales*, because in this framing tale, Chaucer introduces readers to each of the pilgrims in a sort of character sketch. Emerson Brown, Jr., in his essay, "Diverse Folk Diversely They Teach," tells us the story is really a "simple enough narrative of characters and circumstances" (99). It is "a celebration of imperfect pilgrims journeying through this uncertain world adopting various means for coping" (101). The applications for students almost six centuries later is that this is similar to what we are asking them to do as they enter a new academic setting—adopt various means for coping.

I would have students read the prologue from a dual linguistic version of the text, so they could get a sense of the original language Chaucer used and at the same time more easily understand the verse. When students approach Chaucer's work for the first time, the language will seem strange and difficult, but there is value in having students see changes in grammar and vocabulary that have taken place in the English language since the fourteenth century; it allows them to view language as changeable through time and in their own lives in this time. As an author, Chaucer recognized that his own language was transforming. Chaucer wrote in *Troilus and Criseyde* (translated from the Middle English); "You know that within a thousand years there is change in form of

speech, and words which were once deemed apt and choice now seem as wondrous quaint and strange; and yet they spake them thus once, and succeeded as well in love by doing so as men do now" (qtd. in Ridley xv). By having students look at some of the "General Prologue" in the original Middle English, they can learn to see the English language and their usage of it as dynamic.

Students will find that in *The Canterbury Tales,* many of the characteristics of discourse communities will be recognizable in the tales the pilgrims tell. Still, in difficult-to-understand literature, such as *Canterbury Tales,* students would benefit from using a guide as they read. Eleanor Kutz, in *Exploring Literacy: A Guide to Reading, Writing, and Research,* offers guidelines for identifying some "important elements of talk in all discourse communities" (190-191):

- Participants in a discourse community use particular varieties of styles of English.
- They talk in ways that are associated with specific roles.
- They draw on a discourse community's genres.
- They know how and when to speak literally or metaphorically and know how to interpret the words of others.

These elements of the shared knowledge of any discourse community could enhance our purpose in reading this work, as well as be applied to the other works I've included in this project.

Members of discourse communities, real ones and fictionalized ones, as we have seen, are likely to share common interests, values, and ways of seeing the world, as well as particular ways of using language. Reading about others' "passion of experience" while exploring place, identity, and language invites

students to examine their own attitudes and relationships with their primary discourse communities. Students can discover more about the communities to which they belong through the ways the authors represent language and ways of knowing.

The writers and works of literature I've mentioned in this section are but a few of the many suitable for including on a course syllabus that has as a goal investigating the nature of discourse communities and experiences within them. In their study, a focus of the reading is to add to students' understanding of discourse communities by entering worlds where contrasting communities are portrayed. An additional purpose of including any of these works of literature on a syllabus would be to demonstrate that rather than one right way to approach a text, students come to understand that there are many ways, some times complementary and sometimes competing, in which a text, and thus language, can be construed. Because of time and space constraints the selections are necessarily limited but at the same time representative of the possibilities of how discourse communities are exemplified in literature. Regardless which selections are chosen, as students experience the voices of others they will use what they learn as readers in forming their own voices as writers.

Writing about Place, Identity, and Language

"When I write, I create myself, and that created self, through writing,
may affect the world. The writer becomes a presence, existing in
a way that he or she does not when silent."
                                        -Donald Murray, *Creating a Life*

Through language we construct an identity for ourselves. Having students

write in a classroom setting presents the possibility that they will not only

construct academic identities but also personal ones. bell hooks has spoken of

the importance of teacher self-actualization to empowering students. Donald

Murray's words imply it is also through the act of writing that the student writer

achieves a presence, a form of self-actualization, and becomes self-empowered

within the community. Thus a space is created for re-examining the presence

and absence of difference in the classroom, both in terms of how students view

themselves and their identities in academic and non-academic settings and in

terms of how we acknowledge one another.

The teacher can first acknowledge students as present by meeting them

where they are and recognizing who they are when they cross the threshold

into our classrooms and into our lives. This means determining where students

come from, both literally and figuratively. English teachers can begin by having

students share their own "passion of experience" by writing it. Indeed, writing,

and therefore language usage, has a complicated relationship to individual

experience. Exploring this relationship connects students' familiar discourses to

more formal ones. Just as there is a new kind of scholarship that interweaves

the personal and professional (Hindman 10), academic success depends on layering academic discourses atop personal, familiar, ones.

As bell hooks uses the phrase, "passion of experience" represents a way "for critical thinkers to engage multiple locations, to address diverse standpoints, to allow us to gather knowledge fully and inclusively" (91-92). By having students engage analytically with past experience, whether they have been *placed* or *displaced*, they create a less alienated future. As students write their "passion of experience" within the discourse community, some students will have personal stories to tell of singularity and difference, but they will also find, in many cases, that "private experiences will echo collective ones" (Lionnet 33). This knowledge feeds our interest in one another; it allows us to "read" difference in a new way and appreciate diverse views.

Exploring prior experience within familiar discourse communities invites students to write personal reflections. Composition theorist Peter Elbow, who comments often on the role of the writer versus the role of the academic, also advocates having students engage in this kind of personal writing. Elbow wonders why it is such a stretch for some in the academy, in English departments specifically, to justify having students write their experience when "most of the texts we teach in English courses are literary pieces that render experience." He gives so much credence to personal writing that he goes on to warn, "When students leave the university unable to find words to render their experience, they are radically impoverished" ("Reflections" 147). Personal

writing allows new college students to see how past experience has contributed to their identity now as readers, writers, and learners as they enter new discourse communities.

Specifically, teachers of English composition and/or introductory literature courses can facilitate access to prior knowledge by having students recall and reflect on some familiar settings and conversations that have taken place there. When students write to reflect, they "consider an idea or an experience, and through this consideration come to a greater understanding of its significance" (Faigley 75). Memoir is the genre most commonly used for recalling the past and reflecting on its significance to the present. After initial reflection, students would be asked to create a memoir about past experiences within different discourse communities. They might begin by describing familiar settings and interactions within these settings.

Most students think that the conversations they've learned to take part in within the context of other environments are so different from the ones needed in the academy that they feel the voices of home and other familiar places must be left behind. By recognizing that both spoken and written conversations are shaped very much by where they take place, students are empowered to move between various discourse communities more readily. Therefore, it seems that an examination of place and all it implies to the individual is a logical point for many students to begin envisioning their own memoirs.

An important idea to consider together as students begin reflecting upon their personal experiences is how we see *place* as experience. Southern author Eudora Welty affirms that we all "tend to measure ourselves against place and try to become a part of its more enduring identity" (119). For Welty, "her characters are the place they live, i.e. their place is so much a part of them that their identity depends on the relation" (Gretlund viii). Wallace Stegner spent his life writing and teaching about the relationship between one's experience with place and one's identity. In the essay "The Sense of Place" he writes: "Neither place nor I had a chance of being anything unless we could live together for a while. I spent my youth envying people who had lived all their lives in the houses they were born in, and had attics full of proof that they *had* lived" (200).

Here I can share my own experience to illustrate the significance of place to sense of self. Like Stegner, I spent a nomadic childhood yearning for "being something" in the places we landed. My search for identity, grounded in place, was so strong that I am sure it was no coincidence that I married a man who at the time had lived twenty-two of his twenty-four years in the same little house in North Carolina—a house his parents have now inhabited for forty-five years. Not only does the house literally hold an attic full of their history there, a short drive reveals his family's roots in the area. Not far from the small town of Sherrill's Ford, a bronzed marker announces the spot where his ancestors first crossed the Catawba River and established a "homeplace." My husband's place has become my place and my children's place but so has Montana, the place we traveled to

together to live our lives. I now see that my acquaintance with many places as I was growing up is as key to my sense of identity as my husband's deep connection to one place is to his.

So too, students' experience with place, prior to leaving home to attend college, will be varied. Some people will, as Stegner suggests, have "never stayed in one place long enough to learn it," and some will "have learned it only to leave it" (201). Still other students' ways of knowing are deeply entrenched in a single location as a result of being in one place their entire lives. No matter which circumstance is true, it is important as students enter the new environment of the academic community to reflect on how sense of self derives from sense of place.

The correlation between sense of self and place is reflected in the sentiment, expressed by writer Wendell Berry, that "if you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are" (qtd. in Stegner 199). I noted earlier that knowledge and growth are situated in particular environments; accordingly, we are always in dialectical relationships with our environments. If we understand *dialectical* as the "technique of analysis that relies on careful consideration of opposing alternatives" (Booker 103), we can see how the relationship between identity and place can help bridge binaries between ways of knowing. For Freire, "The more we are aware of the dialectic the more we can affect changes in our selves and in our environments" (Villanueva 624). Therefore, the more the dialectic is recognized as such, the less the chance of alienation or exclusion.

This can be accomplished structurally, as we design courses that contain a dialectical relationship between familiar and formal discourse communities.

Eugene O'Brien seeks to explain this dynamic in his discussion of Irish poet Seamus Heaney's grounding in place. He writes, "At the level of epistemology, identity is precisely the bond between a people and a place, a bond …which is created and cemented mainly by language" (3). Here, O'Brien establishes a connection not only between place and identity but also language. It is through language that we both explore and convey identity; therefore, we come to realize that the relationship of place and identity is largely a linguistic one. So, in the English classroom, we can have students explore their world through language to discover how their knowledge and language simultaneously are grounded in and emanate from place.

To have students engage in this type of exploration is applying Gee's principle of *metaknowledge*. Gaining a cognitive awareness that ways of knowing are bound by experience with language in certain locations affords students opportunities to investigate how they employ linguistic conventions, dialects, colloquialisms, idioms, and the like. In order to help our students link the concepts of identity, or knowledge, place, and language, we might ask students to respond to some of the following, or comparable, items. We could simply have students discuss their home. Where is it? What is it like? How do they feel about it now or before? We may ask students more specifically to discuss where they come from and how they talked there. If they "know" these

things, how do they say or write them? How would place say they could or could not?[6] Essentially, grappling with these questions helps students find a voice, as *voice* names "both what is thought to belong uniquely to a writer as well as those cultural discourses that are seen as speaking through her words or text" (Harris 44).

As Peter Elbow uses it, voice often equates to something like style or tone—writing with "real rhythm and texture" (*Writing* 290). Elbow argues that voice makes writing authentic, personal, and original; it is what makes a piece of writing human (*Writing* 283-286). In a discussion devoted to the subject of *voice* in college writing, Joseph Harris, tells of how writers often have to appreciate and draw on the voices they have been hearing around them throughout their lives (43-45). Similarly, students can be encouraged to listen to and draw on familiar voices in their own writing. This is a complicated proposition, but Jim Burke, in his book *The English Teacher's Companion,* has developed a unit of study that fits beautifully with this pedagogical practice. Burke suggests:

> Each student will be asked to investigate how she or he is situated as an individual who belongs to certain groups and addresses insiders and outsiders in different voices. Students will be asked to consider their present command of language and voices, invited to take pride in what they know, and encouraged to strive to increase their linguistic range and depth. At the same time, they will be investigating the voices of a range of writers addressing the questions: 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?' The goal will be for students to see themselves as users of language, with voices of their own that are similar to those of the writers they are reading. (45-46)

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[6] Michael Konsmo, a fellow Teaching Assistant, developed this line of questioning in order to encourage students in his College Writing course to consider their own relationship with place.

We can see in Burke's pedagogy his belief that students' awareness of their own discourse is vital to their perception of self and sense of connectedness to a wider community of writers and readers. His classroom appears to build on the overlap between the students' common discourses and the academic ones, as they are asked to work within and against both their own languages and those of the texts they are reading.

Marrying the personal and the academic in this way not only provides students a way into more formal discourse communities but also gives them an appreciation for language beyond the academy. The connection between purposeful, engaged reading and writing about their own experiences provides a place within the classroom for the students' selves. To facilitate this kind of environment, I might, as bell hooks does, ask students to ponder what we want to make happen in the class and to name what we hope to know (92). It is important to keep in mind, though, that for the kind of inclusive pedagogy I advocate to remain authentic there are limits to our "passions of experience." hooks shares:

> I ask them what standpoint is a personal experience. Then there
> are times when personal experience keeps us from reaching the
> mountaintop and so we let it go because the weight of it is too heavy.
> And sometimes the mountaintop is difficult to reach with all our
> resources, factual and confessional, so we are just there collectively
> grasping, feeling the limitations of knowledge, longing together,
> yearning for a way to reach that highest point. Even this yearning is
> a way to know (92).

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

"We know what we are, but know not what we may be."
- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

The pedagogy I imagine acts as an introduction into academic discourse within literacy events—composition and literature study in the college classroom. It reflects my beliefs about curriculum, learning, and teaching and the academic work infused with those beliefs. Investigating the nature of discourse communities forces us to consider multiple literacies, used for multiple purposes, rather then a single static literacy. In selecting from the plurality of discourses (not necessarily the same discourse all the time), the individual joins a community of users of that discourse. The strategies I recommend to do so ultimately increase sensitivity to diversity issues and promote an environment of inclusion, as students not only examine their own ways of knowing but also consider worlds unlike the ones they know. An *inclusive pedagogy* is holistic, a way to look at how teachers relate to self, students, and the world.

My philosophy of teaching relies on the fact that while addressing the content of our curriculum—the "what" we teach—is an undisputed responsibility; our primary obligation is to students—"who" we teach. If the experience of teaching is regarded as anticipating promise, embracing the unexpected, expending energy, giving of self, and welcoming other, then maybe we can

imagine how theory is manifested in practice. As teachers, we have a responsibility to create a place where students are recognized as full participants in our classroom and other communities. When this is accomplished, the classroom is seen as a welcoming, flexible language community.

A recent MLA initiative, a publication series, called "Teaching Languages, Literatures, and Cultures," puts into perspective and makes relevant this discussion beyond my own interests. The series' editorial board claims, "It is through acts of teaching that we make real for our students ongoing social and intellectual transformations" (29). As I have indicated, bell hooks, too, discusses acts of teaching. She opens pedagogical conversations to the possibility of speaking intimately about the classroom. Like hooks, I want to be "recognized in the classroom by students, seen by them as a teacher who worked hard to create a dynamic learning experience for all of us [...] (12).

This is risky, as we become better teachers by "striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world" (hooks 15). This idea embodies Paolo Freire's liberatory pedagogy, as we share his vision to teach "reading the world and reading the word" (105). Engaging students is what is at stake. As students are asked to read and write out of their "passion of experience" they are fully present, fully included in the academic community and vested in what they "may be" in the future.

Educators such as myself, who are concerned with each individual student's growth within our classroom communities, can find both solace and