RESISTANCE WITHIN THE CLASSROOM SPACE:

TEACHING CONTESTED TEXTS AS SOCIAL ACTION

By

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Abstract: Drawing from classical rhetoric and from scholars such as Paulo Freire, James Berlin, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, bell hooks, Kristi Fleckenstein, and others, I seek to interrogate pedagogical implications of incorporating "hot-topic" texts within First Year Composition (FYC) classrooms. Chapter 1 explores the scholarly conversations about critical pedagogy and provides the theoretical framework for the study. I discuss the relationship between social-epistemic rhetoric and critical pedagogy, and examine the ways students might be encouraged to participate in productive citizenship. In chapter 2, I report and explain a teacher research project I constructed to study possible forms of resistance FYC instructors exhibit when they encounter hot-topic texts in their classroom spaces. I began my research project with a personal reflection journal where I recorded my reactions toward classroom discussions that included socially-contested issues. I became curious to know if other FYC instructors reacted similarly, so I conducted the formal study which consisted of an online survey for FYC instructors to participate. Finally, in chapter 3, I discuss specific implications of a critical pedagogy that privileges ethics in the composition classroom. Calling on Berlin's article, I connect pedagogical practices with their underlying ideologies. Second, I trace the relationship between ethics and rhetoric in the composition classroom, pursuing a method that extends this relationship to incorporate how teachers choose course readings and why choosing hot-topic texts can be productive for critical pedagogy. Finally, after exploring how language is a skill that involves purposeful instruction, I offer a heuristic that allows for a composition instructor to utilize hot-topic texts as one avenue through which she can encourage critical writing for all students within their differing value systems. I argue that through the practice of critical pedagogy, there is an ethical responsibility to incorporate hot-topic issues in first-year composition classrooms in order to foster opportunities for dialectic and critical writing: which leads to productive citizenship.

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CHAPTER I

LIBERATION IN THE CLASSROOM: PEDAGOGICAL USE OF "HOT-TOPIC" TEXTS

Asking students to read popular culture critically, by questioning assumptions and producing cultural analyses, does more than sharpen students' capacity to be critical consumers of the worlds they inhabit. It encourages a resistant affective stance . . .[and] reflect a teacher's desire to examine coercive, repressive structures that seek to reproduce thoughtless compliance with unquestioned norms.
-- Laura Micciche in "Emotion, Ethics, and Rhetorical Action"

"How do you want me to respond to this prompt?" asked a first-year composition student. As I continued to pursue a conversation with "Ann," I found that her real concern was not how to articulate her own thoughts and ideas, but rather to see what I wanted her to say so she could finish the assignment. Maybe it is because of the increased testing constraints being placed on K-12 teachers, but it seems as though students are more and more hesitant to voice their own thoughts and ideas – unless it is to do so as a form of protest against the supposed "heresy" being embraced by academia. In any case, students do not always appear to be confident enough to take part in purposed reflective practices that stimulate personal change and growth. A concern for students' critical thinking skills as well as an effort to prepare them to participate productively in future citizenship provides the foundation for the practice of critical pedagogy.

In this chapter, I discuss the presence of productive citizenship within pedagogical practice. I begin with the foundational roots of Western rhetoric. I then move to one of the most influential scholars and thinkers in critical pedagogy: Paulo Freire. His idea for

a liberatory education provides the foundation for other rhetors such as Berlin, Shor, hooks, and Giroux. There are also those who have discussed the application of citizenship education within First-Year-Composition (FYC) classrooms, and I call on Graff, Lazere, Farmer, and Lynch. Even with the work that has been done, there remains opportunity to examine specific pedagogical choices that directly impact student learning. Therefore, after I have discussed the roots of the scholarship for my project, I will specifically address the research questions that guided my scholarly pursuits. In sum, this first chapter will move from a general discussion of composition pedagogy toward my specific research questions. The second chapter will describe and analyze a study I conducted that explored the pedagogical use of hot-topic texts; and the third chapter, interrogates the ethical dimensions and argues for pedagogical applications with FYC classrooms.

To begin, I now turn to the foundation of composition studies. This type of citizenship education has roots as far back as the beginnings of classical rhetoric when Isocrates and Plato founded their schools with the conviction that they could strengthen their own society. In particular, Isocrates committed himself toward a citizenship-type of rhetorical instruction. In other words, he taught that knowledge was “for moving people to action for the common good” (Bizzell and Herzberg, 67). His goal in educating his young students “was to prepare civic leaders” (26) who would learn through the modeling of the instructors. Additionally, Isocrates defined three pre-requisites toward an effective education that would train valuable citizens: “natural talent, practice in varied situations, and instruction in general principles” (ibid). The first two elements are focused on the student, while the third is focused on the instructor. This leads us to

surmise, as Bizzell and Herzberg explain, that for Isocrates, the participation of the student was more important than the expertise of the instructor. By somewhat of a contrast, Plato's focus for education centered on the pursuit of absolute knowledge – even absolute truth. He focused on exposing the falsehoods (as he saw it) of the Sophists who had used rhetoric to persuade people to believe a truth that may not be a complete truth, as well as rhetorical speeches for monetary gain, a sign of corruption within the society. This discussion is fruitful for us because we are able to see that there have always been differing opinions about the function of education and the practices employed by the instructor. It seems to come down to the issue of defining the ideology that forms the foundation for the pedagogical practices.

What does seem to be applicable for my exploration here is to acknowledge first that even with these differences, a continual underlying thread permeates rhetorical studies: the thread of Isocrates's philosophy that education "should form men who are capable of serving the state" (68); thus, the call for education to empower students toward productive citizenship. This has provided the foundation for scholars and theorists such as Paulo Freire, James Berlin, bell hooks, Henry Giroux, and others who argue for education to be more than a formalistic skill. There are those who oppose this pedagogical approach as many of them argue for FYC courses to focus solely on "writing itself, and how one uses it to learn and think and communicate" (Hairston, 697). However, since I am arguing for a pedagogy that equips students to participate in their society in ways that benefit all citizens, I have found focus and direction through the examination of Berlin's social-epistemic rhetoric. He explains that "[t]here are . . .as many conflicts among . . . [those spokerpersons for social-epistemic rhetoric] as there are

harmonies[, but they] are brought together . . . [through] their shared notion of rhetoric as a political act" (488). This means that we instruct students through compositional studies to become productive participants in shaping our society because knowledge "can only be posited as a product of the dialectic . . . [as it is] "grounded in language" (ibid). In this way, language becomes a strategic tool for a productive use of rhetoric and even a tool for bringing opposing viewpoints together in conversation through the act of communication.

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who strove to enlighten his own people about the need "to participate in the transformation of their society" (Shaul, 30), began his work in the 1950's in Brazil. Since the American-published emergence of Paulo Freire's work in 1970, American educators have continued to explore the implications of his "banking concept" of education. He explained this concept as an analogy describing the relationship between a teacher and her students. His argument called first for a recognition of the "fundamentally *narrative* character" (Freire, 71) of this relationship where "education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (72). Second, he furthered argued "that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings" (73). For Freire, this type of education was detrimental to society since it yielded students who could not develop a "critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (ibid). Freire's work with impoverished Brazilian peasants to "become free Subjects and to participate in the transformation of their society" (Shaul, 29) has influenced critical pedagogy – even though his pedagogical

practice had a different focus. What has been transferrable is Freire's push for instructors to practice a purposed pedagogy that contributes to societal improvements.

I am truly convinced that there is great value in creating classroom spaces that actively engage both teachers and students. I understand that there are significant efforts to affect pedagogical change, but I believe there is still improvement that remains to be done so that composition classes become transformative spaces. I use "transformative" here in the context of Freire's work to mean classroom spaces that foster critical awareness in students that continues toward a "critical consciousness" (Freire, 35). Admittedly, citizenship education is not a new phenomenon for first-year-composition instructors. Many of us know the fertile opportunities that await us when we enter our classrooms. During my course of study, however, it has become most beneficial for me to seek ways to meld classical theory with subsequent theory and scholarship in order to seek the most productive methods of pedagogy. The specific pedagogical strategy I will explore is the potential for a productive use of "hot-topic" texts within the first-year-composition classroom. The ideology behind the strategy is worthy of examination, and so I now turn to Berlin's *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies*. Here, I seek to explore the ideologies underlying changes within compositional studies.

Berlin, in his 2003 work, begins by explaining that his study is inspired by "two great moments in the history of rhetoric – [4th and 5th-century B.C.E.] Athens and the last hundred years [of] the United States – as well as [his] experience in English departments" (xii). I contend that if we understand that "ideology is minutely inscribed in the discourse of daily practice" (84), then we can move forward with a theory and pedagogical

practices that are grounded in that ideology and theory. This means that a pedagogical practice that encourages students to become productive citizens that create an improved society is a practice grounded in social-epistemic rhetorical ideology. A social-epistemic rhetoric "is the study and critique of signifying practices in their relation to subject formation with the framework of economic, social, and political conditions" (83). Further, social-epistemic rhetoric has consistently "maintained a commitment to preparing students for citizenship in a democratic society" (87). It is characterized by the practice of a "dialectical process" (91) where class members "continually interact with each other" (ibid). An additional characteristic of a social-epistemic rhetoric is that "[w]riting and reading are . . . both acts of textual interpretation and construction" (ibid). Calling back to Burke's terministic screens, Berlin further explains that social-epistemic rhetoric fosters a reflexive examination of a text. Because language "forms and shapes experience . . . [its] use is thus inherently interpretive" (92).

Berlin further explores reasons for his students' "resistance of various kinds" (112), and he posits that when teachers provide opportunities for students to become "conscious of the concealed conflicts in their language, thought, and behavior" (ibid), there is always "some discomfort" (ibid). This is what provides the opportunity for students and teachers to engage in a participatory education. In other words, a pedagogical practice of this nature "will require that students participate in disagreement and conflict in open, free, and democratic dialogue" that further promotes the need for students "to draw up a set of rules to govern members in their relations to each other" (ibid). The social-epistemic ideology forms the basis for the classroom space to "not be a stage for the virtuoso performance of the teacher" (119), but rather to instigate a "student-

teacher relation [that is] . . . marked by a democratic dialogue that is by moments both collaborative and disputatious" (ibid). Similarly to Freire, Berlin argues for teachers to "prepare students for communication in their careers" (ibid) by way of providing "choices that for once extend beyond commodity consumption" (ibid). This is what Freire refers to through his metaphor of the "banking education" where students are automatons that receive information without critical reflection.

Likewise, in Henry Giroux's *Theory and Resistance in Education: Towards a Pedagogy for the Opposition*, he advocates for an educational practice that he describes as "radical pedagogy" (2). Calling on the "theoretical work developed by . . . 'the Frankfurt School,'" (7), Giroux argues for a theoretical background for education that "refers to the nature of self-conscious critique and to the need to develop a discourse of social transformation" (8). Teaching practices grounded in this theory call for teachers to gain deeper understanding of a critical pedagogy that encourages students to probe their preconceived notions and beliefs and to practice a reflexivity designed to "consider the importance of intentionality, consciousness, and interpersonal relations in the construction of meaning and classroom experience" (51). He argues for "a more dialectical treatment of agency and structure by restructuring the ideas of ideology and culture" (120) so that the end result is a student population who actively practices self-awareness and self-interrogation. The underlying theoretical principle here is that in order to change society, there is a need to rework "the notions of ideology and culture within a problematic that takes seriously the notions of agency, struggle, and critique" (139). A radical pedagogy creates a learning environment where students are encouraged to "first view their own ideologies and cultural capital as meaningful before they can

critically probe their strengths and weaknesses . . . to critically interrogate their inner histories and experiences" (150). He further calls for us to understand and extend "the liberatory moment" (165) in our efforts to fully practice radical pedagogy – to "determine when it may be more productive to function in some situations rather than in others" (167).

As Giroux calls back on the citizenship education of the ancient Greeks, he reminds us of the purpose of education: namely, to be "training grounds for character development and economic and social control" (169), which differs from Dewey's idea that "schools [should] provide non-coercive forms of persuasion in order to develop intellectual growth consistent with psychological development in students" (169). In fact, he further quotes Edward Ross who posited that "education was an inexpensive form of police" (ibid) where the hegemonic ideology was reinforced with young citizens. He admonishes us to create spaces that foster critical interrogation, not only for our students, but for us as well. We must "free [ourselves] from the burden of [our] own intellectual and ideological history" (170).

Another scholar who furthers Freire's work and explores the implications of a citizenship education is Ira Shor. He argues, in his work *Empowering Education*, for an active teaching approach that foster student "empowerment." He urges "teachers to encourage students to question their experiences in school" (11). He further advocates for a classroom space that provides students the opportunity at the beginning of the school year to question; thereby fostering a "remarkably democratic and critical learning experience for students" (ibid). Drawing from Piaget, Shor continues to explore the educational implications of teachers who have students "make meaning and act from

reflection, instead of memorizing facts and values handed to them" (12) – which also calls back to Freire's warning that "[e]ducation is suffering from narration sickness" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 71), because teachers are not practicing a "liberatarian education," rather, they are participating as "depositors" and the students are "depositories" where information is narrated or issued, and then "patiently receive[d], memorize[d], and repeat[ed]" (72). Shor continues to call for pedagogical strategies that strengthen students' ability to critically interrogate social norms, beliefs, and practices. He provides a choice for teachers to either practice a pedagogy that "can socialize students into critical thought or into dependence on authority . . . into autonomous habits of mind or into passive habits of following authorities, waiting to be told what to do and what things mean" (1992, 13). For Shor and others, this is the great tragedy of education: that it fails to equip students to be the positive change they want to see in their society. For Shor, a productive education "is more than facts and skills. It is a socializing experience that helps make the people who make society" (15).

Of course, he admits that although he calls for a student-centered pedagogy, this does not mean that an instructor is to throw caution to the wind and allow the "students [to] do whatever they like in the classroom" (16). It does mean, though, that an instructor continually negotiates the "learning process" (ibid) and practices her own personal critical interrogation, thus perpetuating a classroom that is characterized by "high expectations" as both the teacher and the students democratically participating in the subject matter that is oriented "to student . . . interests, needs, speech, and perceptions – while creating a negotiable openness in class" (ibid). Because Shor refers to Piaget's work on "the relation of action to knowing" (17), this type of pedagogy fosters students

who become “motivated learners, not . . . passive beings”(ibid), which, again, also calls back to Freire when he argues for an education that empowers people to learn “that through transforming action they can create a new situation” (*Pedagogy*, 47). Finally, Shor cautions educators that to not engage in a transformative education is to allow the practice of a “nonparticipatory education[that] corresponds to the exclusion of ordinary people from policy-making in society at large” (19). In other words, essential positive and productive societal change never occurs; instead, society continues making the same mistakes and becomes stagnant. It is through what Shor refers to as a “problem-posing approach” (35), which he further explains as a form of “participatory” education (37), that students learn the value of participating. When he presented a problem in class that started “from the students’ situation,” he found that students were able to “begin critical reflection in their own context and their own words” (45). Later, he also calls this method of teaching, “reflexive teaching” (54). He further explains that this teaching practice is “where the teacher poses questions, listens carefully, and re-present to students what they have said for further reflection” (ibid). This provides the opportunity for students to participate in an “empowering classroom . . . [where] students and teachers can create knowledge that leaves behind the old disabling education in a search for new ways of being and knowing” (ibid).

The importance of a critical pedagogy that empowers students to be a positive and productive influence on their society is further explored by bell hooks, another scholar who has been significantly impacted by Freire’s educational philosophy. In her work, *Teaching to Transgress,* she clearly calls for teachers to create learning spaces “where students could raise critical questions about pedagogical process . . . to think seriously

about pedagogy in relation to the practice of freedom" (6). Like Shor, she calls for an education that is not focused only on empowering students, but also is "a place where teachers . . . are empowered by the process" (21). She also explains that "[w]hen we engage in a citizenship education, we have the opportunity to fashion a learning space that might be classified as a "radical space of possibility in the academy" (12). Further, a citizenship education is characterized by what hooks describes as a "place where I could forget . . . self and, through ideas, reinvent myself" (3). This is a classroom space where students' thoughts and ideas are enriched through purposefully selected readings and discussions that explore various ways of interacting with the world. It is a space that allows students to critically examine societal issues and to realize that their "voice[s] must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself" (11). We begin to experience "Freire's . . . education as the practice of freedom" (14). Additionally, hooks calls for a classroom that encourages students "to be . . . active participant[s], not . . . passive consumer[s]" (ibid). Both she and Freire strongly assert that in order for students to exit formal education and become productive citizens, those students must "link awareness with practice" (ibid).

Further, hooks claims that in a liberating classroom, all members who participate in that space experience the benefits of a transformative pedagogy. Not only are students empowered, but a citizenship education also provides the opportunity for teachers to "grow . . . and [become] empowered by the process" of engaging pedagogy (21). In an engaged pedagogy, instructors continue to provide avenues for students to feel the "responsibility to contribute" (39), and this can be achieved through purposeful examination of "hot-topic" texts. This is also a way for the classroom to become a space

where both teacher and students "recognize the value of each individual voice" (40). There is a need to allow students to critically examine issues so that they interrogate "biases or reinforce[d] systems of domination," which leads instructors toward an "engaged pedagogy [that] requires [them]. . . to make their teaching practices a site of resistance" (21). It is important that we remember that "no education is politically neutral" (37), so it follows that, in a citizenship education, our pedagogical choices must reflect our goal of fostering critical thinkers and self-reflection. She calls for us to create classrooms that are "a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute" (39). This provides the foundation for a learning space where community is built, where "each individual voice" is valued (40). It is in this way that teachers can make sure "that no student remains invisible in the classroom" (41). A critical education of liberation provides the potential for students to feel that their views are valued, and this is a crucial move for Shor's participatory education.

Teachers who practice citizenship education assist students to identify the various interactions of societal beliefs and ideals. This can be better explained through an examination of Kenneth Burke's work since it explores rhetorical analysis as it applies to the use of language and the motives for its use. Burke, in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, "defines rhetoric as the use of language to form attitudes and influence action" (Bizzell andHerzberg, 1295), and he analyzes the possible ways individuals interact with each other and subsequently group themselves. Put another way, the work "considers the ways in which individuals are at odds with one another, or become identified with groups more or less at odds with one another" (Burke, 22). As students navigate the issues discussed within the classroom space, they have the potential to learn more about

themselves and the place they can fill in society. Teachers also have the opportunity to perpetuate current trends in society – such as class system, political beliefs, etc. – or they can create a learning environment that perpetuates changed attitudes through collaboration and problem-solving, which translates into productive citizenship. One way to do this is to decentralize ownership of the classroom. According to Burke, "[w]here the *control* resides, there resides the *function* of ownership" (33), and this ownership potentially leads to "[p]ossibilities of deception" (34). For Burke, this is how he explores the ways groups identify with each other and the world around them. I wish to extend his discussion to include a pedagogical application that analyzes the relationships between instructor and students. It therefore becomes important for the teacher to share the ownership of the classroom space, to seek ways to build community.

The productive place that conflict might hold in the classroom is described by Erik Juergensmeyer as "a productive heuristic for rhetorical invention, a dialectic experience that improves critical thinking" (79). It provides a way for students "to establish their own voices and places in academic conversations" (ibid). Drawing from Bruffee and Trimbur, Juergensmeyer encourages instructors "to create places . . . where conflict can safely emerge and invite engagement" (82). Through pedagogical practice of embracing conflict, students are afforded the opportunity to "increase their abilities to interact with differing viewpoints" (84), and he further argues that these skills will transfer to student writing, thus composing texts that are thoughtful and fruitful.

Frank Farmer argues for the virtue "of dialogue and critique" (189), and encourages composition teachers to participate in a teaching role that attends to all students without excluding some who feel excluded due to a lack of "knowing" what

others seem to know. He forwards a pedagogical theory influenced by Freire, yet approached through a Bakhtinian lens "so that students and teachers can engage the kind of dialogic inquiry that Freire sees as transformative" (193). Through Bakhtin's anacrisis and superaddressee, Farmer advocates a questioning approach for instruction. He admits the potential problem of "ritual forms of catechism that are hostile to the unpredictability of authentic dialogue" (197), yet he encourages us to continually seek ways of instruction that enhance student autonomy – not reduce it. It is more effective for the dialogue to not seek a solution, but to seek another question. We must seek "to expos[e] contradictions, unmasking cultural codes, revealing the dominant interests that shape contemporary discourse . . . [and] seek to discern the possible in the actual" (202)

As we think about the pedagogical strategies that create opportunities for productive use of conflict within composition classrooms, we can begin to think about specific types of texts that provide the foundation for reflexive dialogue. Graff and Lynch and Lazere have done considerable work that provides us with information for how teaching these types of texts can be productive towards citizenship education. Gerald Graff argues that we can begin to practice a citizenship education that overcomes cultural separatism. We can "acknowledg[e] that culture is a debate rather than a monologue" (15), which leads students toward becoming "something more than passive spectators to their education" (12). Graff's literature background provides the basis for his curriculum choices, but he couples that with an exploration of political agendas within the contextual surroundings of his readings. In fact, he quotes George Orwell by saying that "'no book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude'" (144), and he continues to explore

the fallacy of ignoring the politics behind “the arts [because they] profoundly reflect and influence the political shape of society” (ibid). He cautions teachers to not impose their own “specific ideology on students” (146), because “students are . . . [so] vulnerable to ideological coercion” (ibid). He also projects that when teachers ignore political conflicts, the result is non-productive and “poisonous when they do surface” (148). Teachers can best deal with political conflicts within the classroom space by being “willing to consider certain questions open rather than closed” (149) in order for the students to not feel as though they are coerced by the teacher to project certain views. Although Graff seemingly advocates for a more active instructor role than what Shor or Giroux might recommend, the strength of this pedagogical difference might be the instructor has the opportunity to guide the conversation toward critical thinking when the students are struggling to examine their inner histories. The weakness of this increased involvement, however, is the potential for the open-ended questions to still lead the students in a predisposed direction that is dictated by the instructor, thus the need for the instructor to remain reflective in her approach.

In the same way, Donald Lazere and Dennis Lynch call for composition instructors to “broaden the ideological scope of students’ critical thinking” so that those students can “make their own autonomous judgments on opposing ideological positions” (Lazere, 195). The question is not whether a teacher should bring her own political agenda into the classroom. Rather, the better question is “how should teachers and students together approach, resist, negotiate, affirm, transform, make use of, etc., the political [ideologies] . . . that . . . define the writing classroom and its activities?” (Lynch, 351).

Lynch furthers his argument by calling us to rethink the relationship between rhetoric and politics in a citizenship education. In other words, like Freire, Shor, and hooks, Lynch cautions instructors to critically reflect on their teaching practices in consideration of defining “good citizenship” which leads to a hegemonic view of what “good citizenship” looks like (para. 353). His purpose, then, is to explore “the problem of the relation of rhetoric to politics” (354) and to seek what the pedagogical implications might be. Beginning with Greek Rhetoric and Politics, Lynch explores the roots of citizenship education and a connection with “a political agenda” (359). He explains that within a citizenship educational practice, there can be a tendency to “[overlook] commitments to certain social and political values” (364) in the overall effort to achieve student autonomy. Self-awareness is key toward successful navigation of a citizenship education: instructors must accept “that values not only inform what and how we teach but also condition the very activities we hope to prepare our students to engage in” (367), and in so doing, we can keep from undermining the fabric of what we teach. We can “hold any political belief . . . and still teach or practice rhetoric” (368), we just must do it with a clear “standing of the trade” (ibid). This means that just because the instructor calls for her students to engage in critical analysis and examine hot-topic texts does not necessarily mean the instructor has no personal belief system herself: she just takes care to not impose her values onto her students – she understands the value of rhetorical analysis and works from that foundation.

Likewise, Lazere’s 1992 article “Teaching the Political Conflicts: A Rhetorical Schema” yields an examination of a specific teaching strategy for teaching hot-topic issues. In this article, Lazere claims that there is a need for “the development of critical

civic literacy" (195), but he also acknowledges the potential for unwarranted "indoctrination to the instructor's particular ideology" (ibid), which can actually be a deterrent toward productive critical pedagogy. He draws largely from Graff, and he forwards his schema as a method of resolving the "indoctrination" problem. He divides the schema into "four units of study" for integration "into a writing course" (196). These four units are as follows: Political Semantics, Psychological Blocks to Perceiving Bias, Modes of Biased and Deceptive Rhetoric, and Locating and Evaluating Partisan Sources. Within each of these units, he describes specific analyses for students to practice as they encounter hot-topic texts.

Political Semantics analyzes the problems of subjectivity within a text – visual or alphabetic. Students are also encouraged to look up terms that are commonly used to classify social politics: conservatism, liberalism, radicalism, and so on. Psychological Blocks to Perceiving Bias is a unit that "focuses on the most common psychological blocks to critical thinking that students should watch for" (200). Through this unit, students have the opportunity to reflect on their own "self-evident truths" and how those truths are influenced by their social class, their familial circumstances, the gender, their nationality, etc. (ibid). The unit Modes of Biased and Deceptive Rhetoric encourages students to critically interrogate and to notice "possible biases of . . . [the]scholars" (201) when conducting their own research. This teaches students that "every ideology . . . is predisposed toward its own distinct pattern of rhetoric" (ibid), and students are granted more autonomy as they become emerging scholars who thoughtfully analyze other people's work. Finally, the fourth unit is Locating and Evaluating Partisan Sources. This unit's assignment is an annotated bibliography that students have completed after they

"analyze the rhetorical/semantic patterns accordingly . . . [and] evaluate the source's arguments against opposing ones" (202). This fourth unit also guides students toward composing a more analytical approach to their research paper as they do not "make a final and absolute judgment on which side is right and wrong" but they "make a balanced summary of the strong and weak points made by each of the limited number of sources they have studied" (ibid). The final move in their paper is when they "make – and support – their judgment about which sources have presented the best-reasoned case and the most thorough refutation of the other side's arguments" (ibid). Lazere's article provides for FYC instructors a possible first-step in creating assignments that encourage students to participate in critical analysis of hot-topic texts.

In accordance with what these theorists and scholars have written, I wish to further explore the potential for citizenship education. There is sufficient evidence and discussion surrounding the importance of a critical pedagogy. Freire's work with an education of liberation, provides a foundation for FYC instructors to begin thinking about the necessary instructional move to create critical-thinking analyses. Berlin's and Burke's works with language as it structures society and provides ways people connect is useful for consideration since FYC instructors are daily working with students to gain a sense of the productive use of language. Giroux, Shor, hooks, and others make a clear call for the importance of the classroom space to be a space of community and citizenship, thus becoming a transformative space. There are, however, differing views about how the specific pedagogical practices might look. I wish to specifically examine the practice of teaching politically-charged texts. A politically-charged text is a text that discusses hot-topic issues such as abortion, gender identity issues, religion, and others,

and there is work that still needs to be done to examine and discuss how FYC instructors incorporate hot-topic issues in their pedagogical practices. Specifically, I seek to answer the following questions: Are the issues allowed in discussion? Do instructors steer class discussion away from these hot-topic issues? These are, I believe, productive questions for us to examine in order to further strengthen composition instruction.

CHAPTER II

TEACHING "HOT-TOPIC" TEXTS IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION: A FORMAL STUDY

Education is suffering from narration sickness . . .For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human.
-- Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored and discussed the scholarship that has informed my study. I will now examine and analyze the formal study that I conducted regarding teachers' potential resistance toward teaching "hot-topic" texts. Attention toward classroom resistance is evolving more and more as theorist continue to explore the behaviors and underlying causes for such conflict. Henry Giroux identifies the conflict between educational theory and practice in terms of explaining how traditional and radical Marxism remain in opposition to one another, and therefore impose constraints on reconciliation between theory and practice (*Theory and Resistance*). He calls for instructors to actively practice a pedagogy of "citizenship education" (168) and asserts that a citizenship education must confront assumptions about the who, what, and where of educational decisions, and to acknowledge how traditional literacy practices are identified as control tools that seek to maintain the status quo of the class system in our society. Giroux also asserts that critical literacy is a literacy practice that furthers discussion rather than controls it, and we can be the hub of that pedagogical wheel that

redefines education.

Similarly, Graff lays the foundation for the reasons behind conflict within the realm of academia through a discussion of the ever-changing demographics of the student body and the shifts in world politics and powers (*Beyond the Culture Wars*). Transforming a classroom of conflict into a classroom of community should be the goal of a critical pedagogy, and Graff encourages instructors to take an approach that fosters open, honest dialogue and moves students toward a critical-thinking approach to everything they read. This pedagogy can be described as a space that encourages struggle; it is a pedagogy of pain and transgression that has the potential to yield empowerment for teachers and students alike. There are challenges toward teaching hot-topic texts, and those challenges can begin with teacher resistance. Put another way, this pedagogical approach can be an approach that is resisted by instructors. To help me define what I mean by resistance, I will borrow from Nedra Reynolds' work.

In her work *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*, Reynolds posits that to teach writing is to move through "a set of spatial practices not unlike those we use in moving through the world" (3). In other words, how teachers teach is similar to how those teachers position themselves in the world around them – the place they believe they occupy within the community in which they work. She further argues for us to "discover more about how people learn about boundaries and borders, when they may cross them without penalty" and to apply this to a deeper understanding of "how people learn to . . . interact with texts" (3). I wish to forward her discussion of boundaries and borders to include a discussion of the boundaries that instructors may have that influence their choice of texts from which they teach. While

there can be many reasons for instructional choices, I explore here the possibility of tensions that may exist in the form of internal struggle when instructors encounter politically-charged texts and discussions. The struggle manifests when instructors choose specific texts based on their mental boundaries of what is appropriate for instruction within the classroom space. In other words, reading choices that are made reflect the boundaries that dictate how the students learn and interact with texts, and thus the instructor resists the teaching of particular texts. Therefore, resistance will be used to describe a deliberate choice *not* to teach a certain text or *not* to allow class discussion regarding certain subject matter.

Before continuing with a discussion of how this study came to existence, there is one other thing that needs to be examined, especially in the context of Reynolds' theory of place. Reynolds recalls how "Plato draws attention to the role of *place* in conversations, persuasion, and learning" (1). I contend that an analysis of resistance toward teaching hot-topic texts cannot be complete without acknowledging and describing the place where this specific study occurs. In fact, Reynolds argues that "[t]heories of writing, communication, and literacy . . . should reflect [a] deeper understanding of place" (2), so it appears that we might be able to reconcile the resistance in our classroom spaces by working through the first thing we have in common with our students: the classroom space. In other words, as we continue to move toward a critical pedagogy that seeks to connect students with the instructor and with each other – all with seemingly disparate backgrounds – we can start with "[w]hat we *do* have in common . . . [which] are the places where we meet them . . . [and that is what will] give us common ground" (Reynolds, 4). So since "our habits, speech patterns, style, and values [are

influenced by] geographical locations" (11), I will now describe the location for this study.

The study was conducted at a mid-western, Research University where 23,033 students were enrolled during the academic year of the conducted study. Of those 23,033 students, 66.69% are in-state residents, 25.83% are out-of-state residents, and 7.48% are international students. The ethnicity of the student population is as follows: 75.94% are non-minority and 24.06% declare themselves as minority. The University is housed in a state with approximately 3,850,568 people, and the dominant religious affiliation is Evangelical Protestant with 41.4% adherents. Other memberships include Mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, Muslims, and Jews – in successional order of declared membership. Of the total population, 39.2% do not claim any religious affiliation. In summary, most of the students attending this university have not travelled far from home, they are white middle-class, and they tend to be affiliated with an organized, conservative religion – which increases the potential for resistant reactions toward hot-topic texts from both students and instructors. For this study, these characteristics are applicable only so far as they help to contextualize the setting for the students who travel through the classroom spaces. While this information lies beyond the scope of my study, I suggest that it can be worth studying in the future; however, it is beneficial to acknowledge the influence of place, as Reynolds suggests. We can now proceed with this clearer understanding of the shared spaces the instructors and students occupy.

While there is much work into the theory of critical thinking and analysis and the pedagogical practices that foster those skills, few studies have been conducted that examine the classroom space and the implementation of these pedagogical practices. In

fact, Graff mentions that "[i]t remains to be seen how well the conception will translate into practice, but the principle seems to me sound" (187), and in spite of the date of his work being over ten years old, my current research reading revealed a lack of significant classroom research exploring this type of pedagogy. With this scholarly attention to critical pedagogy, I became focused on my personal teaching practices. I noticed in my personal reflection journal that I expressed discomfort with certain issues that students would introduce into class discussions. I also started thinking more critically about the types of course reading assignments I would assign for students. I began to notice that I did favor texts that more closely reflected my own value system beliefs than those texts that conflicted with my beliefs.

I became more aware, during this time, of other instructors who often commented on how they handled hot-topic issues in course reading assignments. After considerable self-reflection on my reactions to student-initiated discussions the reading assignments I chose, and after noticing a possible pattern of behavior characteristics among these FYC instructors, I conducted a pilot study of informal interviews with peer instructors. The informal interviews would be the result of my purposeful participation in ongoing conversations I happened to overhear. For example, when I would enter a room where two or more instructors were talking about the day's teaching experiences, I would join in and share my own experiences. I would listen for an opportunity to turn the conversation toward teaching or even encountering social-contested issues in their classrooms. I would possibly ask how they handled the situation, or I would ask if they purposefully chose contested texts and which texts they would feel more comfortable discussing with students. These conversations indicated there was a need for a more formal study that

examined how FYC instructors utilized hot-topic texts within the classroom space. Therefore, this chapter describes how an analysis of teaching theory informed the development of a formal survey and personal reflective journal used to determine the specifics of teacher resistance toward political texts as instructional material for critical discussions. To use this as a springboard for potential future studies that positively affect instructional strategies, this study will focus on the following questions: Am I resistant toward teaching certain texts? If so, what is the content and what are the forms of that resistance? Are other teachers resistant toward teaching certain texts? If so, what is the content and what are the forms of that resistance?

Methods

For the study's methodology, I draw from A. Mackey and S. Gass (2005) to construct a Teacher Research approach (using a personal reflection journal and a formal online survey) to study resistance in the classroom space and ascertain if resistance toward teaching politically-charged texts exists, and if it exists, then seek to identify the behaviors of the resistance.

Before I constructed the formal survey, however, I used information from my reflection journal where I recorded data and analyzed it to find patterns or commonalities. The reflective practices from my journal where I identified my concerns within my own first-year composition classroom provided me with data that informed my desire to seek information from colleagues through a pilot study. The pilot study consisted of casual conversations that I purposefully refocused to include discussions of choices for assigned course readings, as well as teacher reactions to any hot-topic discussions in the class. After I realized some recurring patterns, I created an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved, formal online survey.

Using open coding analysis described by Mackey & Gass (2005), I explore the results of my personal reflection as well as the results of the survey data. I also seek instructional strategies that can have the potential to improve the practice of a critical pedagogy; therefore, I draw from Lazere, Graff, and Farmer to identify specific pedagogical strategies that make productive use of engagement with hot-topic texts. I determined that there were specific shared characteristics within the pedagogical choices surrounding reading text assignments for these first-year composition classrooms.

Participants

As an instructor of first-year college composition at a research university, I began my data collecting from personal reflection and journal notes. I have instructed at the college level for five terms and at the public school, secondary level for fifteen years. My choice in texts is largely comprised of texts I enjoy teaching and discussing, but I have found myself engaged in lively class discussion concerning controversial issues. I choose some of the English Department's suggested readings, but many of my class readings come from outside text sources.

The instructors I surveyed consisted of nineteen (19) First-Year-Composition instructors. Their job title was one of three things: Graduate-Teaching-Assistant (GTA), a Visiting Assistant Professor (VAP), or a Lecturer. Their teaching experience ranges from one year to more than 4 years. All of them teach at the same university where I teach. The first question on the survey asked the participants to indicate how long each has been teaching FYC courses (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: How long have you been an FYC instructor?

	1 – 2 years	**2 – 4 years**	**More than 4 yrs**	**No response**
Responses	4	4	8	1

Four of the instructors have been teaching for one to two years, five have been teaching for two to four years, nine have been teaching for more than four years, and one instructor opted to not answer this question.

Participants were asked to indicate what their job title was. They selected from Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), Lecturer, or Visiting Assistant Professor (VAP) job positions who can be assigned FYC teaching assignments at the University (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: What is your title?

	GTA	**Lecturer**	**VAP**	**No response**
Responses	9	1	9	

Of these nineteen respondents, nine are Graduate Teaching Assistants, one is a Lecturer, and nine are Visiting Assistant Professors. Graduate Teaching Assistants are graduate students, either pursuing a Master's degree or a PhD; Lecturers are experienced instructors with a PhD who are hired under a short-term contract, and Visiting Assistant Professors are recent PhD graduates who are hired at the University and given a three-year term contract.

For this study, the gender identity of each of the participants is outside the scope of the present inquiry because the information was not necessary to answer the research questions. I will, however, throughout this analysis identify all participants with the pronoun "she."

Instruments

During this study, I developed a personal reflection log that was used to keep an account of my pedagogical practices in choosing texts. Blakeslee and Fleischer describe

a research journal as a place to "record . . . thoughts and ideas throughout the research process" (11). Additionally, Mackey and Gass explain that diaries or journals are useful instruments for recording a researcher's "internal processes and thoughts" (176) throughout the course of a Qualitative Study. I used the journal to record my lessons for each day with notes in the margin about future changes I would like to make. This journal is a simple collection of small tablet paper that was meant to not be obvious and obtrusive. I kept my journal notes in my file folder that contains my class instruction materials. I also kept a formal reflection journal in a desk drawer in my office. In this journal, I transcribed the notes from class and mark formal reflections as I reflected and processed how a class had progressed.

Additionally, I sought to triangulate my findings by conducting a formal, IRB-approved survey that consisted of guiding questions designed to garner responses that were descriptive of the type of hot-topic texts instructors may or may not employ and the reaction of each instructor toward resulting classroom discussions. I interchangeably used the terms "hot-topic texts" and "politically-charged topics" after defining them as "issues dealing with abortion, religion, gender, etc." (see Question #3 – Appendix 1).

Procedure

For my reflection journal, I compiled my thoughts and ideas about my resistances toward the reading assignments I made. I purposely considered texts of *all* content to determine what my reaction would be toward including those texts in my pedagogical choice for my students. I took note of the choices I made and consciously considered the reasons for those choices. Additionally, I analyzed the type of questions I asked to guide the class discussions to find any influence of personal bias or potential of

"indoctrination" (Lazere, 195). When thoughts and revelations occurred during class, I wrote notes on my copy of the class hand-out while the class was working or discussing to keep track of the mental analysis I was doing while instruction was taking place. To explore outside factors that might influence my reading assignments, I also made short notes to record students' reactions to my choices of texts to analyze and determine if that had any effect on my class texts. Upon returning to my office, I transcribed the notes made during class into a formal reflection journal. I also reflected on my personal reactions, comments, and thoughts during the class and mark additional comments for future pedagogical use. I analyzed the data according to my first two research questions: Am I resistant toward teaching certain texts? If so, what is the content and what are the forms of that resistance? I paid particular attention to my reactions in class and noted any significant patterns or recurring personal behaviors. I also paid attention to the reading assignments I made to determine if I provided texts that had the potential to foster critical interrogation.

I designed my survey through Survey Monkey (see Appendix 1). After obtaining IRB approval for my survey (see Appendix 2), I contacted my FYC colleagues by email via my university's Composition List-Serve (see Appendix 3). In this way, I was able to maintain a uniform data collection of responses that could be easily connected by similarities or themes (Blakesley and Fleischer). When I constructed the survey, I formulated questions that would best help me answer my third and fourth research questions: Are other teachers resistant toward teaching certain texts? If so, what is the content and what are the forms of that resistance? When I examined the collected responses, I grouped the responses according to the length of time each respondent had

been an FYC instructor to see if there were any patterns of relationship in the responses toward teaching hot-topic texts.

I began my analysis by grouping the responses according to the length of time each respondent has been an FYC instructor. Next, I constructed a table for each of the closed-ended questions so I could record the responses in the corresponding column for the length of time taught. I analyzed each of the question responses to find any trends or patterns. Through open coding analysis, I constructed a coding chart to help me organize my analysis of the open-ended responses.

Findings

As I reflected on my personal teaching, I found that I chose texts based largely on my personal biases. I also recorded feeling uncomfortable when students introduced issues that have the tendency to be highly volatile in the culture of this state. Some of these issues included abortion, same-sex marriage, and religious issues (e.g. whether the framers of this country were Bible-believing Christians or not). Since I was not raised in the same region as this University, I was surprised when I realized the students were more easily agitated with some issues than I initially thought they would be. My discomfort was mainly the result of my hesitancy to allow heated discussions that take us too far off-topic. Here is where Reynolds's theory of place is applicable for future research. In any case, as I analyzed the data from my journal, one other finding is I made instructional changes when I realized my biases were skewing the course discussions and readings.

Since the course readings were already published on the course syllabus, I decided to continue with the readings. However, I find that I worked to not impose my personal beliefs on the students, but I let those texts begin to provide a springboard for

discussion opportunities where students can disagree with what is in the text. I encouraged students to analyze texts through an objective lens. In fact, I asked students to look for flaws in the argument of the text and to research opposing views to seek the side that seems to them to be most valid (Lazere, 201). I wanted them to begin to analyze the world they live in and maybe seek ways to alter it (Farmer, 189). When students bring up texts that are in opposition to my personal belief system, I found that I worked to listen respectfully and ask questions to keep the focus on the construction of the argument rather than the content. I worked to keep the focus of the class on the construct of the text and not on the judgment of the values of the text. Therefore, even though I found that my choice of texts is based on personal tastes, I do allow for students to discuss opposing views. I respectfully engage in those conversations to keep the students learning how to analyze a text's construct as a way to model for them how to critically and respectfully engage with discussion about views that differ from what they might hold. My hesitancy to engage with students in hot-topic discussions influenced me to construct the formal survey to ascertain how other instructors reacted in their classrooms.

After I examined the data from the peer instructors, I found the following information in relation to each of the data-gathering questions I designed. The table below reveals the participants' responses to the survey question about whether or not they teach hot-topic texts. Their responses are correlated with their years of experience (see Table 2.3):

Table 2.3: Have you taught hot-topic texts?

	1 – 2 years (4 respondents)	**2 – 4 years (5 respondents)**	**More than 4 years (9 respondents)**	**Unknown (1 respondent)**
Yes	4	4	9	1
No	0	1	0	0

Of the nineteen participants, eighteen of them indicated they have taught hot-topic texts. Four of the four instructors with 1 – 2 years of experience indicated they have taught hot-topic texts; four of the five instructors with 2 – 4 years of experience indicated they have taught hot-topic texts, and one of the five indicated she has not taught hot-topic texts; nine of the nine instructors with more than 4 years of experience indicated they have taught hot-topic texts; and one respondent, who did not indicate the length of time she has taught, indicated she has taught hot-topic texts. This could mean that most FYC instructors do not resist teaching hot-topic texts.

A follow-up question to whether or not the instructors teach hot-topic texts gave the participants the opportunity to indicate how many times during the course of a semester each of them has planned to teach hot-topic texts. Their responses are grouped by the number of years they have taught FYC (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: If you have, how many times during the course of the semester?

	1 – 2 years	**2 – 4 years**	**More than 4 years**	**Unknown**
Only when students initiate	0	0	1	0
Once or twice	3	2	7	1
Regularly plan more than 3	1	2	1	0

These responses indicate most of the instructors indicated plan hot-topic assignments once or twice during the semester: twelve instructors of the eighteen who indicated they plan hot-topic assignments. Four of the instructors stated they plan more than three during the semester, and one instructor engages with hot-topic texts only when students initiate the subject.

Sometimes hot-topic texts or subject matter is not the result of a planned lesson, but rather it emerges as the result of a student-initiated discussion. As a result, I wanted to see what data would emerge from other instructors as they encountered student-initiated discussions regarding hot-topic issues. All nineteen instructors responded to this question, and I grouped their responses according to their years of experience (see Table 2.5).

Table 2.5: How do you react when students introduce discussion topics that are politically-charged (hot-topic)?

	1 – 2 years	2 – 4 years	More than 4 years	Unknown
Change the subject	0	0	1	0
Listen without participating	0	1	0	0
Actively participate	1	2	1	0
Seek to connect to lesson at hand	3	2	7	1

Of the four instructors who have taught for 1 – 2 years, three of them stated they "seek to connect the discussion to the lesson at hand" and one of the four stated she "actively participates" in the hot-topic class discussion. For the five who have 2 – 4 years of experience, their responses indicate two of them "seek to connect to lesson at hand," two "actively participate," and one will "listen without participating." Seven of the instructors who have more than 4 years of experience indicated they "seek to connect to lesson at hand," while one will "actively participate," and one will "change the subject." The one instructor who did not identify the length of time she has taught stated that she will "seek to connect to lesson at hand" when hot-topic discussions arise in her classroom. There may be a slight correlation that can be made here, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Since I struggled with my role during student-initiated hot-topic discussions, I wanted to see what patterns, if any, might emerge among my peer instructors and how they participated in these discussions. I grouped the responses, again, according to the length of time each instructor has FYC teaching experience (see Table 2.6).

Table 2.6: How likely are you to share your opinion during "hot-topic" class discussions?

	1 – 2 years	2 – 4 years	More than 4 years	Unknown
Very likely	0	0	1	0
Somewhat likely	4	3	5	0
Never	0	2	3	1

Four of four the instructors who have 1 – 2 years of experience indicated they are "somewhat likely" to share their opinion during hot-topic class discussion. The five instructors with 2 – 4 years of experience were split between "somewhat likely" and "never." Three of the five indicated that they are "somewhat likely" to share their opinion, and two of the five indicated they will "never" share their opinion. The nine instructors with more than 4 years of FYC teaching experience were divided among all of the response choice. One of the nine indicated she is "very likely" to share her opinion, while five of the nine indicated they are only "somewhat likely" to share, and three of the nine will "never" share their opinion. The single instructor with unknown length of experience indicated she will "never" share her opinion during hot-topic class discussions.

The following question was designed to compare peer instructors' overall goals for class reading assignments. I wanted to see if a common ideal might emerge that could form a foundation to help me forward a pedagogical strategy for teaching hot-topic

texts. All nineteen participants responded to this question and their responses are correlated to their years of FYC teaching experience (see Table 2.7):

Table 2.7: In your opinion, what is the purpose of reading text assignments in FYC classrooms?

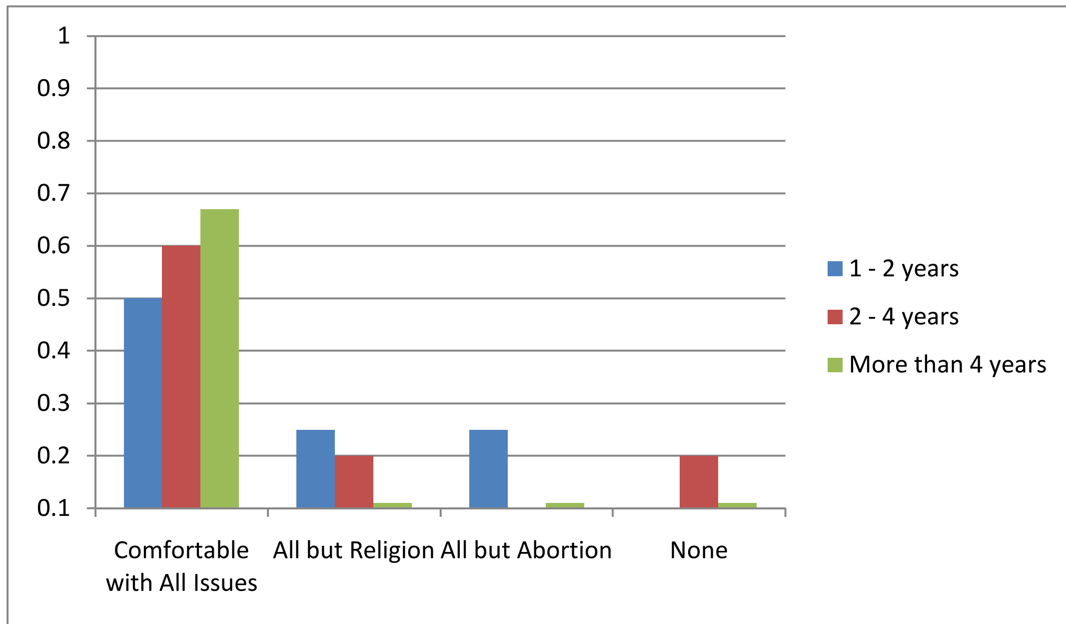
	1 – 2 years	2 – 4 years	More than 4 years	Unknown
Critical-Thinking	2	3 + 1*	4	1
Modeling	1	1	1	0
Scholarly Discipline	0	0	0	0
Other	1	1	4	0

The responses indicate that Critical-Thinking is the most common purpose for class reading assignments. For the four instructors with 1 – 2 years of experience, two stated that Critical-Thinking is the purpose of text assignments, one stated that Modeling is the purpose, and one stated Other: listed as "modeling first and critical-thinking second." For the five instructors with 2 – 4 years of experience, three stated that Critical-Thinking is the purpose, one stated that Modeling is the purpose, and one stated Other as the purpose for reading text assignments; *Other was explained as Critical-Thinking with words of clarification, so 1 more can be added to Critical-Thinking. Of the nine instructors with more than 4 years of FYC experience, four of them stated the purpose for reading text assignments is Critical-Thinking, one stated the purpose is Modeling, and four stated the purpose is Other: two of these instructors stated "All of the Above," and two combined Critical-Thinking and Modeling as of equal top importance.

Participants to the formal survey represented three different lengths of time, and the number of respondents in each category was very different. I chose to translate the numerical data from the coding charts into percentages so that comparison could be more accurate. The responses for each level of experience are color-coded, and the responses

are grouped by similar response. For this analysis, I omitted the participant who did not state a length of time of FYC teaching experience since I am looking for any trends that may occur through the common characteristic of length of time taught. Figure 2.1 depicts the participants' responses to the types of hot-topic issues each of them are comfortable teaching.

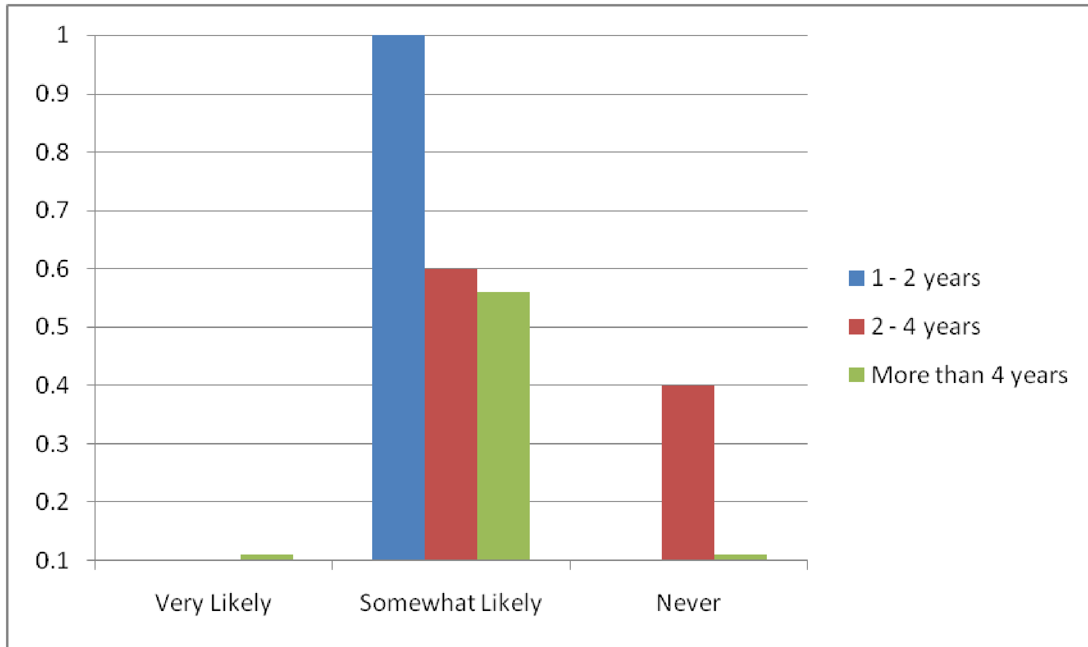
Figure 2.1: List any hot-topic issues you are comfortable teaching



For respondents with more than 4 years of FYC experience, 67% of them are comfortable teaching all issues, 11% are comfortable with all but religion, 11% are comfortable with all but abortion, and 11% are not comfortable with any (this respondent indicated hot-topics are taught only when students initiate the discussion). For respondents with 2 – 4 years of experience, 60% are comfortable with all issues, 20% are comfortable with all but religion, and 20% are comfortable with all but abortion. For respondents with 1 – 2 years of experience, 50% are comfortable with teaching all issues, 25% are comfortable with all except religion, and 25% are comfortable with all except abortion.

Participants were asked to indicate how likely they are to share their opinion during hot-topic class discussions. Their responses are revealed below in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: How likely are you to share your opinion during hot-topic class discussions?

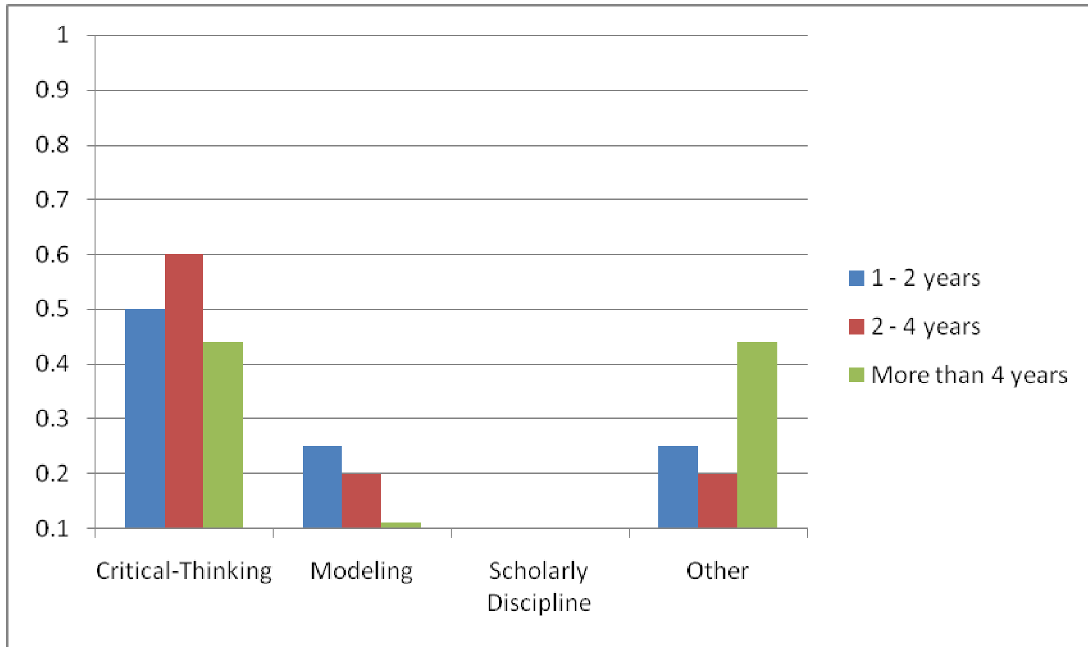


One-hundred percent of participants with 1 – 2 years of experience indicated that they are "somewhat likely" to share their opinions during hot-topic class discussions. Responses from those with 2 – 4 years of experience show that 60% are "somewhat likely" to share their opinion, while 40% will "never" share their opinion. Finally, 33% of participants with more than 4 years of experience indicated that they are "very likely" to share their opinion, 56% of them are "somewhat likely" to share their opinion, and 11% state they will "never" share their opinion. An interesting indication here is that those with more experience seem to feel more confident in sharing their opinion during hot-topic class discussions.

A final comparison I want to make is how the responses about the purpose of reading text assignments compare from group to group. Figure 2.3 shows the percentage

of instructors who chose a particular purpose for reading text assignments in FYC classrooms:

Figure 2.3: In your opinion, what is the purpose of reading text assignments in FYC classrooms?



Of the participants with 1 – 2 years of experience, 50% of them indicated that Critical-Thinking is the purpose for reading text assignments, 25% indicated that Modeling is the purpose, and 25% indicated Other: with Modeling combined with Critical-Thinking. For participants with 2 – 4 years of experience, the data shows that 80% of them identified Critical-Thinking as the purpose for reading assignments (see explanation for Table 2.7, p. 30 of this chapter) and 20% of them identified Modeling and the purpose for reading text assignments. The final point of comparison for this figure is the group of participants with more than 4 years of FYC teaching experience. From this group, 44% indicated that Critical-Thinking is the purpose for reading text assignments, 11% indicated that Modeling is the purpose, and 44% indicated Other as the purpose for these

assignments, with Critical-Thinking still an important component of their constructed combination of Other.

I do not intend for this to be misunderstood as an attempt at a definitive conclusion. I do think, however, it provides sufficient information for a future study involving a larger number of participants in order to more accurately determine a trend that could potentially offer stronger generalization than this small sample's results does. Since the hesitations stated included concerns about social issues that are typically hotly-debated in this region, I also see this trend as potential opportunity to further Reynolds's argument that geographical location influences how we read and write.

Discussion

The findings of this study have revealed significant implications for pedagogical practices. The first finding is that it appears that I am resistant toward choosing certain texts for class assignments. I believe that my resistance is not rigid, however, as I have determined that my ultimate goal for my students is to learn respect for each other's ideas, and I desire for them to be equipped to analyze political texts in such a way as to determine the strength of an argument based on the use of evidence, rather than on preconceived bias. I desire for them to conduct self-examination to find unfounded biases that destroy respectful discourse and thus adjust their convictions to promote positive, productive citizenship. My forms of resistance appear to be solely in my personal choice of texts and not extended toward students who present viewpoints that are different from mine. I do, however, resist class discussions that do not allow for all views to be heard as equally as possible. This means that I will have to intercede at times to redirect a discussion when I see that it has become biased.

Secondly, my own hesitation to critically read and analyze political texts is shared by some peer instructors; this study indicates that other teachers are resistant toward teaching certain reading material. Even though an overwhelming majority of the instructors have taught hot-topic texts, most of them will teach only once or twice during the course of a semester. One instructor believes that teaching politically-charged texts distracts students because of their emotional involvement with the issue. Responses to the survey revealed that eighteen instructors have taught top-topic texts, while one has not. Of the ones who teach hot-topics, eight instructors will plan to examine the texts once or twice during the semester, four regularly plan more than three, and one will examine the texts only when students initiate the issue (See question #5 of Survey – Appendix 1). When students initiate the hot-topic discussion, one instructor will change the subject, one will listen without participating, four actively participate, and eight seek to connect the discussion to the lesson at hand. Most of the instructors will be somewhat likely to share their opinion during hot-topic discussions (seven of them), six will never share their opinion, and one is very likely to share her opinion (See question #7 of Survey – Appendix 1). As to possible resistances toward teaching the hot-topic texts, the findings from the survey indicate that there are specific teacher-resistances.

There were some trends that emerged from my analysis. Regardless of the number of years taught, thirteen of the nineteen participants seek to connect student-initiated hot-topic discussions to the lesson at hand. However, it seems as though the longer an instructor has taught, the more willing she is to engage with the students. For example, nine have taught more than four years, and of those nine, none "listen without participating" in hot-topic class discussion; seven of the nine "seek to connect to the

lesson at hand," and one "actively participates." Another trend is the instructors who have taught for more than four years all have taught hot-topic texts, as well as all of the instructors who have taught for one to two years.

The forms of resistance exhibited in the instructors took different shapes. Two of the instructors stated that they would be comfortable teaching most all of the issues, but they might not teach abortion because of it already being "hashed out." One instructor stated she did not feel comfortable teaching religious issues since "students always know a lot more about Christianity than me," another instructor feels comfortable teaching any issue except for political issues, and one other instructor feels more comfortable teaching controversial texts in Oklahoma than she felt teaching in California. One instructor teaches issues that deal mostly with privilege, and a final instructor stated that she feels more comfortable teaching hot-topic issues in a literature class than she does in FYC.

Survey responses toward identifying the purpose for assigning any reading text within an FYC pedagogy indicate that most (10) of the instructors choose texts that foster critical-thinking and three believe that reading texts provide an opportunity for the instructor to model academic pursuits (See question #9 in Survey – Appendix 1). It is interesting to note that six instructors chose to answer "Other" and identified various combinations of the choices: one stated "Modeling 1st and Critical-Thinking 2nd," another stated "maybe Critical-Thinking without shutting students down," two stated an equal combination of Critical-Thinking and Modeling, and two stated they believed the purpose of reading text assignments in FYC was "All of the Above." Finally, the findings of this study indicate there is an evident trend teachers become more likely to choose to teach hot-topic texts past their first year of teaching.

A significant difference between the pilot study and the formal survey study is that the casual interviews revealed most instructors did not feel comfortable exploring hot-topic texts that might differ from the supposed regional belief system. The survey, on the other hand, indicated that the majority of the instructors (9) are comfortable teaching any politically-charged text issue. Almost half of the instructors (7) are uncomfortable with some or all of the issues of hot-topic texts, and the common issues are topics, as previously stated, that tend to be socially-contested in this region: abortion and religion. Additionally, according to the formal survey data, through question #8 of the survey, the data indicates that some teacher resistance is founded on the boundaries or borders that teachers enter the classroom with – whether those boundaries are region-specific or belief system-specific, the boundaries are clear in the mind of the teacher, and those boundaries may affect how the teacher moves through her society of the classroom. Therefore, I argue that Reynolds' place metaphor and explanation of mental boundaries can be extended to explore the mentally-mapped spaces and boundaries of FYC classrooms and the participants within that space. I also argue that through this analogy of how we move through our society, we can further it to include describing how teachers move and operate within their classrooms.

This formal survey study explored resistance within the classroom – particularly those actions of resistance associated with political texts and the part they play in a pedagogy that fosters critical-thinking and citizenship. When instructors consider the implications of pedagogical practices as they are posited in theoretical discussions amongst scholars such as Freire, Giroux, Graff, hooks, Lazere, and others, then it follows that those instructors must reflect and examine personal practices to ascertain which

practices produce critical thinking and which ones stifle it; which strategies foster a classroom culture that stimulate students to think and discuss critically as productive citizens and which strategies create an atmosphere of resistance and curtails civil discourse. As I examined my personal teaching strategies and discussed strategies with others, my findings indicate that there are strategies worth exploring that create energized discussions and interactions within the classroom space. After further research, I believe that specific strategies can be explored, the academic impact of those strategies researched, and those strategies can be promoted to instructors through instructional training in order to strengthen the spread of a radical pedagogy that encourages constructive citizenship.

Limitations

As I previously discussed, limits of this study include associating pre-conceived notions of teachers and students when they enter the classroom space: their mentally-mapped boundaries and no-go areas. It could be beneficial for a future study to seek a connection between resistant behaviors and the geographic location, and I did not include the variable of gender, which would be another productive extension of the current study. There is also more to be explored about the willingness of instructors to instruct through a specific schema, such as the one outlined by Lazere. Limitations also include the small sample that does not yield enough data for a broad-scope generalization; however, there is enough data to suggest additional work can be done to seek larger number of participants to increase the amount of data, thus gaining enough information to more accurately identify specific trends.

In the future, my goals include obtaining IRB approval for a research study that will examine the possible borders of mentally-mapped spaces that might have an impact on the resistance within the classroom space. I will also explore specific instructional strategies that provide a positive, engaging, and critical educational space that encourages a proactive approach toward *producing* a culture rather than continually reliving it. A potential extension of this study would be to examine student resistance in the classroom space, as well as the pedagogical strategies that would relieve the tension from those students who resist and if once tension were relieved, to what extent the students participated in class discussions that centered around texts of conflict and other modes of critical discourse and analysis: in other words, to make productive use of student resistance.

Conclusion

While I may resist choosing certain texts, I did find that I allow students to discuss openly ideas that may be opposed to mine. I also found that when I incorporated Lazere's strategies for analyzing political texts, my students moved closer to becoming the type of classrooms for which Giroux, Freire, and Graff argue. When my focus became more about valuing each student, I moved closer to creating a "learning process in the classroom that engages everyone" (hooks, 86), and even students who chose to discuss texts that were contrary to my personal biases were respected and became engaged in class activities.

The findings of this study have revealed that while most instructors regularly engage with students in discussing hot-topic texts, there is some teacher resistance within the classroom space toward specific reading texts. While the resistances are varied and not *all* teachers exhibit resistant behaviors, their presence is significant enough to be

considered and analyzed for future consideration in pedagogical trainings. In other words, this means that the classroom use of Lazere's and Farmer's suggested techniques for productive use of conflict need to be further studied in order to provide data that explores the outcomes of those strategies.

The theory behind critical or radical pedagogical approaches is substantive and plentiful, yet there remains a need for detailed accounts and studies of classroom spaces that incorporate this theoretical information into the instructional pedagogy. It is in this way that FYC instructors can begin to reform teaching approaches that merge the theoretical with the practical and assist them to become partners with their students in a literacy practice that furthers discussion rather than controls it (Giroux, 219 - 231). Teachers also become more mindful of their personal biases that shape the classroom and can work to find a balance between the ideological poles that exist with their classrooms (Graff, Lazere).

CHAPTER III

TEACH FROM OUR FEET AND NOT OUR KNEES: ETHICS AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

"Never give up –
Teach to transform –
Not from your knees, but from your feet."
Henry Giroux, CCCC 2013 Featured Speaker

In 1992, Steven Katz wrote an article for College English entitled "The Ethic of Expediency: Classical Rhetoric, Technology, and the Holocaust." In this article, he argues from the standpoint of rhetorical analysis that political writings during the Holocaust purposefully couched the personal nature of exterminating real people. He argues that through technical language, an ethic of expediency became the moving force behind the "'moral basis' of the holocaust" (258). Katz warns against the scientific and technological influences on rhetoric that cause rhetors to embrace "the ethos of objective detachment and truth" (264) which lead to "[p]rogress . . . at any cost" (265). For Katz, the current dilemma is how do composition instructors today contribute (through instruction) "to this ethos by our writing theory, pedagogy, and practice" (271), thus perpetuating an ethic of expediency in our classrooms. This is the real move he is asking us to make: to be purposeful in our pedagogical choices, to call students to question. Since we do not operate in a Platonic universe– as Katz explains "the holocaust casts serious doubt upon this model" (272) – we must account for the unethical nature of man.

We must recognize the ethical character of rhetoric and the role that expediency plays. This, then, is the reason to not only allow politically-charged discussions but to also teach politically-charged texts.

As I see it, there are two things students need: one is the ability to think critically, and two is the ability to participate in dialectic (respectful discourse). I use dialectic here to mean a continuous flow of thoughts, information, and ideas. I n other words, I begin with Plato's definition of the term as it is explored in *Gorgias* when Socrates continually questions Callicles and never allows for an end to the conversation; I next further this definition to include the concept of the "Burkean Parlor" as described by Kenneth Burke where the is continuous flow of conversation as new information continues to be added to the conversation. For my use here, the dialectic is not the pursuit of an idealized Truth; rather it is the reflexive action of seeking new information and adjusting thoughts in light of the new information. Teaching hot-topic texts provides the opportunity for these two things (critical thinking and dialectic) to occur. Additionally, we can provide students the opportunity to grow beyond current societal issues – to learn to question – to interrogate. Based on Katz's argument, I would call us to examine the ways that education has the potential to perpetuate the flaws of the dominant culture where students do not self-interrogate. This is why there is the need to engage with politically-charged texts.

The study in the previous chapter indicates that while most of the surveyed instructors strive to connect hot-topic issues with the current classroom lesson goals, there seems to be hesitancy toward the purposeful introduction of the cultural issues that may prove to be controversial. What I mean here is that the instructors do not necessarily instigate the conversations; they may seek to connect student-initiated conversations, but

most of them do not make an intentional move in their pedagogical practices. For writing instructors to begin to consider the use of hot-topic texts in the FYC classroom, it may be useful for us to consider placing our pedagogical practices within a particular frame. James Berlin begins his article “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class” by calling for us to understand the ideology underlying the rhetoric “in classroom practices today” (477). The three rhetorics he defines are categorized as “cognitive psychology, . . . expressionism, and . . . social-epistemic” (478) and he explains that each rhetoric “occupies a distinct position in its relation to ideology” (ibid). Ideology, as Berlin continues to discuss, “determines what is real and what is illusory, and . . . provides the subject with standards for making ethical and aesthetic decisions” (479). The rhetoric that I am advocating is the social-epistemic rhetoric, which forms the foundation for a critical theory of composition. Further, as Phillip Sipiora argues, “no ideological position can be taken without acknowledging underlying ethical dimensions, and this would include an understanding of how ethics and ideology are energized in the classroom” (41). Taken together, these two discussions yield interesting thought for composition pedagogy. If first we understand the ideology behind our pedagogical choices, then we might be able to be persuaded to consider certain pedagogical strategies. Therefore, in this chapter, I wish to first assess/explore the relationship between language and ethics. I will then discuss how teaching hot-topic texts can provide a foundation for critical thinking and for participation in dialectic– to extend Giroux’s call for FYC instructors to encourage students to critically interrogate their inner selves.

Relationship of Language and Ethics

In "Ethics and Rhetoric: Forging a Moral Language for the English Classroom" (1999), James Kinneavy makes the following claim based on his many years of teaching experience at various educational levels: "Students [do] not have the language and conceptual skills to write about moral issues intheir own chosen major fields. In fact, they did not even have the language or the concepts to talk about such issues" (2). While this seems to discount students' ability to express their thoughts and ideas without the benefit of his instruction, I wish to focus more on the connection between language and ethics. Put another way, from this standpoint, language is the mode through which humans express their ethical convictions. For Kinneavy, it became very important for his students to be skilled at examining and discussing the underlying morals of cultural issues and finding commonalities rather than finding differences. He called this a "Common Social Ethical Language" (13), and he further claimed that "many [students] welcome the possibility of learning" (14) language skills that enable them to critically discuss social issues.

An additional consideration for the role of ethics in language is made by Sipiora in his essay "Ethics and Ideology in the English Classroom." By discussing the roots of rhetorical studies, he draws the conclusion that "[t]here is no question about the critical significance of ethics in ancient education" (40). For him, there is no separating ethics from language since it is through language that students articulate or criticize "patterns, norms, or codes of conduct . . . [that influence] the taking of a stand for or against something on the presumptive ground that it is either good or undesirable" (41). In other words, the nature of language education involves ethic-making decisions. He describes

ethics as a "formal activity [that] also involves the apprising and, sometimes, revising of behavioral codes" (ibid). In other words, the English classroom is a natural place for discussion and examination of issues, and to communicate the thoughts and ideas within a discussion involves using language. Put another way, language becomes a tool for instructors and students alike as they navigate through reading and writing assignments. I would argue here that if language is the tool through which we construct and reconstruct ethical decisions, and if we do not want students to merely regurgitate memorized information, then privileging ethics becomes especially important as we work to be more conscious of the relationship between ethics and language.

Before continuing with our examination of hot-topics as texts to foster critical writing, we must discuss opposition toward this approach. Teaching socially-contested issues in FYC creates areas of concern for many people, as is evidenced by the case at the University of Texas in Austin in 1990. The "Battle of Texas," as it is often-times called, encapsulated a controversy over a new curriculum for the first-year writing program which was designed to "help students to think more deeply about important civic issues and write more reasoned academic arguments" (Skinnell, 145). The class was called E306: Writing about Difference. This first-year writing course was redesigned to reflect wide concern that students were not critically engaging with prior reading assignments, and their writing was not reflecting characteristics of critical inquiry. In order to perhaps provide a foundation for lively examination and discussion, the course syllabus included reading assignments concerned with then-current political and societal issues. After information about the course became public, divisive opinions surfaced. On one hand, proponents for the course believed that students were not equipped to critically examine

diversity and other related topics. On the other hand, those who opposed the course claimed it was an attempt to "replace 'traditional values' with multiculturalist, feminist, non-Western ideas" (Skinnell, 157).

In addition to these views of opposition, Maxine Hairston and others have voiced their concerns for critical pedagogy. In Hairston's1992 College Composition and Communication article, she claims that "writing teachers . . . [must keep] students' writing . . . [at] the center of the course. . . [and they] should stay within [their] area of professional expertise: helping students to learn to write in order to learn, to explore, to communicate, to gain control over their lives" (705). For Hairston, college writing instructors are trained for a specific purpose: they have expert knowledge in their field of composing and reading analysis – not facilitating discussions regarding socially-contested issues. As I understand her argument, she believes that when students gain control over their reading and writing and communication skills, they can then move into critical analysis of social issues: but critical analysis of hot-topic issues happens outside of the composition classroom. She firmly calls for first-year writing courses to provide students with the writing tools they need to be successful in all of their continued academic and professional pursuits.

To my mind, this keeps writing instruction at the basic level – it seems to be perceived as a tool of language. I would like to push against that somewhat and call for us to extend the tool of language toward a pursuit of critical thinking and dialectic. What I mean here is while students do need the necessary writing skills that will help them to be successful in their futures, I have to wonder how students are to be able to, as Hairston says, "gain control over their lives" (ibid) if the writing is not constructed thoughtfully,

critically, and dialectically? I agree that writing is a valuable skill that must be taught to our students, but I cannot help but think that the most effective way to engage students in this activity is to provide a platform through which they can personally connect to the art of writing. I argue that artful writing happens when students are able to effectively use available means for persuasion – to borrow from Aristotle a bit – and that means that, yes, they do know the techniques of good communication, but they also are able to thoughtfully and purposefully use those techniques to provide meaningful and fruitful texts than have the potential to transform their society. Toward this end, I now move to explore how teaching hot-topic texts can provide a foundation for critical thinking – to extend Giroux's call for instructors to encourage students to participate in "a process of critique" (8).

Critical Thinking and Dialectic

To push this a bit further, I draw on Sipiora's claim that since "language is our primary weapon . . . students must engage and challenge inside and outside ideologies" (46). From Berlin we understand that the ways we use language are influenced by the "power relationships" (479) that are "an intrinsic part of ideology" (ibid). Taking ideology in this light indicates that language is a social construct binding people together. I suggest that to increase critical thinking we can ask students to conduct critical reading where they question and search for omissions or contradictions. One example of this is when I assign my FYC students to examine President Lincoln's "Proclamation for Thanksgiving, October 3, 1863" speech. The speech is given during the Civil War, yet in the opening statement Lincoln claims that the past year "has been filled with the blessing of fruitful fields and healthful skies" (Appelbaum, 101). There is significant lack of

reference to the War and emphasis on positive things going on at the time. I encourage students to research the context of this speech to see what was happening during 1863 and discuss Lincoln's purpose and strategies for achieving his purpose. I also encourage them to specifically identify how Lincoln omits talking about the War – which can be a time to develop a conversation about how speakers circumvent "the-elephant-in-the-room," per sea. This provides students the starting point for analysis into their chosen text for their analysis and evaluation. My purpose in this lesson is to encourage students to examine texts critically – even when the speaker is revered by historical account or through present-day media. I want the students to learn to be able to distinguish the ways that preconceived notions or beliefs can be challenged and readjusted in light of added information – which is not necessarily new but can be information not considered before.

This becomes more important to us when we consider composition pedagogy in light of Katz's aforementioned article where he calls for instructors to be aware of how ethos is impacted by pedagogical practices. I see a relationship here with Freire because Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* warned us that education can become a political construct, perpetuating the dominant ideology rather than interrogating it and recognizing shiftings of the ideology in light of new thoughts, ideas, and contexts. In other words, education needs "[t]o surmount the situation of oppression . . . so that through transforming action they [people] can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity" (47). Examining ideology is what Berlin calls for us to consider when we realize that "ideology is a term of great instability . . . [because according to Therborn], no position can lay claim to absolute, timeless truth, because finally all formulations are historically specific, arising out of the material conditions of a

particular time and place" (478). In other words, ideologies are in a state of continual flux, and in order for students to be able to become engaged with examination of course readings, there is a need for them to confront ideological changes that result from changing cultural contexts.

Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics,* describes this as distinguishing between "what we *do* know, and what we *may* know" (24), which means that knowledge can change in light of new or different information of facts or principles. For Katz, then, this is the reason that we must be able to distinguish when deliberative rhetoric becomes "focus[ed] . . . on expediency . . . as a means to an end" (257). Given that rhetoric is the means of persuasion, it seems to follow that we have a responsibility to analyze the role language plays in persuading the audience. I would further argue that we have a responsibility to equip our students with the skills necessary for being able to resist falling victim to a rhetoric that is "taken to extremes" (ibid). Our pedagogy must account for the unethical nature of man; which according to Aristotle is pursuing knowledge through the means of "follow[ing] the impulses of [a man's] passions" or "imperfect self-control" (23). Order and method that leads to the principle of a "Chief Good" for the whole society is what Aristotle would claim to be the foundation for an ethical society. Let me further explain this. Aristotle explains that the greater good of man is best served when a man can consider (his word is "receive") new information and is able to adjust his thinking. He talks about this specific action by referencing Hesiod who clearly claims that a man "is a useless man" (qutd. In Aristotle, 24) if he does not consider opinion or information from another. As Katz points out, though, Aristotle's explanation of ethics is limiting, because it "does not seem to consider other ethics, such as honor and justice . . . in deliberative

discourse – at least not for their own sake" (272). I posit that this is why we must consider language as a tool – as a mode for examination, reflection, and re-structuring the dominant political views and concepts. It follows that to teach language is to teach with a critical mindset.

To better explain this, consider an example from my classroom experience. I use several presidential inaugural speeches (Lincoln, Roosevelt, Kennedy, Reagan, and Obama) and assign them as outside class readings for students. For each speech, students are expected to find specific examples of how each new president works to set the foundation for his new term of office – some during crises of war and some during economic crises. Each man can be working to re-structure the political views of the American public, so students are asked to analyze where that might occur within the speech as well. Words such as "honor" and "justice" can very likely appear in the speeches, so I ask students to mark those and reflect on the rhetorical purpose for the placing of those words in the text. Since one purpose of an inaugural speech is to persuade the American public to operate in unity after the disunity of a dominant two-part election (which can serve to divide the public), these speeches provide bountiful opportunity for students to begin to critically analyze language. I will mention here that using historical speeches – ones from presidents most students do not know – provides the opportunity for all of them to begin their analysis without the potential distraction of divisive issues that may affect their analysis of a current or recent president.

After students have been given the opportunity to conduct analyses without judging the values of the text, I can introduce hot-topic texts for them to conduct the same type of analysis – we focus on the strategies and effectiveness behind the text.

When we purposefully provide hot-topic texts for students to examine and discuss, we provide them the opportunity to grow beyond their current ideals; they question and interrogate hegemonic philosophies and thus are afforded the means to potentially redirect social constructs. Critical theory in compositional studies expects students to actively participate in meaningful and productive ways. Consider Shor's assertion that "[p]eople are naturally curious . . . [and] education can either develop or stifle their inclination to ask why and to learn" (*Empowering*, 12). I maintain that thinking critically involves interaction and engagement with texts that encourage re-evaluation of societal norms and even new ideas or philosophies. For us to think that education must be neutral in order to be effective is to ignore the very social nature of the classroom and to ignore the natural curiosity of our students. Through the English classroom, language is the tool used to complete assignments, and since we have already established the connection between ethics and language, then it follows that no matter what, ethics of some sort is naturally embedded in the composition classroom. It seems that the most productive action is to foster critical thinking and opportunities for reflexive action on present knowledge. In other words, as Shor explains it, instructors need to shift their role from "talk[ing] *at* students [to] talk[ing] *with* them" (85). Instruction that purposefully incorporates hot-topic texts is an opportunity for Shor's "dialogic pedagogy" (ibid) since instructor and students alike are afforded the opportunity to engage with contested issues. He encourages teachers to listen to students to find issues to explore, and this has the opportunity to yield higher student involvement since, the students feel valued. As bell hooks in her book *Teaching to Transgress* describes, when teachers listen to students, they have shown "an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom

dynamic, that everyone contributes . . . to create an open learning community" (8).

Students are not the only ones who benefit from this critical pedagogical approach. Teachers have the opportunity for reflexive thinking as well. Incorporating hot-topic texts in a FYC classroom helps to create what hooks calls "a place where teachers grow" (21): and to my mind, this provides the opportunity for the learning to become a practice in the dialectic. Students can bring varying perspectives about hot-topic issues to class discussion, and the result can be the instructor sees an issue through a different lens than what she previously had used. I remember a class when a student spoke up during discussion about a particular issue. I had thought through my reasons for my stance, and I believed I had completely examined all angles and come to my conclusion: the positive aspects didn't outweigh the negative aspects for me. The student's perspective was not new for me, but his emotional connection was new – I think hearing the emotional breaks in his voice, as he sat next to me in the discussion circle, caused me to take a step back and re-evaluate my own stance. I cannot say that my belief changed, but I can say that I gained an appreciation that day for the opposing view on the issue. I certainly was not comfortable, yet gaining a different insight was an opportunity for reflexive thinking for me. Since engaging with hot-topic texts can be difficult for students as well as instructor, seeking ways to interrogate the issues and their underlying assumptions or argument structures provides the opportunity for all classroom participants to re-examine notions and ideas. This is an opportunity for personal growth as both instructor and students interrogate the issues together.

Kristie Fleckenstein, in *Embodied Literacies: Imageword and a Poetics of Teaching*, explains that effective literacy instruction happens when "our texts . . . blur

across three borders: those demarcating topics, genre, and media" (105). This means that she advocates for a pedagogy that encourages students to examine how they might see themselves changing and evolving in light of new ideas. In other words, she calls for instructors "to teach so that texts are experienced as disruptive" (112), which results in students being able to reposition themselves in new contextual meanings. Put another way, language is a tool that "enables our students to grapple with immersion, emergence, and transformation" (113), and this translates into critical thinking. She also argues in *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action in the Composition Classroom* for the instructors to realize "the kind of literacy pedagogy [they] practice directly affects the kind of citizenship that their students practice" (13), and I wish to extend this to include the pedagogical practice I advocate here. I contend that instructors through their reading assignment choices have a direct impact on the type of citizenship their students will practice.

Privilege Ethics in Critical Pedagogy

When students do not self-interrogate, education has the potential to perpetuate the flaws of the dominant culture; therefore, the acts of citizenship do not change. I further argue that when reading assignments do cause students' social norms to be challenged, their convictions have the potential to be surface-level since it is through close and careful examination, and even through being challenged, that they can begin to tease out the nuances of dominant value-systems. Freire calls this an education of liberation. He further explains that "[l]iberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (79). Therefore, I have found it productive to assign students course readings that encourage them to think of issues

through a different lens than what they have previously used. Peggy McIntosh's essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" is one example of such a reading. For this essay, I encourage students to make their own lists of attitudes or consumer products that assume a hegemonic stance. We also examine Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July" by Frederick Douglas analyze the societal assumptions each of these speeches address. I have to require my students to do a bit of background research in order for them to have a clearer understanding of the context surrounding each of these texts, but that allows for them to begin to question possible societal constraints still being acted out in today's society. My goal is for my students to begin thinking of ways they can transform their society through their acts of citizenship, and these texts – along with others like them – provide the opportunity for these discussions to occur.

Another way to consider the dialectic nature of teaching hot-topic texts is to examine the how students might react toward the texts. Since hot-topic texts are texts rooted in current political and social issues, there is the opportunity for students to be more personally connected to the readings. Gerald Graff claims that "if students remain disaffected from the life of books and intellectual discussion . . . [they will lose] the potential to help them make better sense of their education and their lives" (11). For Graff, ignoring political conflicts leaves students at a disadvantage to fully participate in productive citizenship. This means when instructors teach without productive use of cultural-contested issues their"[s]tudents are expected to join an intellectual community that they see only in disconnected glimpses" (12). This, I argue, contributes toward a loss of critical thinking since students are not given the opportunity to struggle with issues

within a text and analyze them. When students are initially asked to analyze socially-contested issues, they, in my experience, have a difficult time removing themselves from the emotional strings they may have toward the issue; many times because the issue challenges their value or belief system. It has not been uncommon for my students to struggle through how to remain critically analytical without including their opinion about what is "right" or what is "wrong." I have found it productive to continue to push back against their tendency to argue their own opinion and encourage them to search for specific criteria that constitute effective arguments. Based on the criteria, then, they evaluate the issue through a different perspective than what they previously thought they would. In the same way, instructors who struggle with hot-topic issues in their classroom space can adopt an analytical stance toward the structure of the text instead of focusing on the issue within the text. This is another growth opportunity for students and the instructor as they work through the struggle together.

Another consideration of teaching these texts is the potential to increase the emotional interaction with the text and with the classroom participants. Laura Micciche discusses in her article "Emotion, Ethics, and Rhetorical Action" for a validation of emotion's role in rhetoric. Emotion, for many instructors, can be relegated to the side and discounted or "not included . . . as a component of ethical theory and practice" (163). Her contention, however, is for us to accept that "[e]motion is crucial to how people form judgments about what constitutes appropriate action or inaction in a given situation" (169). A few of the participants in the study discussed in chapter 2 stated that their resistance toward teaching hot-topic texts was based on their hesitancy to contend with the emotional responses toward the issues. This can be a hurdle for instructors when

these hot-topic discussions come into the classroom. I remember a student who was emotionally tied to the subject for his paper, and when he was given the opportunity during class discussion to give a "quick overview – no more than 3 minutes long" of his paper, he spoke for about fifteen minutes. Rather than allowing the conversation to move to the next student, I encouraged the class to take this opportunity to examine why emotion was playing such a large role in this young man's argument. I explained that emotion cannot be ignored, rather it needs to be treated productively for the purpose of the paper. My plans for this class discussion to last only one class session, extended into the next session. Students, however, were more engaged with their writing and more willing to explore how emotion affected the stance of each paper. I agree with Micciche when she claims that "questioning assumptions and producing cultural analyses does more than sharpen students' capacity to be critical consumers of the worlds they inhabit. It encourages a resistant affective stance to the way things are" (177), and that is what I am arguing for: a pedagogy that stimulates constructive dialectic that translates to productive citizenship. Since our students are already daily potentially exposed to "political speeches, news and entertainment media, . . and other realms of public discourse" (Lazere, 197), I contend that students will participate more thoughtfully in their analyses when there is some element of emotional connection.

Berthoff, in her 1984 article "Is Teaching Still Possible?: Writing, Meaning, and Higher Order Reasoning," argues for a pedagogy "that views reading and writing as interpretation and the making of meaning" (309). Through her discussion of Piaget's cognitive theory, she argues for compositional studies to recognize that students think abstractly (imaginatively) before they think concretely. She claims the following:

> [We], the learner[s are] integral to the process of making meaning . . . by naming the world, we hold images in mind; we remember; we can return to our experience and reflect on it. In reflecting, we can change, we can transform, we can envisage. Language thus becomes the very type of social activity by which we might move towards changing our lives. . . Language recreates us as historical beings. (318)

She continues to explain that “language and learning . . . are in a dialectical relationship which we must learn to construe and represent so that it is accessible to our students” (319). It follows that through the teaching of hot-topic texts, instructors are able to encourage dialectical interchanges within the classroom space. In other words, language has become the tool for learning – it has become a discourse of rhetoric. This, then, calls us back to rhetoric’s roots since according to Isocrates and Aristotle, becoming skilled with rhetoric was foundational for productive education of the citizens. This is where language as a tool becomes an avenue for critical thinking and dialectic. Berthoff’s argument is useful here because she moves writing from its concrete practice to a reflexive action with the abstract notions underneath, which is a dialectic move that can be beneficial for a citizenship education.

I can appreciate others’ concerns regarding teaching contested issues. Admittedly, there is the chance that an instructor will seize the opportunity to indoctrinate her students. In fact, Graff discusses how “students are the most vulnerable to ideological coercion” (146), and how it is “unhealthy . . . [when] students . . . feel under pressure to accede to the professor’s politics” (ibid). However, he further states that when we refuse “to confront political conflicts head-on . . . [we] only [make] them more poisonous when they do surface” (148). What I would like to see happen is a way to merge Hairston’s claims with my understanding of critical pedagogy. How does an

instructor help students explore, communicate, and gain control over their lives if the course readings do not foster critical thinking? I argue that to teach critical thinking an instructor must facilitate open discussion of texts that challenge societal norms. The important move for the instructor, however, is to practice deliberate self-monitoring so that the class discussion does not become a forum for the instructor's personal political beliefs – the class, in other words, would not become characterized by authoritarianism. I call for a critical pedagogy, but that does not mean I am advocating a teacher's right to promote a specific platform. Rather, I call for a pedagogical approach that fosters critical awareness – and that does not necessarily mean personal convictions need to be changed; they are, however, critically examined and evaluated; they may be adjusted, clarified, or left alone, but nothing is done through a passive acceptance. To my mind, critical pedagogy calls for instructors to allow students their personal views and convictions in light of critical interrogation. One example of what I mean here is through the reading assignments I assign my students. Consider the module I previously discussed where students read selected presidential speeches. The readings consist of three inaugural addresses from past presidents and one from the current president. The texts are from varying points in our history, but I choose ones that the current president may have either cited or referenced. This could be an opportunity for me to try to indoctrinate my students if I were to give them all speeches from a president of whom I was extremely fond and wanted them to see him in the same ways I see him. Since, however, we conduct a rhetorical analysis on each and look equally at each one to find places where deliberate omissions were made or specific metaphors were used to persuade the American public or other purposeful rhetorical moves were purposefully employed, the

opportunity for indoctrination becomes very small as each speech is treated in the same manner toward the same goal. This provides the foundation from which we can next move to other texts and conduct critical interrogation of those texts.

I see language as a tool for meaning-making that moves beyond merely asking students to "do the very best they can;" as a result, I call for a pedagogy that moves from what Berthoff calls "a pedagogy of exhortation" (310) toward Freire's "'Problem-posing' education [that] respond[s] to the essence of consciousness [or] intentionality" (79).   In this way, the decision to purposefully incorporate hot-topic texts in a critical pedagogy has become an ethical decision. This means that education is the place where students are provided the opportunity to learn ways they can transform their society – the place where the classroom becomes what I have called earlier a transformational space. In this light, I wish to offer a heuristic to move teachers past the above-stated pitfalls of teaching culturally-contested topics.

As Donald Lazere has discussed in his article "Teaching the Political Conflicts: A Rhetorical Schema," he identifies four distinct units for teaching political conflicts: Political Semantics, Psychological Blocks to Perceiving Bias, Modes of Biased and Deceptive Rhetoric, and Locating and Evaluating Partisan Sources. It is through these units that he guides his students to "develop a more complex and comprehensive rhetorical understanding of political events and ideologies" (197). I adapt Lazere's schema by using some of the same principles he introduces and adjusting the modes of analysis a bit to build on the underpinning skills of previous lesson in my FYC. Another consideration to examine politically-charges texts I use is influenced by Kinneavy. He identifies four cornerstones of morality and claims they provide the foundation for a

common social ethic umbrella where “many quite diverse groups can be gathered” (5). He further asserts that teachers are able to take a neutral stand when they adopt a “common language based on respect for the rights of all to life, family integrity, property, and truth” (17). This approach also “enables students with different moral codes to talk to one another” (ibid). For us to participate actively in rhetorical analysis, we can place the contested issues under a lens of discovering and developing.

From these two scholars’ works, I offer the following heuristic toward teaching hot-topic texts. I present five specific questions the instructor and the students can ask themselves when examining politically-charged texts. First, what are three facts about the societal/political/cultural context? I want my students to carefully consider the influences surrounding the hot-topic text: discussions in the media, discussions in the courts or legal system, and etc. Second, what assumptions about the audience are being made by the speaker/writer (i.e. the Toulmin warrant)? I desire for my students to think critically about the audience – how far-reaching or narrowly-scoped it might be. I also want them to think about how the speaker or writer pays attention to the values of the audience. Without this understanding, I contend, the use of metaphors goes largely misinterpreted. Third, what, if any, basic human rights are ignored? This is the point where we recall from previous class discussion the list we have constructed of what we believe are basic human rights. It is interesting that to this point, the lists have been extremely similar: the right to live where I want, the right to have the kind of family I want, the right to believe or not believe in religious philosophy. There are variations in how these have been expressed, but the meaning has been the same. The fourth question is, what part does my personal value system play in my evaluation of this text? Here is

where I really push students to conduct critical interrogation into their inner histories and flesh out their personal biases. I want them to be able to articulate their beliefs and to be able to determine if and when they might impose those beliefs on someone else, thus reducing one of that person's "basic human rights" from our class list. And fifth, how do I see my position about this issue changing/evolving/developing as a result of reading this text? This final question is a crucial move for students to make. This has never been something that was achieved easily – most students struggle with acknowledging change because they feel it negates their prior notions. This is a good opportunity for a conversation about the true nature of the dialectic as through its practice, personal growth is characterized by the ability to change in light of new thoughts and ideas. It is my conviction that providing language tools for our students to be able to critically engage with hot-topic texts will prove a more fruitful pursuit than ignoring the issues altogether.

Analyzing hot-topic texts can provide evidence of good thinking. Teaching hot-topic texts can also provide the opportunity for us to be the models for our students to learn from in how to interact with the texts and with each other. In this way, we can be teachers who "represent a starting point for any theory of citizenship education" (Giroux 194). If we truly believe that good thinking precedes good writing, and if we truly believe that when students feel connected to or have a vested interest in reading assignments they will engage more readily in critical thinking than if there is no questioning, then it follows that choices in our reading assignments in FYC courses must initiate with us as we choose to listen to students. If we believe these things, then it may be safe to conjecture that we have a set of core values to propel an action of instruction. In other words, we have a code of ethics from which we operate. I, therefore, posit that if

we truly desire for our students “to critically interrogate their inner histories and experiences” (Giroux, 150) by vigorously examining preconceived ideologies in light of new contextual places, then we have an ethical responsibility in FYC courses to teach from our feet and not from our knees.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Survey Questions (to be conducted online through Survey Monkey)

1. How long have you been an FYC instructor?
   1 – 2 yrs. 2 – 4 yrs. More than 4 yrs.

2. What is your title?
   GTA Lecturer VAP

3. How do you react when students introduce discussion topics that are politically-charged (sometimes called "hot-topic" texts: i.e. issues dealing with abortion, religion, gender, etc.)?

   Change the subject Listen without participating Actively participate Seek to connect to lesson at hand

4. Have you taught politically-charged texts? Yes No

5. If "yes" to the above question, how often during the course of a semester do you teach politically-charged texts?
   Only when students initiate Once or twice I regularly plan more than 3

6. If "no" to question #4, please explain the reason you **do not** teach politically-charged texts:

7. How likely are you to share your opinion during "hot-topic" class discussions?
   Very likely Somewhat likely Never

8. Please list any "hot-topic" issues that you are comfortable teaching (i.e. religious issues, gender issues, political issues, value-system issues, etc., or None):

9. In your opinion, what is the purpose of reading text assignments in FYC classrooms?
   Critical-thinking Modeling Scholarly Discipline Other

10. If you chose "other" please explain:

Appendix 2: IRB Approval Notice

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, April 09, 2014
IRB Application No AS 1439
Proposal Title: Forms of Resistance within the Classroom Space Teaching Politically-Charged Texts
Reviewed and Exempt
Processed as:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 4/8/2017

Principal Investigator(s): Jeaneen S. Canfield, 1919 Elks Rd, Seminole, OK 74868
Lynn C. Lewis, 4112 Annalane Dr., Norman, OK 73072

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.
Ill The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.
As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:
1.Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms
2.Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3.Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4.Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.
Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact
Dawnett Watkins 219 Cordell North
(phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board
Begin typing , pasting, or inserting the rest of your appendices here.

Appendix 3: Email script for the First-Year Composition Listserve of Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.

Dear FYC instructors at OSU, Stillwater, OK:

My name is Jeaneen Canfield, and I am an MA student in Composition/Rhetoric at OSU. I'm in the process of collecting research data for a chapter in my Master's thesis, and I would like to request your participation in a short, online survey.

I am researching the resistance that may or may not exist in regards to teaching politically-charged texts (sometimes referred to "hot-topics"). Your responses will help me to determine the extent, if any, of occurring resistance. I am very interested in your input.

Below, you will see the survey link. The survey is anonymous and only takes about 10 – 15 minutes. Attached, please find a PDF version of the Informed Consent Form with IRB approval stamp.

Please be aware that the window for participating in the survey is open until April 20, 2014. I very much appreciate your time.

Much Appreciation,

Jeaneen Canfield
MA Composition/Rhetoric

Click NEXT to participate in survey

VITA

Jeaneen S. Canfield

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: RESISTANCE WITHIN THE CLASSROOM SPACE: TEACHING CONTESTED TEXTS AS SOCIAL ACTION

Major Field: English

Biographical: 1919 Elks Road, Seminole, OK 74868. 405-744-1989 (work)

Education:

Oklahoma State University **December 2014**

- Master of Arts in Composition and Rhetoric
- Major academic courses highlights: Composition Theory & Pedagogy, Seminar in Style & Editing, Theory and Pedagogy of Multimodal Composition, Professional Writing and Pedagogy, History of Rhetoric, Studies in Visual Rhetoric & Design

Cameron University **January 2011 – June 2012**

- Master of Science in Educational Leadership

Cameron University **August 1996 – May 1999**

- Bachelor of Arts in English

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in English at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2014.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in English at Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma in 1999.

Experience:

English Department, Oklahoma State University **August 2012 - Present**

- Graduate Teaching Assistant and Instructor of Record for First-Year Composition I and II

Writing Center, Oklahoma State University **August 2012 – December 2012**

- Writing Center Consultant/Tutor

Professional Memberships:

Rhetoric Society of America (RSA)
Student Chapter of RSA, Oklahoma State University
National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
English Graduate Studies Association (EGSA), Oklahoma State University