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I, TOO, HAVE A RACE: THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNEY OF A  
TEACHER CONFRONTING HERSELF AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE  
COLLEGE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

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I, TOO, HAVE A RACE: THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNEY OF A  
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COLLEGE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP  
AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY

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## **Abstract**

This study addresses the research question “How might an autoethnographic exploration of my own perceived Whiteness inform how I approach the phenomenon of racism in my teaching of university composition students?”

It grew from the trends I noticed in the classroom into exercises and essays I assigned to students, and finally, their and my responses to those exercises. I found it necessary to first confront my own identity and where my attitudes came from. What I realized is that I held undiscovered biases. Uncovering and acknowledging those biases and discussing them with others helped me grow as a teacher interested in social justice issues.

I believe that if other teachers look at their own lives and classrooms in terms of hegemony, power and emancipatory education that a greater understanding can occur. A large part of my function in the classroom is to raise awareness of social justice issues and help structure vocabulary. Implications of the study include a hope that this experience has made me a better teacher, that my composition students will benefit from my new perspective and that other people I interact with professionally may find a resource to aid in their own journey towards social justice.



## **Chapter One**

### **Research Question**

*How might an autoethnographic exploration of my own perceived Whiteness inform how I approach the phenomenon of racism in my teaching of university composition students?*

### **Background**

The section outlines the journey that led me to select my research question and why I choose to study social issues in the college composition classroom. My experiences in learning and teaching about social issues have led to richer discussions in class, better and more reflective writing in student work, and for me, an understanding of my own place and privilege in society in relation to others as well as an empowerment to take action regarding social ills. For these reasons, I wished to formally study the phenomenon of confronting societal issues in the English composition classroom using the autoethnography, as outlined by Chang in her 2008 book, *Autoethnography as Method*.

During the 2008 fall term at my university, I taught as a graduate teaching assistant in the English department. This was nothing new for me; I have taught freshman composition I and II classes for several years. I enjoy teaching these courses and create curriculum depending on the needs and interests of my students. However, this was my first time teaching English at the research university in the state, and my students and I did not have a shared

background and other than race, found few things in common. The following is an unedited excerpt from my teaching journal from that semester:

In my current teaching situation, I have two classes that meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays. One class meets from 9-10:15 a.m., and the other from 10:30 until 11:45. While the classes meet back to back and have me as an instructor, the similarities seem to end there. My 10:30 class contains students from varying backgrounds, ethnicities and locations and socio-economic statuses. My 9 am class, however, seems to be homogeneous in nature, comprised entirely of Caucasian 18 year olds of similar locations and social standing. It is this class about which I feel anxiety. Our curriculum centers around four essays and class participation and attendance. The first essay is an exercise in reading and reflecting on scholarly discourse- articles pulled by Kozol, Anyon, Tannen, Barber and Mantsios on social class, hidden curriculums and literacy. This is standard curriculum, though I also insert a part from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The second is a language narrative, written in first person, regarding the student's personal experience with language and power. The third is a persuasive paper covering either propaganda or satire and the final is an essay wherein the student does a discourse community analysis. The student is to find a discourse community such as the 11:30 p.m. coffee crowd at Starbucks, the campus GLBT group, a mosque, an online gaming community or something like that and investigate membership into that group, language and customs and the effects and analysis of how this community affects the world around it. The last three essays are multi-modal if the student so chooses. Topics are self chosen and discussions are usually facilitated either in small or large groups.

As a constructivist, radical educator grounded in the teachings of Freire and Vygotsky, I make every attempt to reveal my hidden curriculum, facilitate rather than dictate and keep a positive, student-centered learning environment conducive to diversity and acceptance. I have always done so. This effort has been unchanging in all of my educational experience.

However, my 9 a.m. class seems resistant to the heterogeneity of the world. In my teaching journal I have observed the racism inherent in this class. I wonder if I haven't allowed my students to go too far. They asked me to explain to them why segregation in schools and in society is a bad thing. Several in their essays have asserted that the world works for them the way it is- the cards are stacked in their favor and they like it that way.

When this came to light, I was floored at my personal reaction. Revulsion and anxiety. Fear that White racist attitudes might flourish in the English classroom. “Stop them!” my brain shouted. “Don’t let them think they’re better than everyone else or that it’s ok to take advantage of others.” To do that, I would have to lay down the law. I would have to suppress their expressions of opinion, ill-reasoned as they are. As difficult as it is, I must respect opinions other than my own and the right of people to hold them. My world view says that students learn best through their own experiences and reasonings. I might be able to model to a certain extent, but until they experience it for themselves, my students may never internalize the need for diversity. It is an interpretive/constructivist view. I answered my class this way: I cannot tell you why racism and segregation are bad. That is your job.

Suddenly I was flooded with memories of teaching in the prison system, which is the job I left to return to graduate school. My students there were mostly minorities who didn’t necessarily want to be in a classroom at all. The system requires them to attempt a GED. I reviewed my writings from that time as well. I see many similarities between my students at Coyote Ridge and those I teach now. I see fear of authority and an unwillingness to look at the world from a viewpoint that isn’t ones own. I see a suspicion of scholarly intellectualism. They also made me question myself and my place as an educator. Finally, I see an excuse made for me- I’m a White woman who probably doesn’t appear judgmental. In the prison, I also found examples relevant to African American males in the writings of Langston Hughes, Tupac Shakur, Frederick Douglass and even Walt Whitman. After all, I have a degree in English with a minor in African American Literature. For my current students, we may have to become more inventive.

I did not know what to do. I felt uncomfortable. I didn’t want these issues in my classroom because I not only had not investigated racism- conscious or unconscious- in my own life but I didn’t want to be the one who had to, among other educational objectives, also somehow show students that their perceptions of themselves as not privileged, as non-participants in a system of institutionalized oppression and as active members of a cycle of dominant ideology that requires the subjugation and dehumanization of others.

I wasn't even sure that I was not complicit with institutionalized racism and even what some of these terms meant.

However, with the relatively small class sizes in the English department at the institution – there were just 19 allowed in my courses- and my own background knowledge, education and experience as a teacher interested in issues of equity and social justice, I seemed to be the one to confront these issues. I began doing research and consulting with colleagues in earnest.

The next semester, in conference with an experienced adjunct in the English department, I created a curriculum around film evaluation. While meeting curricular objectives relating to writing evaluation arguments, this unit played to my own strengths and background. I took a graduate film course and developed the curriculum based on that class. The results were interesting, with both positive and negative results. In some cases, students made startling discoveries about themselves. In others, they rejected the idea of White privilege and open opposed the classroom discussion. While it made me angry to see such what appeared to be a panicked attempt to restore social order on the part of my student, I did not shut her down in the classroom. My strong, if silent, reactions surprised me too. In Appendix A, I have included the film unit, including lesson plans and assignments.

That is what happened at the large university. Next I will discuss what I have planned and implemented for the Composition I and II classes at the small regional university where I currently teach.

## **Composition II**

In the Composition II class we write three essays. The first is a definition essay, wherein students select a word and investigate its history, current use, examples, counter examples and problems associated with the use of language in general. The third unit is a researched biography, written in multiple genres, and presented in the class as the capstone of the course.

It is the second essay which is of interest to my study. The unit, which is flexible and can last from four to five weeks, offers students the opportunity to learn film terms and elements, history and some of the practical considerations when making a feature film. We as a class view an entire movie and several film clips as students self-select the film they wish to evaluate. During the course of this essay, the issues of race, gender, religion and discrimination become problematized as part of curriculum. Students are required to select a film from the categories of racism, gender or religious discrimination. The heretofore hidden agenda becomes explicit. At the conclusion of the unit, students each give a short presentation on their film, exposing students to a wide variety of films related to the three general categories and to several issues and perspectives which are open for debate among students.

To select films, students compose a list of movies they recommend or might find interesting for the evaluation essay. We begin as a big group making a list on the board, with films listed under the three categories. This will be important to keep track of in the data collection phase of the study. The

majority of students take the category of racism, with gender discrimination next and religious discrimination as the least popular category. I am not certain why. Perhaps students are more comfortable discussing race, perhaps I speak of racism and White privilege the most, perhaps there are just more films out there dealing with racial issues. I have thus far not asked my students their reasons for selecting films, though this will come up in the investigation.

During the course of the unit, I show a full-length film. *Smoke Signals* (1998) is the one I used the last two times I have taught the unit. Additionally, we view clips from *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), which discusses the school shooting at Columbine High School in April of 1999 and includes a section on the history of slavery and racism in the United States. Another film I present if I have time is *A Day Without A Mexican* (2004), a documentary-style of what might happen in the state of California if all persons of Hispanic heritage were to disappear. We also view clips from Margaret Atwell's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990), a post-apocalyptic tale of sexual discrimination and oppression, and of *Superfly* (1972), the story of a light-skinned African-American drug dealer who wants to do one last deal to make a million dollars and then get out of the drug trade. In *Superfly* (1972), the music of Curtis Mayfield is featured prominently and becomes part of the discussion of the importance of film elements. I also pull in Youtube clips from popular culture in order to both illustrate concepts and interest students in the materials presented. The lesson plans and assignments are attached as Appendix A.

As we work through the unit, I also encourage students to investigate current articles related to the topic at hand. At the end of the unit, during the presentations, students have often presented powerful multi-media pieces to augment their papers and this has opened doors to discussion of racism, White identity and discrimination in general.

### **Composition I**

In my Composition I classes, I ask for several essays, two of which seem to have an effect in developing student voices. The small four-year university where I currently teach has a student population comprised mainly of White students, Native American students, some Latino students and a few students who are African-American. Last semester, both of my African-American students played either for the football team or the basketball team. My Latina students, with only one exception, played soccer. My other athletes, who played volleyball, baseball and golf, were all White. There is nothing shocking about that to me, but I realized that for many students of color, sports are the way to an education and indeed, the majority of these students took their coursework seriously.

I worked closely with the head basketball coach and tutored his player after classes several times to ensure that he understood the assignments and completed his work up to standard and on time. The coach, the first African-American head coach (of any sport) at the university, even volunteered to visit my classes so the students and I could interview him and the class could take notes on interview techniques. This was well received on the parts of the

students, several of whom chose to write an essay including quotes from the coach.

I prefer in my classes to use literature from minority voices. One of those essays is Lars Eighner's "On Dumpster Diving" (Eighner, 1991). Eighner writes of his experiences living on the streets of Los Angeles with his dog, Lisbeth, and finding his meals, clothing, books and electronics from trash bins. Though I do not mention this until the end, Eighner was left homeless at the age of 18 when he told his parents that he is gay. In this exercise, the students read and discuss his essay and the surprises they find; what is distasteful and whether or not they might be able or willing to live as he had done. We discuss his high level of language. At the end of the discussion, we talk about respect. Most of my students find respect for Eighner. Others offer pity or revulsion. To make this essay more realistic, the students and I take class time to go dumpster diving ourselves. On this day, they brought gloves and boots, and I did not require anyone to touch anything they didn't want to. I mapped out a route in advance. We were careful to leave things as undisturbed as possible and stopped along the way to write about the experience. At the beginning of the trek, students trailed behind me, groaning. "This is so gross!", "I hope we don't get caught!", "What if my friends see us?", and other general murmurs. I invited the basketball coach as well, just to help chaperone. As a group, we talked that day about homelessness and how children suffer the most, about how to practically live out of a dumpster and how wasteful we are as Americans and what we can do about it.



This semester, as in previous ones, we focus on a rhetorical analysis essay. I usually use work from Sherman Alexie, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, Frederick Douglass, the Westboro Baptist Church, speeches by Presidents Nixon and Clinton and the text of President Obama's Inaugural Address.

I have often wondered what effect these exercises have on student work, on student attitudes and perceptions and on me as a teacher who is interested in creating a greater democratic society. What can I learn from these experiences as an English teacher and scholar? What can others learn? My head swims at the overwhelming possibilities. Where do I even begin?

### **Need for the Study**

I am not the only White teacher in the public education system and I am certainly not the first to question my place of privilege in society and how I might use this in order to assist others. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 82% of the more than 306,000 teachers in California alone identify their race as White. bell hooks, race and critical pedagogist and a Distinguished Professor in Residence at Berea College, has held positions at Yale, Oberlin College and City College of New York. She asserts that if possible, Black students should be taught by Black teachers (1994, 2003). Until such time as there are enough teachers of color, those belonging to the dominant ideology- Caucasians and hopefully myself included- will have to fill the void. Those who teach often ignore issues of race, discrimination and oppression, possibly out of ignorance, fear or an unwillingness to confront

issues or the general discomfort of making mistakes along the way (Tolchuk, 2010; hooks, 1994, 2003).

The English and Language Arts classrooms are a convenient and opportune place in which to discuss issues of race, White privilege and discrimination. The topics come up in student writings and in the readings I assign for discussion and reflection. Secondary school students are not tested over these topics and right or wrong, they do not contribute to the end of instruction examinations. However, they can and should be incorporated effectively in the classroom for the betterment of all, including the teacher. Freire (1987), hooks (1994), Shor (1996), Tolchuk (2010), and Giroux (1993) all espouse that honest inquiry into the world as it is and a discussion of how our democratic ideals might be carried out in the self and in greater society can contribute to emancipatory education. If we can do good, does it not then become our responsibility?

There is concern as to the appropriateness of inquiry into societal discourse. Do not other concerns such as bullying, growing class sizes and the de-skilling of teachers in the United States take precedence over an old issue, namely racism and White privilege? Would a more apt topic be found in issues of special education, multiculturalism, the impact of No Child Left Behind and the testing environment, burgeoning class sizes and shrinking teacher pay all demand attention from researchers and scholars. I choose to research and write on this topic because this is where I find myself, in my classroom and in the interests of my students. I must begin with the self and work from there, hence

the autoethnographic nature of this dissertation. It is my beginning point. Just as I was asked to explicate my own experiences in my first graduate course and work forward, I will attempt to do so here. There are none who walk through the doors of an educational institution who are not affected by issues of discrimination, race and identity, even so many years after the Civil Rights Amendment of 1964 (Freire, 1987; hooks, 1994, Freire, 1987, and Giroux, 1993).

Who then might benefit from this research? Those who wish to learn about race and class differences, color-blindness, stereotypes and teachers who feel uncomfortable performing a rigorous self-examination and teaching honestly about societal ills may be interested in this study. Perhaps if teachers were willing to confront their own biases, fears and experiences, learn from those mistakes and to begin disrupting hegemonic practices, there might be less bullying of both students and teachers alike.

### **Research Question and Research Design**

*How might an autoethnographic exploration of my own Whiteness inform how I approach the phenomenon of racism in my teaching of university composition students?*

To address this question, I embarked on a personal and academic journey. I elected to undertake an autoethnographic approach to gather and analyze data. This methodology relies on personal memory data and artifacts already in existence prior to the inception of the research question. There are two types of data generated for analysis. First is a focused memoir discussing

my personal experiences with racism, White privilege and discrimination, my educational endeavors and post-secondary education and my time spent teaching in the correctional system, ending with my current activities as an activist. The second dataset will be my teaching reflection for the current semester, focusing on what I observe in the classroom, in my institution and the reactions I have to student work when prompted to address these issues. This second set of data will be rendered and added as the last part of the autoethnography. Since I am dealing exclusively with my own work, and none of my students will be interviewed, none of their work will be used as artifacts, and their identities not discussed beyond a composite or caricature with no identifying characteristics, institutional review board approval is not necessary.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Introduction**

This chapter seeks to discuss key terms in both teaching composition and in social justice, a review of current thought in the field of language arts education as well as a theoretical basis and critical lens for this study.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Conscientization*: In the foreword to Paulo Freire's (1987) "Literacy: Reading the Word and the World", Ann Berthoff discusses the concept of *conscientização*, or conscientization, asserting that "teaching and learning are dialogic in character, and dialogic action depends on the awareness of oneself as knower", referring to this concept as critical consciousness (p. xiii).

A search of the University of Oklahoma's library archives turned up 3,716 articles with the word conscientization in it, and likewise, a keyword search containing only this word generated 567 articles on March 2, 2011.

In chapter two of Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (2000), he discusses the banking system of education, wherein the student is seen as static and not a participant of the world, but rather simply existing within it. Educators are much like bank tellers, making knowledge-deposits into the brains of the students. This paternalistic view is the opposite of critical consciousness, which Freire addresses in chapter one of his book on literacy (1987). Here, Freire discusses the myth of education as neutral and argues that "from a critical point of view, it is as impossible to deny the political nature of the educational process as it is to deny the educational character of the political

act” (Freire, 1987, p. 38). Education according to Freire is used to oppress, to suppress and to deny knowledge and participation in political activity on the part of those groups who are not in power.

Conscientization involves the removal of the teacher as the sole arbiter of knowledge, acknowledges students as knowers and active participants in their own learning. Conscientization is ultimately an understanding of one’s place in the world, the power structures and hegemony, and the opportunity to begin disrupting those practices as a matter of course.

*Emancipatory pedagogy:* “Emancipatory theorists are especially concerned about the damaging forms of pedagogy that go along with...educational commitments, including instructional practices that aim, often quite explicitly, at diminishing or excluding key dimensions of student identity, social experience and political critique from the classroom” (Fletcher, 2000, p. 11). In short, emancipatory teaching pedagogy seeks to identify, usurp and disrupt oppressive power structures which limit the ability of students to realize their potentials, to move social and economic classes and to be able to make informed decisions and participate in a democratic society. Furthermore, emancipatory teaching practices often include a multicultural curriculum that “aims at challenging the goals and advantages of a curriculum based on Anglo- or Eurocentric interpretation of American culture” (Fletcher, 2000, p. 18). Critical pedagogy is often associated with Paulo Freire and Peter McLaren (Dalton, 2003), both of whom discuss the negotiation of power relations and learning. Those who practice emancipatory teaching pedagogies seek to

collaborate with students, to ease tension and espouse a rhetoric of easing oppression and offer hope and an end to suffering.

*Race and Racism:* The concept of racism has changed in the last sixty years. Overt racism dissipated with the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the end of the Jim Crow laws. As the country integrated the school system and Dr. King and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference demonstrated, the Freedom Riders rode across America and brought together not only race, but culture. What has replaced the old racism is an institutionalized, subverted racism, about which many Caucasians are in denial or are completely unaware. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, race is defined in sociological terms as “any of the major groupings of mankind, having in common distinct physical features or having a similar ethnic background”. “Racism springs not from the hearts of “racists”, but from the fact that dominant actors in a racialized social system receive benefits at all levels... whereas subordinate actors do not” (Bonilla-Silva, Lewis & Embrick, 2004). It is quite possible then for the person to act and speak in a racist fashion and not feel malicious nor prejudice? McIntosh (2004) discusses racism as being largely unconscious to members of the dominant class, who are unaware of their own White privilege.

*White Privilege:* Peggy McIntosh discusses the societal and educatory experience of institutionalized racism, as seen in those who gain advantage from the oppression of others. She says “My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual

whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us.'" (McIntosh, 2004). Furthermore, those who are unaware of their place in society, those who unconsciously participate as advantaged or disadvantaged groups and people, are most likely to reproduce the same power structures within the society. Helms (1993) says that "If one is a White person in the United States, it is still possible to exist without ever having to acknowledge that reality" (p. 54).

*Reproduction:* Bordieu and Passeron (1990), of the Centre de Sociologie Eruopeenne in Paris, discuss the replication of the dominant culture in their work, "Reproduction: In Education, Society and Culture". In it, they assert that education is a vehicle through which culture is transmitted. Furthermore, the passing down of White dominance from one generation to the next is learned through the educative process. This is not explicit, but part of the hidden curriculum (Bordieu & Passeron, 1990). The hidden curriculum encompasses "those unspoken values, norms and ideologies that are passed on to students as common sense" (Kanpol, 1994, p. 34). After all, it is the dominant class which selects which texts to value and present, which stories to tell and which skews the language in their favor, using it to reinforce existing power structures. Social reproduction is "defined as the reproduction of the structure of the relations of force between the classes..." (Bordieu & Passeron,



1990, p. 11) . Jean Anyon (1980) posits that students are educated according to the social class they are born into and are prepared for further education and jobs that will be the same social and economic state as what their parents have. In this way, over time, power structures are reiterated and poverty class students become poverty class parents, whose children will be taught marginal literacy skills and language which is not emancipatory nor expected to give access to power (Anyon, 1980). One important aspect of this is in the English classroom. “Storytelling most often reproduces power relations, as the specific stories we tell tend to reinforce the social order” (Bonilla-Silva, Lewis & Embrick, Dec. 2004). Another word for reproduction is hegemony.

*Hegemony*: Barry Kanpol of Indiana University describes the necessity of reproduction in schools as “paramount” because these enforced inequalities contribute to hegemonic power. “This reproduction, or what we shall term hegemony, occurs when administrative, teacher and student experience is unquestioned and when values and actions are lived as commonsensical despite, it could be argued the best intentions for modernism’s quest for community and enlightenment “ (Kanpol, 1994, p. 35).

*Colorblindness*: Colorblindness, for the purposes of this writing, is a “strategy practiced by many Whites to regulate the appearance of prejudice during social interaction...to avoid talking about race, or even acknowledging racial difference” (Apfelbaum, Sommers & Norton, 2008, p. 918). Apfelbaum, Sommers and Norton conducted an empirical study in 2008 to observe the phenomena of colorblindness in social interaction and concluded, among other

things, that this is primarily a strategy to “appear unbiased during social interaction” (p. 918). Further, they assert that generally speaking, “people are not, by any means, “actually colorblind perceivers in most instances” (p. 919). This means that race is relatively easy to discern and is automatic in many cases. In fact, Ito and Urland (2003) showed random yearbook photos to 80 participants for a short timespan (1,000 ms) and asked for categories from the respondents. Race was recognized more quickly than gender (p. 617).

If I ignore race in the classroom, it becomes the elephant in the room. If I bring up race, I risk alienating White students who feel that discussions of race are inappropriate for a social setting. If I remain silent, I become complicit in societal reproduction and hegemonic practices. Therefore, I choose to speak.

*Whiteness Studies*: What does it mean to be White? Is this just about skin tone, and do White people in the United States have a culture of their own? Often referred to as White dominance, White privilege is that advantage given to those who look White and who are able to access and work within the mainstream culture simply because of that ethnic heritage (McIntosh, year, Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Whiteness studies focus on the ethnicity and experience of Whiteness, rather than the experiences or ‘problems’ of African-Americans, Asian-Americans or Hispanic-Americans (Doan & Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 5). Studies of the Whiteness as a culture did not originate in sociology as one might expect, but rather began “in legal studies, history and cultural studies”, and “this occurred in concert with increasing economic

change and insecurity and the restructuring of the racial/ethnic demography of the United States as a result of post-1970 immigration” (p. 5).

Whiteness studies are undertaken in the interest of fighting racism, of making the invisible and of disrupting hegemonic actions (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Two ideas emerge from Whiteness studies, “The invisibility (particularly to Whites) and socially constructed nature of ‘Whiteness’” (p. 6).

As a person who identifies as “White”, I wonder what comes next after the realization that I, too, have a race. According to Shelly Tochluk, author of “Witnessing Whiteness” (2010), actions to be taken include “personal investigation, learning and practice among close relationships and peers” (Tochluk, 2010, p. 199). Tochluk recommends “building knowledge, skills, capacity and community” (p. 200), beginning with an examination of one’s own life. She offers structured writing and discussion activities targeting the realization of how segregated one’s own life is and where they live, questions about socio-economic class, and what people were in positions of power to help a person get to where they are today. Tochluk stresses action in combating normative hegemony, and also includes a practiced response to racism which is helpful in the composition classroom. As many of my students unconsciously espouse racist attitudes, a means through which to address the issue brings to light the attitude and offers “an opportunity to reflect and perhaps alter his or her speech” (Tochluk, 2010, p. 217). In my experience with reading student reflection papers on works by Frederick Douglass, Sherman Alexie, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for example,

students frequently make statements that they may or may not have examined and which provide an opportunity for follow up. The response suggested is to write on the paper “When you say \_\_\_\_\_, it sounds like you are saying that \_\_\_\_\_, but I am not sure if this is what you mean?” (p. 216).

*Power:* Power can be perceived from two different standpoints, one selfish and “self-aggrandizing”, and the other as benevolent (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010). The selfish and self-centered view, according to Torelli and Shavitt (2010), usually does not take into account the others affected by actions the power holders take. In other words, might makes right, or at least might make for the loudest noise, thereby drowning out the ones without power. This view, argue Torelli and Shavitt, is a culturally constructed social phenomenon. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr states in his “Letter From Birmingham Jail”, “freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed” (1963). Power can mean that the person holding power is “in charge” and that the people over whom she or he has power must do as told (Torelli and Shavitt, 2010, p. 704).

I am interested in both the power dynamics within the classroom and also in discussing the relationship between language and power with my students. Greer and van Kleef (2010) discuss the effects of power on the way that people behave in groups. When one person in the group has significantly more power than the others in the group, this may either increase conflict resolution or complicate it further (p. 1032).

Frederick Douglass escaped from slavery, founded a newspaper and heavily influenced Abraham Lincoln in his decision to sign the Emancipation Proclamation. His journey began with learning to read and learning to write. As his mistress praised his early efforts, she was thwarted by her husband who insisted that if a man were taught to read and write, they would be ruined for slavery. It was this ban on learning that fueled Douglass in his quest.

In my classroom, students share in the power relationship. They are responsible for attendance taking, running discussion groups, peer review of papers and other assignments, and give input into the curriculum such as what to read and how the grading rubric is constructed for their essays.

I like to also give a demonstration on the relationship between power and language. I give a short talk on the connection between power and language and write the word “torture” on the board. I then ask a good natured student to come to the front of the class and show a ‘stress position’, wherein the student kneels and places their hands together, thumbs down, and lifts their arms as far as they will go behind their back. Then I say ‘now stay there for two hours’. I have assumed this position myself several times. No student has stayed in that position for more than a minute because it is uncomfortable. I ask the volunteer (interestingly, it’s usually an ex-military member who volunteers) if this would be torture. Invariably, they have answered yes. Then on the board I negate what the student has said because, as I tell them, I have to power to define torture. We usually have a good discussion of power relations

and how if you have power, you can make anything you want legal. Then we discuss how if you deny literacy, you can get away with murder.

### **Selected Authors**

**Paulo Freire.** The philosophy of Paulo Freire is one of emancipatory education. In “Literacy: Reading the Word and the World” (1987), Freire discusses the dominant ideology, oppression of subordinated classes and the suppression of the language of subordinated cultures in favor of reproducing only the dominant culture. In this way have Native American tribes lost some of their histories and languages. African people brought to work as slaves lost not only their histories, languages and cultures, but have been subordinated ever since. Among other suggestions in the book, Freire suggests that the students use their own words from their own world to construct meaning and to bring in those voices into the classroom in order to enrich the conversation and allow for what he calls conscientization- the realization of one’s own place in the world and of the factors of freedom and oppression. He offers the educator advice as well, including a discussion of “how educators who do not recognize how influenced they are by the dominant ideology they are fighting against and how they fail to understand the ways in which they reproduce it” (p. 135). I must be cautious, and perform a vigorous and honest self-examination as well as an investigation into the lived experiences of my students as they work their way through the curriculum.

In the introduction to “Literacy: Reading the Word and the World”, Ann Berthoff says that “Paulo Freire teaches us to look – and look again—at our theory and practice...Nothing in the field of literacy theory is more important than looking and looking again at the role of an awareness of awareness, of thinking about thinking, of interpreting our interpretations” (Berthoff, qtd in Freire, 1987, p. xi). The theoretical basis of this work is to look and look again, at my practices, at the theories from which I seek wisdom and from the experiences I create for students and that those students create for me in return. Truly, the dialectic relationship is the basis of my own radical pedagogy. My awareness of such pedagogy was demonstrated in graduate school by my professor, by Paulo Freire, whose book was my first graduate school text.

My conscientization began when I read the word *conscientization* in the text (Freire, 1987, p. xiii). Through reading, class discussion, reflection and writing about my own experiences, I learned of my own ways of knowing, and of my place in the broader context of American society. As Freire says in the first chapter, “Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world” (Freire, 1987, p. 29). My understanding of language is based on the language I first learned, and was expanded by the language I learned at school. They were not so different, though in the literature I was interested in as a young woman expanded my vocabulary far more than language I found in any textbook. My lexicon expanded as I learned some Spanish and learned more

about the people with whom I spent time and spoke Spanish with. Finally, my academic lexicon was acquired in the same way, through immersion of the world, not just the words that represented the world. The same is true for students in a composition classroom. The first essay is always a personal narrative, incorporating the language learned as children at home with families and hopefully is expanded by the end of the class to include words as passkeys to the gates of academe. This is my intention as an educator, to relate words to students' worlds, to offer respect and celebration of the words and worlds already known and to grow from that place of strength. Ultimately, students may come to a knowledge of themselves and their place in the world, and will perhaps enjoy the freedom to make their own informed choices. These are often not the choices I would recommend, but it is not my place to do so.

Freire also says that "Mechanically memorizing a description of an object does not constitute knowing an object" (p. 33). The student must relate the information to what they already know, to make sense of it and to interpret the meaning of the object. Take a small rubber ball for example. A student might read about and write about a ball, be able to describe it and recite the circumference, weight and overall density of the ball. These are merely facts and have little to do with the joy of holding such an object in the hand, throwing it as hard as possible against the ground to watch it bounce high in the air amidst the sparkling sunshine. This experience brings meaning and knowing, not the dry recitation of unexamined trivia.



“It is impossible to deny the political nature of the educational process...” argues Freire (1987, p. 38). In the United States, we could ask questions about for whom we have designed the educational system, who benefits the most from a marginally literate but not quite critically aware populous and why such schooling benefits certain classes while denying advantage to others. For surely as a group is offered advantage, another must then be disadvantaged.

A final thought on Paulo Freire is his ideas regarding those who teach and what an unquiet pedagogy must entail. He is certain of what it should not include, saying that “a good way for educators to affirm their authoritarian elitism is to always express their thoughts to others, never exposing and offering themselves to others, remaining arrogantly convinced that educators are here to save others” (p. 40). In doing such a thing, in transferring knowledge to students for consumption, to later be regurgitated as though knowledge entailed the memorization of what is important to the teacher, knowledge becomes as dry, flat and uninteresting as a blank piece of paper. This method assumes that students are devoid of their own experiences and that the only valuable interpretation is what is given by the so-called “expert”.

Nobody walked into my classroom knowing nothing. Each student has something to contribute to their learning, to my learning and to the classes body of knowledge as well. I have tried to keep this in my at the forefront of my curriculum and lesson planning and to respect and bring forth students’ knowledge. I have also kept a teaching journal in which I question, dialog

with myself, look and look again at my practices, at my thinking and for ways in which I might improve.

**Louise Rosenblatt.** Louise Rosenblatt explicated the idea of reader- response theory in her 1938 book “Literature as Exploration” (1978). That the student and the text are part of a transaction and that that transaction is affected by the experiences, thoughts, ideas and attitudes of the reader was also new (1978). Efferent (reading for a purpose, such as meaning-making) and aesthetic (reading for pleasure) aspects of literature were also ideas put forth in her writing. Students should not merely read, regurgitate and forget. They ought to engage with a text and make meaning and interpretations on their own. This is what leads to critical thought processes and greater possibility for participation in a democratic society. At the end of her 2003 essay entitled “Literary Theory”, Rosenblatt supports the argument for reader response theory, saying that “the student can participate through literary experiences in a diversity of worlds and systems of values, can become acquainted with diverse interpretive frames of reference, and can be helped to critically develop a personal hierarchy of values that recognizes the democratic rights of others” (p. 72). This is also my intention, to present and discuss with my students the minority voices of multicultural literature and film.

**bell hooks.** Born Gloria Watkins in Hopkinsville, Kentucky in 1952, hooks, an African-American writer, scholar, teacher and lecturer, assumed her pen name from her grandmother (Burke, 2004). She does not capitalize the name, because she would like the work to speak for itself. Says hooks, it is the

"substance of books, not who I am." (Williams, 2006). Like Paulo Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1987/2004) before her, hooks writes from her own childhood experiences in order to extrapolate their meanings for educational and cultural critique. Her secondary education in the 1960's was intertwined with desegregated classrooms, with teachers interested only in discipline and not the academic growth of their students (Burke, 2004). hooks studied at Stanford, the University of Wisconsin and University of California Santa Cruz, earning her bachelors, master's and doctorate in English.

Her work carries a personal tone and she often includes autobiographical material in her academic work. hooks postulates that race, gender and class are all intersecting in education and that the self-perpetuating system is in dire need of transformation. Dauphin (2002) and hooks (2000) discuss the importance of love in hooks' work- Dauphin from an academic perspective, and hooks from a Buddhist look.

*hooks on education, culture and love.* hooks' reports in "Teaching to Transgress" (1994) that her early education was pleasurable. She attended an all-black school, with teachers who cared about her success and who passed on a passion for learning. "She decided from very early on that she wanted to become a teacher and a writer" (Burke, 2004). The teaching was transformative, personal in style and filled with love. By contrast, her later education was disillusioning, impersonal and filled with rules rather than learning. The willingness and desire to learn were not only counterintuitive to her new school, filled with all-White teachers, but the curricular content had

nothing to with her life or experiences, creating a disconnect (Burke, 2004). Hooks published her first book “Ain’t I a Woman?” in 1983 and has written a book about every year since. Her most widely known work, “Teaching to Transgress” was written in 1994. “‘Teaching to Transgress’ is characterized by attention to emotion and feeling, including an exploration of the place of eros and eroticism in the classroom” (Burke, 2004).

***hooks on White supremacy and Paulo Freire.*** hooks is unafraid of conflict and of controversy. She has been the subject of criticism for her opposition to the Million Man March (Grunell & Saharso, 1999) and her writing on the topic of love (Dauphin, 2002), among other things. In an article from the European Journal of Women’s Studies, hooks argues that it is ultimately patriarchal White supremacy, not racism, that is the largest social problem in the United States, and perhaps the world today. White supremacy includes class, gender and race, says hooks (Grunell & Saharso, 1999). White supremacy is an idea permeating American society that Whiteness is privileged above all other skin colors and that to be born part of the Otherness is to be subjected to institutional discrimination.

hooks’ book, “Teaching Community” (2003), addresses Paulo Freire’s pedagogy, taking him to task for his tendency to discuss emancipatory education geared primarily towards men in societies. Indeed, in “Literacy: Reading the Word and the World” (1987), Freire discusses his own experiences with literacy and with creating literacy communities in Brazil and in Guinea-Bissou. All of his discussions- in dialog with Donaldo Macedo-

centers around men. Women escape mention altogether. It is just this stance that hooks resists. This is not to say that hooks doesn't find connection with Freire's work; quite the opposite in fact, since she devoted an entire chapter to Freire in "Teaching to Transgress" (1994), writing in the dialogic style Freire used in his own work.

hooks takes up where she sees lack in Freire's work- in institutional sexism. As a black feminist, finds many points of convergence and departure from Freire's. As a theorist concerned with critical pedagogy, hooks extends his own theories to include women. The importance of a female centered oppositional stance is imperative to women of all colors to fight against and recover from oppression (Northington-Gamble, 1993).

What would hooks say?

What follows is my interpretation and understanding of what bell hooks might say given the set of questions presented. The opinions are based on my research about hooks as well as my reading of two of her books, "Teaching to Transgress" (1994) and "Teaching Community" (2003). In the spirit of Freireian dialog, I will pose questions and ask hooks to respond.

md: What is the purpose of schools and schooling in a democratic society?

bh: Right now the purpose of schools and schooling in the United States is to perpetuate a broken system. Education is geared towards White middle class education and alienates all who are not part of the dominant White supremacy. The purpose of schools and schooling shouldn't be the teaching of blind obedience or rule-following. It should be the opening of minds and of critical

thought and action. Communities of resistance will arise from emancipatory education and an engaged pedagogy.

md: What is teaching?

bh: Teaching is modeling. It is filled with eros (love), and is connected to spirituality and Buddhism. It encourages personal growth rather than regurgitation and obedience. Teaching is political, it is a struggle and it involves the teacher knowing themselves before knowing those to be taught. It is an act of growth on the part of both the teacher and the student. Teaching is also a radical political act- it often takes on subversive forms.

md: What is learning?

bh: Learning is intertwined with teaching.

md: What is knowledge?

bh: Knowledge is constructed rather than attained. It is heavily influenced by culture, as evidence in hooks' early educational experiences. It is not transferred but discovered inside the self.

md: Whose knowledge is most worth having?

bh: The knowledge of the minority voice is most worth knowing and it is also the most suppressed voice. Everyone in the United States has easy access to the knowledge of the dominant culture. By 'dominant culture' I mean White, middle class, heterosexual male perspective. Not everyone has access to those minority voices which speak in dissent or which offer alternative views of reality from the mainstream culture.

**Lisa Delpit.** Lisa Delpit wrote a critically acclaimed book on race and education, winning the 1995 Critic’s Choice Award, and the Outstanding Academic Book Award from both Choice Magazine and the American Educational Studies Association. The book, “Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom”, deals with classroom teachers and the challenges of teaching students who are not of the same cultural or ethnic background as they are. How can one teach when there is no background, no knowledge of or identification with the people with whom the teacher comes into contact? How can we as educators fight damaging stereotypes? Says Delpit (1995), “These adults [Black or White] probably are not bad people. They do not wish to damage children; indeed, they likely see themselves as wanting to help. Yet they are totally unable to perceive those different from themselves except through their own culturally clouded vision. In my experience, they are not alone... We educators set out to teach, but how can we reach the worlds of others when we don’t even know they exist?” (p. xiv). These questions are the guiding light of Delpit’s research, and the answers she offers are based on her own experience as an African-American woman, as a teacher of diverse students, as the daughter of pre-integration parents and a father who died because the “colored ward” wasn’t allowed access to the hospital’s dialysis machine, and as a mother to a child who entered an urban school setting where she was no longer able to shelter her from racism and discrimination (Delpit, 1995, p. xv).

Delpit's view on power as a "critical role in our society and in our educational system. The worldviews of those with privileged positions are taken as the only reality, while the worldview of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential" (p. xv).

In Chapter 1, Delpit gives a narrative of her educational history, detailing her time as a teacher in Philadelphia and how as a progressive educator she felt she had failed, making her unstructured classroom more and more structured and over time, focusing more on skills acquisition rather than fluency in writing for her students. As she spoke with other educators who had attempted a Writing Project process approach to literacy, Delpit learned that a difference between White teachers and Black teachers was definitional and cultural in nature. African-American teachers seemed to know and acknowledge that their students held fluency in language, on the playground, in their interactions with others and in their comfortable forms of writing. They were eager to refine the direct writing skills of students of color, since they are not generally thought to be taught at home. Whereas White teachers worked to develop that voice, that fluency, they seemed unable to recognize it from the students and tended to focus only on the development of fluency (Delpit, 1995, pp. 16-18). Black teachers "seemed anxious to move to the next step, the step vital to success in America- the appropriation of the oral and written forms demanded by the mainstream" (p. 18). These written and verbal skills are sometimes seen as the key to accessing power in the dominant class in the United States.



In another essay within the book, Delpit (1995) discusses the silencing of minority teacher's voices in the graduate arena, whether it is unconscious or conscious on the part of the silencer. Said one fellow graduate student, "I'm tired of arguing with those White people, because they don't listen...It seems like if you can't quote Vygotsky or something, then you don't have any validity to speak about your *own* kids. Anyway, I'm not bothering with it anymore, now I'm just in it for a grade" (p. 21). Delpit argues that White university professors listen to the experiences and discussions from their students of color about their own students of color, but then fail to attribute validity to those statements, and negate them as merely anecdotal. Delpit relates the story of another graduate student who says "He [the professor for her class] asks for more examples of what I'm talking about and he looks and nods while I give them. Then he says that that's just *my* experience. It doesn't really apply to most black people...They only want to go on research they've read that other White people have written" (p. 22).

Delpit then discusses how these grievances can be addressed in what she terms the "Culture of Power" (p. 24). The five aspects or themes running through this are as follows: 1. Issues of power are enacted in classroom. 2. There are codes or rules for participating in power, that is, there is a "culture of power". 3. The rules of culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power. 4. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier. 5. Those with power are frequently least aware of – or least

willing to acknowledge- its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence (p. 24). An example of what this looks like in the classroom, a White teacher in the classroom might seem less authoritarian than a Black teacher. A White teacher may give commands in an indirect way, saying “Why don’t we freewrite for ten minutes?”, while a Black teacher might say “Take out a piece of paper and pencil and freewrite for ten minutes”. Both are commands, but the difference is one of awareness of power. A Black child may perceive that the White teacher is in fact giving a command and disobey, thereby earning the label of “behavior problem”. Therefore, cautions Delpit, “the attempt by the teacher to reduce an exhibition of power by expressing herself in indirect terms may remove the very explicitness that the child needs to understand the rules of the new classroom culture” (Delpit, 1995, p. 35). For a White teacher trained in authoritative rather than authoritarian methods and philosophies, this advice may be ignored, dismissed or otherwise discounted.

To combat and assuage the effects of oppression on children of color, Delpit advises that pre-service teachers “be exposed to more success stories about educating poor children and children of color” (p. 178). It is better to model success for these teachers than to teach labeling, name calling, and lowered expectations for those who are not part of the culture of power (p. 178). Furthermore, it is important for teachers to examine their own biases and beliefs about people who are different from themselves. “Many teachers- black, white and ‘other’”, exhorts Delpit, “harbor unexamined prejudices about

people from ethnic groups or classes different from their own” (1995, p. 179), and goes on to explain that while it may be helpful for teachers to be of the ethnicity of their students, she would like to see a far more diverse population in the teacher pool and that the curriculum could use an overhaul which does not emphasize Eurocentricism (p. 181).

**Sherman Alexie.** Sherman Alexie, Pen Faulkner Award winner and Native American author, wrote an essay on his experiences learning to read and write as a child- a prodigy who read “The Grapes of Wrath” in kindergarten- also supports reader-response theory. “Reading, I’d been taught, means questioning, sensing that what you read is unfinished until completed in the self. The first text is the soul. And the last” (1998). As my Composition I classes and I invariably read and discuss this work the first week in class, what sits in front of us is paper with ink on it. The thoughts that flow between the author and the response of the person who reads and makes meaning from those words have an effect on each other. That effect is as unique as the experiences, attitudes and intentions of each person who transacts with the materials.

### **Contemporary Thought in the Teaching of English**

There is a plethora of current research on teaching about race and White privilege in the classroom. Winans (2005) discusses these issues in her rural college composition classroom in the National Council of the Teachers of English publication *College English*. Todd, Spanierman and Aber (2010) study White students emotions when they learn about racism (p. 97). They

recommend that “it is noteworthy that particular types of classroom activities or assignments (i.e. independent writing or intergroup dialog) may result in different types of emotional responses” (p. 108) and recommend training for educators on just this topic (p. 108).

In their 2007 *English Journal* article “Perspective-Taking as Transformative Practice in Teaching Multicultural Literature to White Students”, Theirn, Beach and Parks discuss the “tension” experienced when students see “alternative perspectives” and “try on” those points of view. They argue that change happens slowly, over a number of years and that students may resist, less they become accused of collusion with the dominant ideology. And Sassi and Thomas (2008) explore tension and combativeness, as well as “colormute and colorblindness” (p. 25) during a unit on Native American literature.

Beach (1993) details reader response theories, including experiential, social and cultural theories of response, among others. He also postulates that when eliciting responses, the teacher should take into account their “own attributes” as well as those of their students, “instructional goals”, the “social/cultural context”, and “long term planning” (p. 153). In other words, asking questions might be a good place to begin. Who are the students? What sorts of background knowledge might they have? What are their attitudes, beliefs and interests? What sort of knowledge does the teacher possess and how can s/he use this to best advantage? Where might the teacher and students differ in their interpretations of a piece of literature and how will that affect

instruction and the classroom environment? Moreover, who does the teacher privilege in the classroom?

John Dewey, the progressive educator, writes in *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902) that children have rather narrow worlds and that the world is fluid around them. They are active learners (pp. 36-37, 187) The curriculum seeks to extricate experience rather than to integrate it and to make small, “pigeon-holed” (p. 184) and that this process doesn’t necessarily make sense. “Subject-matter is but spiritual food, possible nutritive materials. It cannot digest itself” (p. 187). Students shouldn’t be crammed into a state where they merely absorb and regurgitate, but should experience the curriculum for themselves so that they might have a better chance, more exposure and in different ways to help them assimilate information. Says Dewey (1990), “To possess all the world of knowledge and lose one’s own self is as awful a fate in education as in religion” (p. 187). Knowledge must be constructed in the learner, not from without. The child and the curriculum are therefore in opposition to one another and it can be the teacher’s goal to help that student make sense of the materials presented, their experiences and to make those meanings and interpretations so that they might have a greater chance at self- realization (p. 187). The teacher can set the curriculum to include experiential rather than merely classroom learning, and this in turn sparks creativity and an interest in ongoing studies. “Only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up can society by any chance be true to itself” (p. 7).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Conceptual framework and rationale.**

In searching for an appropriate approach to writing personal narrative and autoethnography, I was surprised at the plethora of methodologies and perspectives available to guide my own writing. This section seeks to represent a variety of approaches to writing autoethnography and to develop my own rationale and perspective.

I have always been fascinated with storytelling as a means to pass on familial and cultural norms. I use stories to introduce topics in my classes, to engage students in writing and critical thinking activities and to spur reflection in my students. However, in research, storytelling and self-narrative itself is not enough. "...Autoethnography share the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation" (Chang, 2008, p. 43). In this case, I will define autoethnography as autobiographical ethnography, and will center on the self in society, with analysis and interpretation through an ethnographic lens (Chang, 2008).

In her 2008 book, Heewon Chang provides a conceptual framework for using autoethnography as method, chapters on data collection and analysis, and offers an appendix of examples from her own autoethnography. In a critique of the book, Mullin notes that Chang provides the social researcher "with a basic tool set for imagining, designing, conducting and analyzing the self in the context of culture" (Mullin, 2011, p.726). As a conceptual

framework, Chang names the question I have been trying to articulate: does society form the personality of the individual or does the individual form the society (Chang, 2008, p.20)? Can my autoethnography be indicative of and perhaps represent to some degree the society from which I emerged? Can I act as an agent of change within the culture and society of the classroom? Is that not my duty if I am able?

To explore and address these questions, I refer to the seven Concepts of Culture section of Chang's (2008) work:

1. Individuals are cultural agents, but culture is not all about individuality.
2. Individuals are not prisoners of culture.
3. Despite inner-group diversity, a certain level of sharedness, common understanding and/or repeated interactions is needed to bind people together as a group.
4. Individuals can become members of multiple social organizations concurrently.
5. Each membership contributes to the cultural makeup of individuals with varying degrees of influence.
6. Individuals can discard a membership of a cultural group with or without "shedding" their cultural traits.
7. Without securing official memberships in certain cultural groups, obvious traits of membership, or members' approvals, outsiders can acquire cultural traits and claim cultural affiliations with other cultural groups. (pp. 21-23).

Using these concepts, Chang (2008) offers the opinion that culture is a "product of interactions between self and others in a community of practice...From this individual's point of view, self is the starting point for

cultural acquisition and transmission” (p. 23). Finally, argues Chang (2008), “Understanding the relationship between self and others is one of the tasks that autoethnographers may undertake” (p. 29).

In deciding whether or not autoethnography would be an appropriate methodology, I searched the WorldCat database of dissertations and theses and found 275 files with the keyword “Autoethnography”. In browsing these, it appeared that most related to the social sciences and humanities. I then searched Ebscohost, which deals primarily with social sciences, sciences and humanities, and provided the same keyword search of “autoethnography” and narrowed the search parameters to publications between 1980 and 2011. The database yielded 5,745 records in cultural and qualitative journals, and those concerned with research practice and with education. Many doctoral dissertations, including within the University of Oklahoma’s College of Education, use autoethnography as method. Given the prevalence of autoethnographic study in the social sciences, I feel assured that this is indeed an acceptable method to pursue.

### **Examples of methodology.**

There are many approaches to writing autoethnography and few instruction booklets available to guide one’s practice. This section will offer examples of autoethnographies and the approaches used by each author. The work of Muncey (2005), Duncan (2004) and Behar (1996) will be discussed.

**Muncey.** Muncey (2005), writes autoethnography from four perspectives: snapshots, artifacts, metaphors and journeys. She chooses four large



influences on her life in her approach to writing autoethnography, including nursing, research, teenage pregnancy and time spent in her garden. The snapshots, of which there are five, depict her from a young child through the reception of her doctoral degree. The photographs seem to add credibility to the telling of her story, as though Muncey is saying *See? I have the photos to prove my assertions*. Muncey (2005) also asserts that “although memory is selective and shaped, and is retold in the continuum of one’s experience, this does not necessarily constitute lying” (p. 2). She supports her personal account with artifacts; photographs of her report cards, an article she published and her nursing sashes denoting a rise in nursing rank.

Likewise, in an autoethnographic study, it is difficult to determine what stories to include, and what ones to leave out. If one selects a story, a memory and leaves out another, are they not lying? Is there any way to tell the complete truth as it is experienced through the researcher’s subjective lens? Is this method not purely subjective, or is there validity in the telling of the tales? Muncey addresses this question, saying “I am proposing that if one wants to tell a complex story in which the disjunctions dictate that the whole is more than the sum of the parts, the method requires some portrayal of this disjunction” (p. 2). In other words, memory is fluid and changing over time. Memories are sometimes linear and sometimes temporal and the recording of a moment in time is an attempt to be honest with the self and with the reader.

Memories are sometimes unreliable, however. Does this mean that autoethnography is void as an authentic academic endeavor?

“Autoethnography celebrates rather than demonizes the individual story” (Muncey, 2005, p. 7). Each person is unique, and even though several people may be witnesses to the same scene, each will tell their own individual story—none of which invalidates the other in their interpretation and recounting of the truth as they see it.

My own experiences are similar to those of millions of Americans, to hundreds of thousands of teachers, and to many who are interested in teaching writing. My experiences are also unique as they are filtered through the lens of my experiences, education, training and observations. Is my story too unique or too commonplace to be considered valid in an academic context? “Perhaps there are no deviant cases; perhaps there are just lots more individual stories waiting to be told, stories that are sometimes difficult to tell, that need support and understanding in the telling” (Muncey, 2005, p. 7). In adding my voice and experience to the greater body of knowledge and experience in teaching writing and issues of social justice in this arena, we will be afforded a broader perspective on these issues as well and have something broader and deeper and with greater context from which to draw conclusions and make decisions.

**Duncan.** Duncan (2004) used autoethnography to reflect on six years of experience as a hypermedia developer. He chose autoethnography in order to answer the question: *How do I improve my practice?* and decided on autoethnography because, as he said, “what I needed to do was externalize my inner dialogue of decision to find and develop fully the central themes and outstanding questions that were emerging” (p. 2).

“I needed a method in which the lifeworld and internal decision making of the researcher were considered valid and noteworthy. I needed methods that encouraged systematic reflection and ensured a scholarly account. I needed a means of analyzing evidence that not only organized a record but also enabled discovery” (p. 3).

“The essential difference between ethnography and autoethnography is that in an autoethnography, the researcher is not trying to become an insider in the research setting. He or she, in fact, is the insider. The context is his or her own” (p. 3). In the context of my own research, I was an insider in my classroom. Most of the students were second semester students who asked me to teach a Composition II class. I was slated to teach only Composition I, but convinced my department head to switch one of my classes to a Composition II so I could accommodate the request. Only a small portion of my students were not pulled from my Composition I class. The others, in this small college, were friends or acquaintances of former students. In this way, I could have elected to do an ethnographic study, but I preferred the emphasis to be on my own experiences.

Duncan (2004) reiterates, as did Muncey (2005), that “an important assumption held by autoethnographers and qualitative researchers in general is that reality is neither fixed nor entirely external but is created by, and moves with, the changing perceptions and beliefs of the viewer” (p. 4). Therefore, the emphasis on the finding of one’s own voice and telling of a

personal story in light of events can be considered just as valid as that of an outside observer.

Unlike Muncey (2005), Duncan (2004) places himself at the conservative end of the autoethnography spectrum in an attempt to bring greater validity to his study and to assuage any anticipated rejection of his methodology. The reason he uses autoethnography as a methodology at all is that he is the main source of data, though he mentions computer screen shots, emails and other artifacts in his paper (p. 8). The main difference I noted is that in his reflective journals, Duncan attempts to keep to facts and observations rather than recording any reactions on his part. However, the paper seemed to lack a passionate need to know find and elucidate the answers to his research question. Like Muncey, Duncan breaks his autoethnography into themes and relevant data. He discusses study boundaries, instrumental utility, construct validity, external validity, reliability, and scholarship (p. 8).

**Behar.** In her 1996 book on vulnerability in anthropology, Ruth Behar discusses the concept of vulnerability and the risk of exposing the self in the name of research. It is important, she says, that the ethnographer not only write, but write well, as the risk of boring narration and commentary can be humiliating (p. 14). Moreover, not any personal story will do. The discussion of observer as participant (or observation of the self for that matter) must be essential to the telling of the story, “The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to” (p. 14). Behar also states that “a personal voice, if creatively used can lead the reader

not into miniature bubbles of navel-gazing, but into the enormous sea of social issues” (p. 14). This is my aim as a teacher of writing, as a privileged White educator and as a human being.

Chang (2008) describes the benefits of autoethnography as threefold: 1. It offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers; 2. It enhances cultural understanding of self and others; and 3. It has a potential to transform self and others to motivate them to work toward cross-cultural coalition building (p. 52). These three benefits, combined with other considerations, led me to choose autoethnography as method for this line of inquiry.

### **Data Collection And Analysis**

Data collection methods focused primarily on the researcher and only peripherally on students. In autoethnography, there are three possible perspectives: first that the self is the main focus of the work; second that the self and other participants are co-conspirators; and last that the other participants are the main focus of the study and the self is the a minor part, mainly considered an outsider (Chang, 2008, p.64). The most common form and the one selected for this study is the first one.

Institutional review is not necessary as the autoethnography has a total study group of n=1. However, just because IRB approval is not necessary, it is still important to protect, whenever possible, the privacy of my students and family members. I have spoken to my classes and to my family and friends. Whenever possible, I will conceal names, except when I have explicit permission to use them. Students will not be identified individually, but will

be given pseudonyms. Family members have given permission to use their names (Change, 2008, p. 68). I wrote an autoethnography focused only on those experiences in my personal, educational and professional life that pertain to issues of racism, White privilege or discrimination in general and analyze and interpret through an emancipatory lens. Wall (2008) notes that an authentic account is impossible to accomplish without some emotional elements. I would not deny that these events have affected my growth as a person and as a teacher. Indeed, they are the reason I teach in the way that I do. Furthermore, the last part of the autoethnography concentrates on my students as they were, in the college composition classroom, my observations of them and my reactions to their classroom performance and to their writing.

I have been a writer since I was old enough to hold a pencil, keeping a detailed diary, and later a journal, and later a teaching journal and blog, beginning at the age of 13. For this I am fortunate. Sifting through the contents of these writings gave me some rough thematic approaches from which to write the autoethnography. In the section of my personal life, I focused on a childhood filled with mainly White people and a family composed entirely of Caucasians, as well as my choices as an adult. In the second section on my education and professional experiences, I included ways in which I came to a critical consciousness and realized my place of privilege in the world, despite my disadvantaged socio-economic standing as a child and how those experiences shaped my world view. In the next section, devoted to my time spent teaching in a men's prison, I included an article I wrote about

teaching in the total institution. The writing, which is as of yet unpublished on its own, is a discussion of my experiences with the special population of inmates and my experience teaching and learning from them. I included a section on my activism and current activist activities. As a person who has found a voice and place in the world, I see it as my responsibility to practice what I advocate to others and stand as an example of what can be done to combat inequality in the world. Finally, I reflected on my teaching practices and looked at my teaching journal to discover my attitude and my students' attitudes towards issues of racism, White privilege and discrimination as well as response to curriculum and the things I say and do with the 90 or so students who comprise my Composition I and II classes, keeping in the research question at the center of the writing.

While the personal approach to ethnography- the autoethnography- can have a therapeutic effect on both the author and the readers, the benefit is minimal without emphasis on analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2008, p. 51). Therefore, the author must engage in careful analysis and interpretation of the dataset. I chose three types of data for analysis: Personal Memory Data, Self-Observational Data and Self-Reflective Data, and Textual Artifacts.

### **Personal Memory Data**

“Personal memory data is the building block of autoethnography because the past gives a context to the present self and memory opens a door to the richness of the past...What is recalled from the past forms the basis of autoethnographic data” (Chang, 2008, p. 71). Memory is sometimes unreliable

and fraught with emotion, perhaps even distorting events through romanticism or aversion (p. 72). I will act as a skeptic in the analysis, but will keep in mind what Chang has said about personal memory data: that I am building a database for analysis and interpretation (p. 72) and that autoethnography values personal memory.

### **Self-Observational Data and Self-Reflective Data**

“Self-observational data record your actual behaviors, thought, and emotions as they occur in their natural contexts” (Chang, 2008, p. 90). This data can be collected by writing daily routines from specific circumstances and times in one’s life, including interactions and locations of those interactions. I will give as an example, an “Occurrence Recording” with a topic of my interactions throughout the day and some of my activities (p. 92). As an educator at a small regional college, my daily routine consists of waking up, drinking coffee and checking my email. I hold office hours at 10 a.m, teach at 11:00 a.m., and grade papers or write in my teaching journal until about 4 p.m. Most of my working day is spent interacting with students, administrators and fellow teachers. I walk home and eat a small snack before jogging or walking at the local park. At the park, I often recognize students or members of the community as they engage in physical activities or spend time with their families. In the evenings, I write either for publication or for personal reasons, and make phone calls to friends and family. Noticeably absent is the presence of television in my routine, though I sometimes watch movies. I am a single woman with no children living in a small town in Oklahoma. None of my



family members live within driving distance. On the weekends, I sometimes have a date or go to the nearby city to spend time with friends.

“Self-Reflective data result from introspection, self-analysis and self evaluation of who you are and what you are...keeping a field journal helps you capture self-reflective data” (Chang, 2008, p. 95). I kept a teaching journal and sifted through that data in the analysis of the text.

### **Textual Artifacts**

“Artifacts are material manifestations of culture that illuminate historical contexts” (Chang, 2008, p. 107). Additionally, “textual artifacts concerning you r authored by you are also useful autoethnographic data...Personally produced texts, however, are particularly invaluable to your study because they preserve thoughts, emotions and perspectives at the time of recording, untained by your present research agenda” (p. 107). These artifacts- poems and writings prior to the commencement of this document- can be seen as excellent sources of data. I have often considered writing my dissertation, but did not write these documents specifically for inclusion in this writing.

### **Procedural Steps of Data Analysis**

I will be focusing on the parts of my personal and professional life that are of concern to my study. In her 1996 book “The Vulnerable Observer”, Ruth Behar addresses the difficult line between observer and participant. She finds it artificial to pretend that the observer in any ethnography is objective, and urges the reader to acknowledge their own feelings and emotional investment in a given situation (p. 6). She poses the question “How do you

write subjectivity into ethnography in such a way that you can continue to call what you are doing ethnography?” (p. 6). Behar answers with “ethnographies are a strange cross between author-saturated and author-evacuated texts, neither romance nor lab report, but something in between” (Behar, 1996, p. 7). It is difficult for me to separate out my feelings from my observations, and so I will do my best to evoke rather than to remember exactly, for “conversations and interactions...can never again be exactly reproduced” (7). Since this is an autoethnography, I must be cognizant of the dangers of too much emotional response and also of too clinical of a view, as both of these may add undue bias or color my study in an unintended way. I will organize and sort through my data to distinguish those things which are pertinent to White privilege, discrimination and racism from those which are not. The best I can hope to do is to show snapshots, share focused memories and render creatively the experience of my continuing journey of conscientization. In my mind, White privilege is bound to hegemony, discrimination, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and religious oppression and as such, much of my narrative will focus on these issues.

### **Conclusion**

My background, experiences, education, socioeconomic status and ethnicity contribute to the kind of teacher I am. These things affect the college composition classroom and my students. Those who enter that classroom bring their own lenses through which they view the world. What can I learn about teaching English through this study? What will my students experience

and how can they and I grow individually and as a group by confronting issues of race, White identity and discrimination through a college composition curriculum? I pursued these questions and hoped to raise more along the way in my efforts to grow further as a researcher and teacher of English.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Introduction**

In December, 2010, I visited the Seattle Museum of Art. There was a special exhibition of Pablo Picasso's works. His cubism, African inspired period, classicism and surrealist phases, the women he loved and portrayed and the surprising sculptures, and drawings all showed a depth and breadth of a man who lived his life translating creativity into tangible, touchable, poignant and evocative art.

One painting in particular caught my eye and I stood and stared for awhile. A portrait of Picasso's young son, Paulo, hung amongst others, waiting for me to discover it. In it, Paulo is dressed as a harlequin and is portrayed just as one would view him in real life. His face and hair are photo-perfect, with an expression not of joy or loving or youthful exuberance, but what I interpret to be patience.

Picasso does not fill in all of the details for the viewer. Paulo's feet and the ruffle around his neck are merely penciled in, as is the background of the painting and the rest of the chair. I have kept this in mind. An autoethnography is much like this painting: Perhaps not a virtuoso, but a frame from which to render a likeness. I have given the best detail of the important and telling parts of the picture, but the reader must fill in the spaces with their own interpretation. And we, like Paulo, must be patient and allow the viewer to come to their own conclusions. It is perhaps best this way. My work, this

dissertation, is but one piece of the greater body of my research, creative writing, and attempt to make sense of the world around me.

This chapter seeks to discuss my data gathering technique and the autoethnography itself, including sections for each phase of the writing.

### **Research Question**

*How might an autoethnographic exploration of my own perceived Whiteness inform how I approach the phenomenon of racism in my teaching of university composition students?*

My research question arose from my time spent in post-graduate studies in English Education. I began teaching college composition courses as an adjunct at a small regional college. After I graduated with my master's degree, I worked and taught at a community college in the city where many of the students appeared to be non-traditional, first generation and of depressed socio-economic backgrounds. Each person seemed in search of a better life and, for lack of a better metaphor, a better hand than the one they were originally dealt. My own personal and educational background reflected that of my students and everywhere I looked, I saw people just like me and my family: single moms and dads working two jobs and juggle families, married couples trying to get better jobs so that they could start a family, survivors of suicide, people who had suffered discrimination, and people who had no idea what to do next. They just knew that college was the answer and that things had to get better somehow. My job, as I saw it, was to help people figure out

where they were in the world, what forces had led them to that moment, and how they might proceed from a position of conscientization (Freire, 1987).

Three years later, I took a teaching job in a minimum security prison. I knew it would change my perspective on the world and I welcomed that change. I also thought I might make a difference in the lives of a special population and help make the world a better place. This has always been my objective; I have not wavered. The job was the same, to help people make better informed choices about their own actions and reactions to oppression and power differentials.

In returning to graduate school to study in earnest, I collided with another special population: affluent White students who denied their own privilege and pretended that either racism did not exist or that they had no say in existing power structures. This was a system that worked in their favor, which gave unearned advantage and which gave unfair disadvantage to others. Whereas my community college students rallied for change and fought hard for a better life, I imagined most of these students tip-toeing through my classes, trying to stay under the radar lest they have to take responsibility for their part in changing the world. It made me angry and I became lost for words. In this state, I am less effective as a teacher and I am less open to listening to students, for those opportunities to create teachable moments.

I cannot be the only disillusioned English teacher in secondary or post-secondary education. There must be lessons to be learned from the careful consideration of my own curricular choices and interactions with students. It is

my quest and sometimes my obsession to be the best English teacher I can be. The question I seek to explore is *what is my experience in confronting racism, White privilege and discrimination in the college composition classroom?*

To approach that topic, I embarked on an autoethnography. As discussed in Chapter 3, autoethnography uses the ethnographer as the main source of data and seeks to write in a focused and selective way (Behar, 1996; Duncan, 2004; & Muncey, 2005). In using my personal story, I have not written a comprehensive autobiography, but instead focused on key points of my personal experiences as they relate to themes of racism, White privilege and discrimination.

At many points I hesitated. In relating my experiences as a survivor of suicide not once, but twice, I wondered at the pathos of the matter. Was I merely trying to elicit a reaction from the reader? In discussing my bi-racial relationship, was I not somehow cannibalizing my own life in order to tell a credible story? Says Behar (1996) in her discussion of ethnography, “ethnographies area strange cross between author-saturated and author-evacuated texts, neither romance nor lab report, but something in between” (p. 7).

This autoethnography is the product of that effort. It is organized chronologically, including headings for my personal life, education and professional experiences, correctional work, activist activities and the Spring semester of 2011, wherein I look at the students in my class currently and the

curriculum I present as well as discussions on things that made their way into my teaching journal.

I have categorized my data into five categories: Personal life, Education and Professional Life, Correctional Work, Activism and the Spring, 2011 semester. I have analyzed and observed along the way, and provide insights at the end of this chapter.

### **Personal Life**

It is important to share the facts of my life in order to position and give context for my life decisions and world view. I grew up the youngest of four girls born in 1966, 1968, 1971 and 1973. My sisters and I are related by blood through both of our parents- we are not half or step siblings. Both of my parents were White. My father was a logger in Forks, Washington, and my mother was a homemaker. My father's parents owned a restaurant and bar with his uncle, and it was called "Curlys". Both of his parents died of alcoholism prior to my birth. My father was killed by a drunk driver when my mother was two weeks pregnant with me. He never knew of me.

While my father's people settled by the ocean, my mother grew up in a small farming community on the eastern side of the state called Dayton, Washington. Her father's great grandfather was one of the founders of the town back in 1889. Until she was eighteen years old, my mother lived a highly sheltered life out in the country, going to town only for school and church activities. She did not date and her brother taught her to drive and to shoot a gun. Otherwise, she learned to sew, cook, crochet, knit and can food. The



church my mother (and later I) grew up in is so infused by our family as to have a lighted cross hanging above the pulpit in honor of my great grandmother. The chair my great uncle, Vernon, occupied behind the pulpit for more than sixty years remains empty during services, although his death was more than three years ago. At the age of eighteen, my mother moved over three hundred miles to a place she had never been and where she knew no one. She married my father less than a year later.

We moved often when I was a child. My mother had remarried three more times by the time I was four and in total has married six times. She never dated a non-White man. We moved all over the state of Washington and spent time in California. Sometimes we moved in the middle of the night, leaving many belongings behind. My mother often worked, leaving my sisters to babysit me. I rarely saw her. My sister Patti, while only four years older than myself, was my chief caregiver as I grew up. Today she is my best friend. The tumultuous and often violent environment of our youth is often a topic of discussion during annual visits.

The place we lived were predominantly White neighborhoods, with a few influencing demographics. In the Pacific Northwest, we attended schools with a higher minority of Native American students. On the eastern side of the state, we attended schools with some Latino students, the children of migrant workers. I do not recall attending school with any Black children, ever.

I used to think that I grew up in an unprejudiced household. We lived in western Washington for much of my elementary school years. My father

had been killed by a Native American, but my mother's friend Barbara, with whom we lived on the Lower Elwha Reservation for a time, was also Native American. They stayed with us sometimes too, when Barbara's boyfriend (who was White) was on a particularly violent rampage and looking for her. Her son was in my class at school, even though he was three years older. Barbara was a harsh person, and physically and verbally abusive to her son and to me. The son, Paul, also used to berate and hit, perhaps since I was the youngest and the weakest of my sisters. I did not fight back. I never heard my mother make racial remarks about Indians, but when the relationship with Barbara went bad and her son misbehaved, my mother hit him hard enough to break his nose. I believe he was about 12 years old at this time. She called them "dirty" and we left post haste. Likewise, my sister Patti was in the same class as two daughters of the man who had killed my father, and when they taunted her at school, Patti beat one of them up and was suspended for a week from school. My mother praised her for that action.

We moved to the Eastern part of the state when I was in the sixth grade, to a fifty-acre plot six miles from Dayton at the end of a half-mile long driveway. My mother and her husband put a single wide trailer next to a camp trailer and build a walkway in between. I helped build a deck and put a roof over the two trailers to keep the rain out. We had a wood fireplace for heat, well water and no television reception. In the Spring, I caught crawdads in the creek. I taught myself to use oil paints, read voraciously, picked wild strawberries, and tended to our small sheep ranch. Here I attended church with

my great uncle and eventually became a Sunday school teacher at The United Brethren Church. This church has been our family church for six generations and the lighted cross behind the pulpit is dedicated to the memory of my great grandmother.

We lived less than five miles from my grandparents, who were both retired from jobs with the City of Dayton. They were of Norwegian descent. My grandfather worked for the water treatment facility and my grandmother was a school lunch cook for more than thirty years, during my mother's youth and also my own. When we needed food, my grandmother cooked and we did dishes or helped to clean house. As an adolescent, my grandparents took me camping with them for weeks at a time, up to a place called the Tucannon, where my great-grandparents had homesteaded in the earliest part of the century. My fondest childhood memories center around these trips, with my great-grandfather and I as partners in a game of pinochle against two of my great-aunts; "shooting the moon" (slang for winning the whole game in one hand), fishing during the day and listening to stories of Great-Grandpa Albert's time as a hunting guide, his interactions with the local Palouse tribe (they were tee-pee neighbors, well thought of, and not on a reservation then) and stories of nature and cougars who lived in the mountains.

In high school, my grandfather gave me an old 1940's engine to rebuild for my shop class. Race was almost never discussed in my mother's house, but in my grandparent's, it was a common occurrence to hear racial and ethnic slurs, especially against African-American men. Words like "piccaninny",

“nigger”, “darkie” and “smokey” were often said. I also enjoyed a television show called “The Cosby Show”, in which Bill Cosby played a gynecologist and Felicia Rashad played an attorney. The situation comedy focused on their family life with five lively children. I was fascinated by a set of parents who not only knew what was going on in the educational lives of their children, but also talked and listened to them. The only place to watch television was at my grandparent’s house, and if my grandfather caught me watching a show with Black people, he would make a racial comment and change the channel, usually the National Finals Rodeo.

Our small town was filled not only with my mother’s relatives, but the permanent residents were almost exclusively, visibly White. There were no Black people. One student in school was Vietnamese, the son of a man who married during his Army tour in Vietnam. Of the minority population, which was Latino, Only a few girls in my classes lived in town permanently. Since Dayton is a farming community, migrant workers came through every year to pick asparagus, onions, apples, apricots and other seasonal fruits on their way to Twin Falls, Idaho and back down to Texas during the latter part of the season. Annually, in the spring, I would see friends from the year before and we would catch up on their lives on the road and the seemingly unchanging landscape of my life in Dayton, as an outcast.

Since I entered Dayton Schools in the sixth grade and not from kindergarten, I was treated differently by the White students in the school. I was an outsider and quite suspect, even though my mother and grandmother

had attended school with several of their mothers and grandmothers. I did my best to fit in, getting used to an agrarian culture and the onslaught of puberty. One day, five of the White girls in my class confronted me on the playground. They decided that I was too smug, too arrogant and that I needed to be put in my place. Thoughts raced through my brain. One was pretty big, three were average and one was small. I thought I could take two of them, but not all five by myself. I looked around to see people watching, waiting for what would happen next. I was terrified; none of the other kids seemed to want to help. I knew then that I would take a beating and probably never report it. Weeks before, a boy from my class kicked me pretty hard and left a bruise. I told my sister Yvette, and later she gave him a black eye and brought him to me to apologize. Yvette, however, was two years ahead of me and not at recess. While not an overly nice sister, she would not tolerate anyone being mean to me.

When I remember this story, I hear the theme song from “The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly”, and see a short Mexican girl step in between me and the impending doom of Dayton Middle School. Her name was Karla, and she and her family lived year-round a few blocks from the school. “If you want her, you’ll have go to through me,” she says. I imagine she puts her hands on her hips and sticks out her chin. The White girls do not say anything. In my version of the story, the White girls have no voice. “Huh? You think you can do it?” She shakes a fist at them, at the big girl who seems to be the leader.

“I’ll beat you and you know I can, Leigh!” My heart jumps back to life. I hadn’t realized it stopped or that I was holding my breath.

Those girls did not hurt me that day, though I never made many friends in high school. I do not know what made Karla stand up for me the way she did, though I find her effort extraordinary. We did not know each other well. Fifteen years later, when I read Dr. King’s “Letter From Birmingham Jail”, the words “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”, reverberated in my head and the fierce image of Karla leapt to my mind, shaking her fist not just on my behalf, but in what was I would say was her attempt to stop an injustice.

For an unpopular girl, I participated in many clubs and activities. I did not want to be at home. My mother divorced when I was in ninth grade, and we were forced to move to a small, two bedroom house on the Main street of town by the railroad tracks. Behind our home was a small trailer park with few permanent tenants. The trailers were used by the migrant workers and their families who came through town. I was glad to have learned some Spanish in school and with my friends. I never felt uncomfortable living there. We were all poor and when someone needed something, we just shared what we had. I was amazed at the number of people who would live in one trailer and admired the dramatic hair and make up capabilities of the girls who lived there too. They showed me the secret: starch for ironing would keep your bangs from going flat and eyebrow pencils would make eyes stand out much more than normal.

I had learned to drive when I was 14, on an old one-ton Dodge truck with lock boxes on it. We used it to haul hay to feed the animals. I drove myself to school too, and at sixteen, got my license. I got a job and bought my own clothes, insurance and car and much of my own food. By participating in clubs, I could avoid being at home except to shower and sleep. I was in the business, homemakers and agriculture club and acted in the school musical plays. I became a champion sheep showman and breeder, and was the best crops judger in the state of Washington my senior year. I served as a Columbia County Fair Hostess when I was sixteen and in that year, I won a spot on the state leadership team for Future Business Leaders of America as their Vice-President. Still, my interactions with people who were not White were limited. When in my travels I encountered non-White people, I felt uncomfortable and did not know what to say. I hoped everyone would be like Bill Cosby and not like the things my grandparents had said. I hoped that nobody would be able to tell how uncomfortable I was when I traveled. I was embarrassed that I could easily find differences in White faces and latino faces, but that people of Black or Asian ancestry seemed to look the same. I remember at a dance in Washington, D.C. for a leadership conference (generously funded by the school district), I finally got up the nerve to dance with a boy who was black. He had a great smile and showed me how to move in time to rap music.

Perhaps more uncomfortable but socially expected were the Fair Hostess duties. Since my family was one of the first in the county, I was

selected as a Columbia County Fair Hostess in 1989. As a hostess three young women rode on a float, waving to crowds in our giant floppy hats and lace gloves and represented the county fair in parades, rodeos, other fairs and any time there was a gathering in the city where we grew up. We “behaved as ladies” as our chaperones often exhorted us, kissed derby winners and posed for photographs with the winners of car and horse races. We box-stepped with elderly men and ate lunch with ladies. We were there to be seen, to exemplify behavior and to present an idyllic face for the idyllic country life. Looking back through the lens of time, I realize that we were there to represent White culture.

For a few years after high school, I could not afford to go to college. I lived with a boyfriend for a time and eventually moved back to Port Angeles, Washington, where I lived right by the beach and worked at a mid-size hotel. I became a front desk manager, where I made an hourly wage of \$6.50. Managers at Burger King made a dollar more per hour. All of my superiors were White men, except in the housekeeping department, which was managed by a White woman. At the front desk, we were expected to dress professionally and look and act bright for the customers. Winter came and I was cut to part-time work. I took a second job as a waitress, midnight to eight a.m., at a pancake house. I was the only overnight waitress. My clientele consisted of a regular group of coffee drinking younger crowd, until about 2:30 a.m., when the post-bar crowd would filter in. The coffee drinkers and I became quite friendly, and I would spend time with them in my off hours. Of



the men, one was a logger, one was a used car salesman and one was a college student pretending to be in class but really just having coffee and French fries at my restaurant in the last afternoon. The women were dating or married to the men. Some were on welfare, others worked part time doing something considered “women’s work”; cleaning houses, working in the hotels and sometimes at the grocery stores. The bar crowd was often raucous and handsy; such is the way of things in an economically depressed logging town. Between four and five I could clean the restaurant, but at 5:30 the ferry traffic came in have coffee and breakfast before a trip to Victoria, British Columbia. The restaurant faced the ferry. The cook was a White male and I was hired since I was reasonably good looking and worked hard. The restaurant owner was a man, and the women who came on shift after me incessantly complained about my work and sloppiness.

Now that I think of it carefully, I have never had a non-White direct supervisor or manager. I never met a non-White teacher, principal or other authority figure until I went to college. Most of the time, the authority figures in my life have been men.

I once dated a young ex-military man named Patrick. He had been part of the initial effort in the gulf known “Operation Desert Shield”, and was profoundly affected by his experiences in the desert. He had been sprayed with chemicals from overhead enemy planes and never knew what it was. He spoke German fluently, though English was his first language. After a few months, I broke it off with him. Too much erratic behavior and mood swings.

I hoped that he would get some help. Six months later, he came to see me. We had some coffee and talked. He asserted that I had an easy life and no cares in the world while his head would never be the same. I pointed out (rather indignantly and rudely, I might add) that I could not afford college and was stuck in low-paying jobs and as a woman it was a lot worse than if I were a man. I said that at least he had the G.I. bill. I had attempted to enter the Air Force, but was rejected after seven weeks of training because of my asthma. I think I probably yelled at him. I feel bad about that now. Patrick apologized and said that if he got that way again, I should just hit him in the head. I said I was sorry too. Then he smiled, hugged me and had a party that night.

According to accounts, he told everyone how much he loved me and then shot himself in through the temple with a .45 caliber pistol. He did not die, and I spent a month at his bedside while he was in a coma, no frontal plate to protect his brain, waiting for him to get better. He breathed at first on a ventilator, then later on his own. I almost fainted the first time I visited, but got used to the sight of his bandaged head and sporadic twitching. Eventually, Patrick woke up, and I was there to greet him. His mother called me and said it was my fault that he had “had such an accident”, and that I should never come back. If I did, they would get a restraining order. I was 21 years old. It seemed strange to me that I never saw them in the hospital. The nurse saw the blood drain from my face and asked me what was wrong. I told her, and went to say goodbye to Patrick. He could not talk but could squeeze my hand so we communicated quite well anyway.

I do not know what mercy led the nurse to take the action she took next. I know it was her; there wasn't anyone else who could have done this. A grief counselor 'showed up' in the waiting room of the ICU. He just happened to be around, out of chance, and wondered if I wanted to talk. I sure did not want to talk. But I would listen. He said the one thing I really needed to hear at that moment: "This is not your fault". I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding. In retrospect, I wonder about the kind of people who would blame a young woman for their son's suicide attempt. The counselor said many things, all of which were comforting. Then he gave me his card. I hugged him. A complete stranger, and I hugged him and could not stop crying. I kept his card for years; my talisman and ward against discrimination.

During this time, two other major events happened. First, my cousin and great aunt were struck and killed by a drunk driver. Second, one of the coffee crowd was killed. It was Matt, the college student. He had taken a job at a convenience store and was walking home from work very late one night. A car came by and a Native American man ran him over. He did not know Matt, who sat quietly and played card games, wore a hat with coffee symbols on it that he gave to me one day, and ran around with me and what had become my friends. He was just gone, blown into a ditch where he bled to death in the cold and rain. Because the man stated that he had wanted to kill a White man, he was charged with hate crimes and sent to prison. It was the mid-1990's. I still have that hat and visit Matt's grave whenever I am in the area. I sometimes wondered if the lives of poor people are more traumatic and

difficult that those of more fortunate ones. I sometimes wondered why there was so much anger and pain in the world, pain that makes people do senseless and violent things. I wondered if that capacity lives inside of me as well.

There was never a time when my mother or other person sat me down and said “Look, you ought to date White guys.” I’m not certain that my mother worried about who I would or would not date. She was more concerned with factors of financial security than race, as far as I know. If I had to guess, I would postulate that it did not cross my mother’s mind that I would date someone who is African-American.

But I did. I have struggled with whether or not I should include this experience in an autoethnography. It is personal, but perhaps it is in the honest examination of somewhat uncomfortable situations that one can find wisdom. I have decided to discuss this because I feel this incident can exemplify racist attitudes within my own family. For seven months, I dated a man who works at the university where I teach. He is fit, handsome, holds a master’s degree in education administration and also has a bi-racial daughter. We are the same age and have similar backgrounds. He is also Black.

My sister Patti has traveled extensively as part of enlistment in the Army. Her world, in my opinion, is broader than the perspective a small town by itself can offer. She is my confidante and also my best friend. I knew when I started dating “Joe” that sharing my delight at this new relationship would not be colored by...well, color. I texted her his photo and received a reply asking who the cute guy was. I replied that this is someone I am dating, to which she

texted me an affirmative reply, as is the custom of sisters and friends. What a man looks like doesn't concern my sister so much as my happiness in the relationship.

By comparison, I rarely if ever discuss my romantic life with the other members of my family. They tend to gossip. I am the only childless member of my immediate family, I divorced in 2003 (my three sisters and my mother have had divorces), and am not currently married. Years ago, I declared my personal life off limits. However, I opened a door in December that I wish I had not.

My sister Yvette lives in the same town where we grew up; in the same house on Main street where she has raised her four children. She sent me a text with a photo of Christmas ornaments featuring President Obama with a racial slur regarding how it was suddenly socially acceptable to once again "hang a nigger from a tree".

Blood rushed to my face and I felt my pulse quicken. I fight for tolerance; I educate to end ignorance and racism. I was shocked to see such a blatant display on my phone, from my own sister, asking me silently for my complicity! My self-concept flashed through my mind. My friends- of varying ethnicities and belief systems as well as of the dominant ideology- and I depend on each other to stand up for our beliefs. My students look up to me as an example of something they would like to emulate. More than that, it is important to me to be in word and in deed a fair, honest and decent person. Here was my sister, mindlessly spewing hate. My thoughts raced and

overreacted: Was she doing this out of spite? Does she really dislike everyone who is different than she is or is she just participating in a system that rewards us just for our skin color? Here was someone telling me that collusion and hegemony were not only right, but also humorous. I texted back a reply: *How offensive! Do you not know that my boyfriend is Black? What is wrong with you?* Yvette replied: *I don't see the world in color. I'm not racist.* Perhaps she did not realize the idea of colorblindness, a denial that racism does not exist because the person does not come into contact with non-White people on a regular basis while simultaneously reaping benefits unearned just because of the way one is born. I asked her through text message to not send me such garbage again, and brooded about it for a few hours. I also admit that I felt sanctimonious and as though I had been a jerk. Much later (as they are on the West coast, it is two hours earlier in Washington than it is in Oklahoma), I was sent a text message by my other sister, Mickie, which was obviously in reply to something Yvette had said to her. She advised Yvette that if I were to have children with Joe, then they would still be obligated to love them, because after all, it is President Obama that they didn't like, not me. When I confronted Mickie about this through text message the next day, she denied sending the text and said that all she knew is that Yvette might have sent me a racist text and that I was offended.

In retrospect, I don't think I should have responded the way I did. I should not have mentioned who I date as Joe's presence in my life is not material to my sister's display of racism. I believe she was putting down

others in order to feel superior, a trait I remember from our childhood. I chose to take this personally and felt ashamed. Had I ever been complicit in my I did want to shock her. I shut her down and closed communication rather than using it for an opportunity to open dialog. I also had forgotten in the heat of the moment that I would be traveling to visit my grandmother, who resides in a nearby nursing home, within a matter of weeks and that it would be inevitable to interact with the rest of my family, mainly these two sisters. I consulted with my other sister, Patti, Joe, and my friends in order to figure out how I might have handled the situation and also how I might handle similar talk in the future. I decided on making jokes about how my future children might not be able to grow a proper mullet.

I do sense, however, that this has caused Yvette to treat me differently. During our visit, she seemed awkward and unwilling to talk of matters beyond what one would discuss in front of others at the grocery store or in church. I felt bad. I did not know what to say either, and we left it at an uncomfortable silence. I should not have judged her so harshly, nor responded so angrily. In the future, I hope to be more understanding with my sister.

Mickie was more forthcoming. She asked me a few questions about Joe and said that she felt uncomfortable, not because Joe is Black, but because she has little experience with non-White people. This put me at ease and we had a discussion over a period of days where we worked through some of those anxieties and difficult dialogs.

When Joe and I went places in the small town where we work, people do sometimes stare. Once in awhile, people really make faces and it's disconcerting. I have rarely felt myself to be so subject to another person's opinion. Not just any person, but White people. The looks we got were from White people, mainly men. Joe seemed unphased but I was surprised and sometimes incredulous about the type of culture which tells some members that they are privileged and have the authority to tell complete strangers who they may or may not be romantically involved. It made me feel awkward and as though society was telling me I was doing something wrong.

I thought of how there was a time in my life when I have looked a few times at people who did not conform to what I expected to see. Did I behave that way? I think of my own reactions when learning of race and racial differences. Have I judged people for being in bi-racial relationships? Yes, I have; I approve of such relationships. The most reaction I can remember was in the mid-1990's when I saw a couple in their mid 70's at a coffee shop. I assume they were married and thought about how much they must have loved each other to risk alienation from friends, family and society for the sake of a life with each other. I remember this distinctly. Though Joe and I have parted romantic company, we remain friends and often commiserate on strategies to deal with issues of tolerance. We also share a passionate admiration for Dr. King.

There is another area of my life where I have struggled with the idea of disclosure. I hesitate to speak of the racial, sexual or ethnic identity of my



friends and acquaintances. Wildman and Davis (2000) Delpit (1995) and Tochluk (2010) all suggest that a thorough examination of one's own life in terms of racist/sexist/privileged thought, action and growth therein would also require an examination of those with whom I am closest. It is counterintuitive to classify my friends, but in their essay on making privilege visible, Wildman and Davis (2000, p. 51) assert that "our world is also raced, making it hard for us to avoid taking mental notes as to race". Therefore, I will make a few notes on this matter. My family is Caucasian, and every blood relative, save for the son of one of my first cousins, is to my knowledge, White. The friends and loved ones of my immediate and extended family are similarly situated. Of everyone in my extended family, I have the most education. I do not know why my friends are not exclusively White. Perhaps it is because of the situations I have exposed myself to, my geography or my entrance into higher education, but many of my friends and acquaintances are not White and are not exclusively heterosexual. Many of my friends are teachers and more often than not have undertaken graduate studies. While I follow Taoist beliefs, my friends are Jewish, Christian, Catholic, Muslim, Agnostic and Athiest. They are White, Black, Native American, Mexican American, Indian, Iranian, and Spanish. My friends, with whom I frequently associate- range in age from their mid-sixties to their early twenties, though my most frequent contact is with people from 30-41. Likewise, these people are engaged in all sorts of relationships, including lesbian, bi-racial, heterosexual, gay and open relationships. Many are recreational drug users, others are alcoholics and

recovering alcoholics. They are men and they are women with all sorts of abilities and disabilities (both physical and psychiatric). Many are poor, the bulk are middle class, and a few are affluent. I refer to one of my dearest friends as my brother. We met in the mid-1990's, and Thorn is gay, an AIDS patient and an advocate. He has lived with his disease and the ensuing stigma for over twenty years. It was Thorn who took me to my first gay bar and Thorn who lived with me when he almost died of lung cancer. When he dies, I will be there because he asked me to. And he will die a young man. He has had several recurrences of cancer.

I celebrate and grieve with my friends: birth, death, marriage and divorce. I am a vegetarian and we eat together, drink together and offer support. I babysit their children and attend birthday parties. Sometimes, someone betrays me and sometimes I make mistakes and poor decisions in my friendships. We either say we are sorry and forgive, or part and go our separate ways.

What do my friends do for a living and how do they make a difference in the world? One of my friends is a correctional officer in the Walla Walla Penitentiary and a former drill instructor for the Army. Another is a judge. Several are teachers and some are professors. There are actors, a physicist/astronomer, an arts management major, a homemaker, some musicians, a linguist, a paragliding pilot, a judge and a district attorney, a maintenance supervisor at a trailer park, and a few who are unemployed and/or homeless. Many times, we have attended protests together. We have gathered

to stage annual productions of “The Vagina Monologues” and raise money for the local women’s crisis center. One of my friends and I wrote a three-act play about education. Others and I gather to stage poetry readings, conferences for writers and teachers and a few times, a counter-protest against the Westboro Baptist Church, a hate group who often pickets churches and funerals in Oklahoma. Another friend, the person who introduced me to activism, is now a social worker.

What could all of these people possibly have in common or agree upon as a group? I can think of only a few things, and that is they would like to grow as human beings, they value social justice and they want to keep an open mind.

### **Education and Professional Life**

Am I unusual as an English teacher? Many things about me are not unusual. I am a single, White, heterosexual, female English teacher. This is not unusual in the slightest. However, there are mitigating factors of how I came to be who I am and why I do what I do. My childhood, my choices, my circumstances and even geography have played a part in who I am as a professional and as a researcher.

My educational experiences certainly play a part in my teaching practices and in my everyday life. As a high school senior, I looked at the world around me and wanted desperately to leave it. All three of my older sisters had children by this time, two of whom had gotten pregnant by the age of 17. I was in every club and non-athletic activity I could find. I only played

softball for a year, and ran track in junior high. It wasn't until years later that I found out that I have asthma. Though we were extremely poor, I was able to travel on scholarship to Washington, D.C. and to Kansas City, MO, to conferences and attended conventions and activities all over the state of Washington. I simply wanted more than what my options at home showed. Nobody in my family had ever gone to college. My mother worked as the night dispatcher at the local police department, and her voice came on our police scanner every night. I never took the ACT, and only took the SAT in tenth grade. I decided to go see my guidance counselor to see what advice she could give me. This would have a profound impact on my future. Here is what I remember her saying:

“You could go to the community college. Take some secretarial courses and you'll always have a job. It's not like you are going to be a brain surgeon.”

I did attempt community college when I turned 18. I was immediately elected president of the business club for my experiences in high school. It was my history class that made me drop out. I figured I couldn't write a ten-page essay; indeed, I had never been asked to write anything longer than a few pages and only my senior English thesis came close. I felt wholly unprepared and quit before I failed. I did not return to academics for several years and when I did, it was through community college in Las Vegas, and later, the Oklahoma university system. I did spend some time as a secretary for David Copperfield, the magician. For the record, I am a terrible secretary.

Nine years after I left high school, I earned an associates degree in Biology. I was a straight A student. I transferred to the university and majored in pre-veterinary medicine. For stress relief and fun, I took upper-division English classes, which I excelled in. I was also fortunate to be accepted into veterinary medical school in the top five of the hundreds of candidates that applied that year and as such, was not even required to interview for my spot. I had worked for years for that moment, the acceptance and reassurance that I was a person worth the educational investment. I wanted badly the validation and authority associated with a medical degree. I thought back to my high school guidance counselor and considered the possibility that I could, in fact, become a brain surgeon. Ultimately, though, this was not what I wanted. I was convinced that I would rather be a writer and perhaps an English teacher. I was a good writer, if a little rough, and finished a bachelor's degree in English/Creative Writing the next fall. During my quest for acceptance into vet school, I held study parties at my house and taught my fellow students chemical reactions and the Krebs citric acid cycle. This change of major from veterinary medicine to English dismayed my then-husband, who assured me I must go into journalism in order to make a living. The following fall, I tested my teaching skills. I had enough upper division chemistry credits to get a job as the chemistry labs manager. My first teaching experience was as a teaching assistant, teaching organic chemistry labs and tutoring pre-veterinary students through the challenging class. I have kept in contact with some of my students from that time. Now, ten years later, three of them are veterinarians.

My teaching colleagues in the chemistry department were primarily of Arabic or Indian descent. We made fast friends. For a time, I tutored the wife of one of my colleagues in English. She wore a hijab in the house and we rarely went outside for our lessons. Her daughter was too young to wear one but I was assured that after a certain age, the little girl would wear a scarf too. It was hard not to judge. I felt enough oppression without a head scarf; I couldn't imagine also having to wear a head covering in the Oklahoma heat. I wonder now about the impact of teaching English. I loved having international friends. For Thanksgiving one year, my husband at the time and I invited over everyone we knew. At our dinner were his parents, one of whom was a Baptist preacher, a Protestant minister and his wife, two international students respectively from Southern India and Morocco, and my good friend Asif who was a post-doctoral fellow from the Bengali province in India. This was one of the most exciting nights of my life. It happened that Ramadan was being celebrated, so we held the feast after sundown. Everyone seemed to genuinely enjoy each other's company even though few had met before that evening.

I learned much in those years about food, religion and culture and the intertwining of those three things. I was instructed on etiquette and taught to dance in my living room. I made friends that I still keep in contact with. On September 11, 2001, the Twin Towers and the Pentagon were hit by hijacked airplanes. I gathered my friends together and asked them to stay at my house for a few days. I feared for their safety in a world gone suddenly mad. I did not want to think of what reactionary White "rednecks" might do to innocent

people who looked the part of a “terrorist”. The same way that ten years prior I could not tell people of color apart now prompted me to fear people with the same problem. A few took me up on the offer.

During these years, I made friends in the English department of the college with several fellow majors. One of these students, named Karla, and I became good friends. It did not occur to me until several years later that she and the girl who saved me from taking a beating in junior high school had the same name. She and her boyfriend would come to breakfast on Saturdays. They would throw parties and I would attend. We had classes together and when the summer semester of Shakespeare rolled around, we studied as a group at Karla’s house. Karla was kind and beautiful and adopted a kitten, naming it Pangur-ban. She seemed so normal. Karla did not tell me of her mental disorder. She was bi-polar, and she did not have health insurance or access to regular medication. She kept a journal and wrote often on her memoir, which she called “Glue”. We were both Creative Writing students, and sometimes she showed me excerpts. Eventually, Karla fell apart; a combination of lack of family support (her ex-priest and ex-nun parents lived in denial) and her manic cheating on her boyfriend left both of them devastated. Eventually, she committed suicide. I attended the funeral with her boyfriend, in the church in which they were to be married. In her long and detailed suicide note, she addressed her friends and asked us to forgive her. Her father, who writes Catholic self-help books, founded the Karla Smith Foundation, which seeks to offer counseling to those who have lost a loved one

to suicide. He also wrote a book about her death. While I appreciate Karla's family's loss, I wonder what could have been done to help her while she was alive. She found her way to several halfway houses in Tulsa, but none could keep her for a significant amount of time, nor provide the services that she needed to regain a more positive frame of mind. In his eulogy, her twin brother Kevin commented that Karla knew that one in five people with bi-polar disorder die or commit suicide. He thought it probably that she hoped perhaps her death would save someone else. I agree with this assertion. Some of Karla's friends refused to go to her funeral. They called her selfish, and blamed her for her erratic behavior when she was alive. I disagreed; Karla, when she was well, was giving and selfless and vulnerable. It was my second experience with suicide, with unchecked and unhelped mental illness. These experiences often fuel my passion for social justice. What good is society if it cannot help the least of us?

As I entered graduate school (and got a divorce), I thought of the kind of teacher I wanted to be. I am passionate about education because of the impact it has had on my own life, not only through learning as a student, but as a teacher of English. During my post-secondary experience, much of my variety of teaching experiences, which are all in higher education, from vocational and community college, to the university system and the prison system in Washington state, have shaped my world view. Perhaps the most profound impact on my teaching has come from community college teaching



and my experiences with issues of oppression, racism and hegemony in the prison system.

My first university teaching position was as an adjunct. I taught four classes, three days a week in a small regional university which drew the majority of its students from the rural area around it. The largest business was Walmart, which had driven many of the small business out of business. Most of my students were White and young, though there were some students of color and a few over the age of twenty five. During the second semester, there was an incident of racial violence that occurred off campus involving some of my students and a local land owner. A young lady had driven her truck, filled with football players (African-American and White) to a party on private property belonging to the father of one of the party-goers. From the account given to me by the young woman, who was a student of mine, the father became angry that there were Black people on his property. These students climbed in the back of her truck and she drove away. The man followed her, hitting her truck and purposefully making her automobile flip over. Everyone in the truck was thrown out. One student was killed, another (also my student) was paralyzed from the waist down. Everyone else seemed to escape with only bumps and bruises. Eventually, the man was tried and convicted and will likely spend the rest of his life in prison.

In the Spring of 2010, I was afforded an opportunity to study the work of Sherman Alexie through a special course at the university. For a month, a professor of Native American Literature would guide us through selected

readings and critique, then our class would spend four days with the author himself, having dinner, a day of discussion of his work and a day of service in assisting a public talk and book signing by Mr. Alexie. The chair of my department wrote me a letter of recommendation, and I was selected as a fellow, earning my tuition through attendance and scholarship.

Of the students in this class, I was for once in the minority. Most participants, including the instructor, claimed Native American descent. We were all excited to study his work and went about this task with gusto. As it turned out, of those who were present, I was the one most familiar with his work and life. Having both grown up in Eastern Washington, many of the places in his work are pronounced with a regional dialect, and I was often called upon to clarify issues of life in Washington state. Furthermore, I have studied his oeuvre and watched over the years as his star has risen to both cheers and criticism from critics and popular audiences. His popular young adult literature book is set in Reardan, Washington, in the school directly across the street from my aunt and uncle's house. My cousins attended that school and Chrysee, youngest of the three, graduated from high school with Alexie's youngest brother. By proxy, we have much in common and ended up having several conversations over the course of the week that both intrigued and enlightened my practice as a teacher. Mr. Alexie even gave me his email and telephone number, and I interviewed him extensively. Following is an excerpt from my teaching journal written during that time, regarding my own fear of

racial prejudice and the prospect of a White teacher leaning on non-White authors. I have rendered it to a vignette for use here:

“So what are you looking for, a red permission slip?”, said my friend and colleague, Steve. We were in a Starbucks, discussing teaching practices. A big guy, a Choctaw Pawnee with dark skin, a long braid and nerdy glasses framing his round face, Steve wasn’t easy to miss. His easy smile and shoulder bag filled with books and a laptop gave him away as an intellectual, an Indian nerd, which he was. I doubted he ever got bullied by other kids when he was growing up, the way that Sherman Alexie did.

“I’m just not sure where I stand on this. If I should be doing it.” My eyes darted around the room, a good portion of which was taken up with Steve, and the other parts filled with students, soccer moms and kids getting matching adult and child size beverages and one of the dying breed of middle class yuppie typing away on his mobile laptop, sipping a cappuccino and answering messages on his iPhone. I wondered what we must look like to them. Me a red-haired, blue eyed Amazon, and Steve looking like a friendly version of the savages found in cowboy movies.

We had notes in front of us. Steve was in the middle of his dissertation research and I was worrying myself into a corner. “Well, if you can teach it and if you love the literature, you should teach it. What is your connection?” I squirmed, since I was a total hypocrite.

“Where do you get off?”, cried the voices in my head. “Where does a White chick get the idea that she can teach Native American literature?” Ghosts crept silently in through the crack in the coffee shop door. Not the regular Indian ghosts with oilskins and shells and whaling spears. Not the ones with dugout canoes and sharp features and short, bowed legs. These were the modern Indians and they looked like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn [Native American Literature critic with a strong view of tribal sovereignty] with her eternal frown lines and some of the Native American classmates in my Puterbaugh course, all dark hair and eyes and turquoise and western clothing. They whispered in my ear, “You don’t know what you’re doing. There’s nothing in your blood but Indo-European trash. You don’t even tan. You can’t teach something you didn’t grow up experiencing.” That’s actually what one of my classmates said to me. Well, not to me, to the class. But I think it was aimed at me since Alexie is my favorite author to teach.

Steve would laugh at me if he knew what I feared. Instead, I told him my stories and he told me I had nothing to worry about. I asked him if he’d come to class and vouch for me. Steve claims to be neither a post structuralist nor an essentialist, and argues that while everything doesn’t mean nothing, there are often multiple

interpretations for the same signifier. I tend to agree. I wonder if it's the same for Alexie.

I ended up confessing my fears to Mr. Alexie. He assured me that I have his blessing to teach his work, and noted that he has more in common with a farmer from Eastern Washington than most of the Native American population. My uncle is a farmer in Eastern Washington. I cannot help but offer that validation to anyone who asks.

Throughout my graduate school experience, few of my peers were people of color; a major minority. While my professors were almost exclusively White, the majority of my peers were middle class White women and some White men. The administration at the community college where I taught for three years as well as most of the faculty were White, even in the inner-city, and this theme was repeated in the prison where I worked, the state university where I taught and in my current position. I saw and continue to see few reflections of actual demographics in positions of power and authority within the educational system.

### **Correctional Work**

*This section of the autoethnography is a reprinting of an article I wrote entitled "Teaching in the Total Institution". I am including it for consideration in the autoethnography because of its completeness as a document dealing with my personal autobiographical experiences with oppression and institutional reproduction of racism, gender bias and discrimination. The placement of this piece contributes to the overall "flow"*

*of the autoethnography, and as such, it would be jarring to merely add it as an appendix.*

In his 1962 book “Asylums”, Erving Goffman defines the characteristics of a total institution. Most often, a regular institution is a place where a particular group of people gather for a common reason. The U.S. Post Office is an institution, as is any educational center such as a university. These places do not permeate or control every aspect of a person’s life. Sleep, recreation, sustenance and work are usually separated in society, even if those amenities are geographically offered within a particular campus. In a total institution, “all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority” (Goffman, 1962).

In January of 2008, I began a job teaching in a total institution in Washington state. I became employed through a community college and would be teaching GED and English as a Second Language coursework in the minimum security portion of a prison. Barbara Wade, in an article published in *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal*, points out that education in correctional facilities is to serve a variety of purposes. The incarcerated would gain employability, become more responsible members of society and that most important, those who undertake academic studies are less likely to return to prison (2007). However, the criteria for defining success in prison education is murky and rests most widely on the idea of reduced recidivism rates (Wade, 2007).

Mostly though, I wondered what the effect of the prison system would have on me as a teacher, as an educator and as a person. Would I change the world, or would the world change me?

### **Methodology.**

This thematic textual analysis examines two primary documents; my online teaching journal and my autobiography during the eight-month span of my employment as a teacher at a minimum security men's prison. As I sifted through the documents, I realized that I was subject to Foucault's (1977) panopticism, and to the isolation felt by inmates and other interred in total institutions. Furthermore, I could use an etic overlay of Goffman's (1961) characteristics of a total institution through which to view my experience.

In the interest of inter-rater reliability, I shared my documents with two independent readers. One is familiar with Foucault's work. The other attended the initial six-week training course with me, currently is employed in a correctional facility close by the one where I worked, and is someone who has insider knowledge of the total institution.

Each of the documents has been coded and themed according to an etic overlay of some of Goffman's characteristics of the total institution as they apply to my experience and also at points where Foucault's panopticism and isolation come to bear in the writing and experiences. I use Foucault's theories to view my experiences and to help identify and characterize Goffman's characteristics of the total institution.

Introduction

The facility where I taught houses 600 inmates and offers a drug and alcohol treatment program to over half of those entrusted to its keep. The incarcerated men were all within four years of release to halfway houses or parole. Gender and release date seemed to be their only common factors; type of crime held no sway. All prisoners were included from convictions on drug charges to murder, crimes against women and children and property. Minimum security designation does not mean the inmate is not dangerous. Minimum designation means that they have exhibited a certain desirable behavior for an acceptable period of time. Given the fact that basic education classes leading up to a General Education Diploma are not optional, they are required, I wondered how successful a program of forced literacy would work. Why would anyone use mainly the rates of recidivism to assess effectiveness of an educational program? Perhaps to justify the expenses. It's most likely that since those statistics, collected by the Bureau of Justice, already provide the statistics, it's fairly inexpensive to do and "... policy makers who fund rehabilitation programs need empirical evidence that these programs reduce crime" (Batiuk et. Al, qtd in Wade, 2007). However, why not have education for the sake of education? It is public opinion that drives budgets and politicians who run on "tough on crime" campaigns are the ones who fund penal institutions over educational ones.

I moved 1,700 miles to take the job. This placed me within 60 miles of my grandparents, who I wanted to spend time with before they passed on. As a social constructivist, I felt I could make at least a small difference in the long-

term of an often oppressed group of people through literacy and Paulo Freire styled emancipatory education techniques. I left my home in Oklahoma with only my cat and a small Uhaul to move out into the desert in a town of no more than 350 people- many of whom were the families of the incarcerated or of the guards- and took up residence in a small apartment on the second floor of a concrete building. Thus began my journey as a part of the institution and as one who was surprisingly subject to the watchful gaze from within the walls.

In the second part of Goffman's discussion of the characteristics of a total institution, he discusses the changes that take place during the initial induction phase of institutionalization. He speaks of a role dispossession, a "deep initial break with past roles" (14). My first day. I wasn't to start work until 12:30, since that's when the security sergeant would be available. A graying man with a computer and a cramped office full of papers, He seemed competent, if not overwhelmingly warm. His first words after pleasantries? "In the event of a hostage situation, we will not negotiate for your release. You will be considered useless and this may be the only thing that protects you in the end. Also, we monitor your computer activities. And don't ever let a hand off of your keys." These were the first of many rules to the prison. Do not bring in glass, only plastic silverware. Never leave a room unattended. Don't bring in too many personal things- inmates will use your information against you. Hot trash is one thing, shredders are your friend, and don't let any information slip about you or anyone you love. Don't take shit from anyone. Don't even let people call you by your first name. Inmates must tuck in their



shirts and not wear sweats to class. Nobody leaves class unless called or they sign out with good reason. Don't touch anyone. Don't let anyone touch you. Don't smile. Don't look anyone in the eye, don't look too close at the barbed wire or you'll cut your eyes and cry blood. I was overwhelmed by institutional dealings with the uglier denominators of humanity. What had I gotten myself into? My instinct was to say that there had been a mistake and that I'd like to go home. But I was home and this was the only job available at the moment. I had to stay. I called everyone I knew to talk me down, and one person, Kerry, to just come and get me.

A redefinition of the self is necessary- in order to form an identity within the walls and confines of the institution in order to successfully live through one's time served. This break is also necessary for those who voluntarily work in the institution. For me, it was the requirement of a six week training seminar where I would spend eight hours daily with other new employees of the prison system. My background was in education and I had no training in corrections. In fact, I was not employed by the prison system but by the local community college. All persons who worked within the walls had to undergo the training. At the end, most became correctional officers. My particular group had a mixture of correctional officers, kitchen staff, administrative staff and myself. The only other person was a contract-to-hire psychologist who had been with Washington State Corrections for several years. The induction phase, meant to form us into a cohesive group (undifferentiated by socio-economic or other divisors such as race or education

level), instead became heavily divided along lines of race and employment status.

Within a total institution, groups of people are treated en masse (Goffman, 1962). Sleeping, working, eating, recreation and education are all activities accomplished in blocks. “All phases of the day’s activities are tightly scheduled with one activity leading...into the next” (Goffman, 1962, p. 6). This was so in the institution. Our classes were on time blocks to accommodate inmate’s schedules for eating, working and religious observance. Inmates, who I called “students” in the classroom, often remarked that they liked being in my classroom because they felt less like nameless, faceless pieces of the crowd and more like humans. A few times, students in my classes purposely failed their final General Education Diploma exam so they would more time to spend in the classroom, writing, enjoying quiet, or learning. The experience, they reported, was outside of the norm.

In a total institution such as the one where I worked, one central feature is that all aspects of life are tightly controlled, activities are completed in large groups and that these things are tightly scheduled (Goffman, 2001). Of course, this is to keep the individual’s mind on the task at hand, to occupy their energy and to ostensibly eliminate time to get into trouble. The other outcome, I have noticed, is that it also impedes time for reflective individuality, personal growth and self-actualization, some of the basic tenets that I value as a humanist.

I was an outsider to the institution. I had never been employed through corrections. My supervisor had spent her entire career within the walls of the institution. First she served in administrative capacities as a parole officer and later as a counselor. Then as a shift towards education occurred and was begun to be handled externally, she obtained a master's degree online in education and viewed her education career as an extension of her corrections career. I was an outsider, through and through. My educational background and experience was in teaching English at colleges and universities. I knew nobody on the inside prior to my first day on the job.

Foucault's (1977) idea of panopticism is that prison systems are built with a central tower and all inmate cells surrounding it, able to be viewed by the corrections officers and the administration, but not by the other inmates, and of course, the inmates are not able to view inside the towers. I felt this directional gaze from the moment I entered the prison. I do not enjoy being the object of attention; I prefer to observe rather than to be observed. However, inside of the walls, I was watched first and most obviously by the inmates and secondly by those who worked there. I expected to dress down-way down. I bought dark, loose clothing that covered me as much as possible from neck to feet. I wore the same black shoes every single day of my tenure. I never wore perfume, very little makeup and always pulled my hair into a bun. The inmates never saw my long red hair, a photograph of me or my family, or any indication that I had a life outside of the classroom save for the one lie I

planned to tell: I bought a lab-created diamond ring to wear to disguise the fact that I was single.

My induction into the institution was disruptive to my world view. I was told during the six week training course to compartmentalize feelings and to leave my job at work. I had a difficult time with the idea of a separation between work and family life, as most of my friends in my former life were drawn from the creative pooling of ideas to solve problems that had been brought out into the light. To make a presentation of myself that was incomplete felt like lying. Whereas before I had always used personal stories to draw out student's stories and writing, to do so in an institution could be considered dangerous not only for the information given, but for the danger that my students might feel connected and equal to me. To step from the role of distant professor to fellow human being simply was not tolerated in my new context.

As Goffman states, "Total institutions are also incompatible with another crucial element of our society, the family" (Goffman, 1962, p. 11). Not only is this true of those who dwell within the institution, but also for those who spend their workday within the walls. For me, the split was a wide chasm. Given that I would see my grandparents only on the weekends, and that I had only one good acquaintance in the town I lived in, it was very difficult to fully discuss and resolve issues outside of work. I made another acquaintance in the training seminar. As a retired Army drill instructor, my new friend had little difficulty assimilating into the institution, and he

occasionally assisted me in my endeavors to fit in. We met only occasionally, since there was almost 80 miles between us, so contact was much appreciated but brief. And since I didn't trust anyone I worked with, feared them, in a way I didn't fear the inmates, I turned to the only outlet available. I wrote my lived experiences.

### **Isolation and Panopticism.**

In sifting through my autobiography and teaching journal, I discovered that isolation and the break with previous social roles seem to go together and that these phenomena affected the inmates and also me. Some of the isolation was environmental. The classrooms were almost entirely the same, each equipped with tables, a U-shape countertop that spanned three quarters of the room to hold computers, and a Whiteboard plus teacher's desks and filing cabinets. The computers existed on a closed network with no internet access available. There was no telephone in the classrooms. There was no video camera, though there was one in the hallway. There was no panic button or other forms of communication between the teacher and others, except to leave the room. Only rarely was a correctional officer present, and this was done about halfway through their shifts as part of their rounds. During the day, many non-inmates bustled about. My supervisor and most of my co-workers were in office until about 4:30 p.m. After that, I was on my own. Down the hall were three other teachers in their classrooms. That was all for the building. If security were needed, one had to exit the classroom and open a locked door, close it behind them, and then dial the operator for help.

Besides the physical layout of a prison, social controls often account for isolation. It usually follows in a work situation that anyone I supervise I often have close contact with. In my work, I was assisted by a teacher's aide. Their job in the classroom is to assist students with work, help answer questions, read out loud and sometimes administer and grade practice tests. My job was to somehow teach the aide to help me teach but also maintain personal distance. My first aide was a college graduate who claimed a degree in business and said he'd been involved with drugs. He spent his time in class drawing pictures for his daughter. Students often refused his assistance, and I noticed the tension and the "apartness" between him and the other students. He was doing his time alone, turning inward and away from social norms within the prison. He did not seem to have many friends. This is what Ric Scarce (2002) refers to as hard time. As "little more than automatons" (Scarce, 2002, p. 306), my aide went through the motions of inmate life- sleeping, eating and performing activities in the presence of others. However, he seemed to need to keep a social distance from others, to stay apart from rather than to become a part of, in order to continue to think of himself more in street terms rather than as an inmate. The other inmates noticed and obliged his unspoken desire; he was more or less ignored. He had achieved what Goffman (2001) refers to as situational withdrawal.

My second aide, who I will refer to as Adam, had finished a GED and was highly social with the students. He was far more successful in his educational efforts because he put information and examples in terms easily

understandable and within the context of his fellow students, tacitly doing what Paulo Freire (1978) advocates- using the words from the world around them to describe and learn the materials. His apparent insider status ensured many times that the students would be able to learn comfortably and without judgment. A slightly built young man, Adam, like many of the students, was a storyteller and a social chameleon. He was able to navigate relationships with opposing gang members, even though he was affiliated with one group in particular.

Within the education department, we had little enough communication and a culture of fear. I approached my supervisor only when I needed to report something to her or to ask her for information. My coworkers did the same. The person above her was not on our campus. And my coworkers, whether they liked it or not, were subject to the same unbending rules as I was. I was once turned in by the computer teacher to my boss for breaking a rule I didn't know existed. I was told when I began my job at the prison that I could run a writing group. No problem. However, any time students tried to get time with me out of class, my boss put the kibosh on it. When they come during classtime, she likewise kicked them out or got them in trouble. And my "office hours" were entirely closed; the building was locked and students could not have access to their teacher. Fine. I used the 20 minutes after class that I had and sometimes made time in the evening class when nobody was looking to tutor students in writing. It was the beginning of my own resistance to the institution. Think of it- there's no college credit given, no acknowledgement of

their education, no other reward besides learning to write and think critically. Yet I had students every day bring me their writing for help, validation, critique and discussion. And they took assignments and worked on them too.

One student was writing a novel. He finished his first chapter and that's a major accomplishment. I gave him editorial advice on the handwritten material and advised him to type it up. He did and gave me the copy. I didn't think anything of it. It was maybe 10 pages. I guess it was a big deal to use computer class time to work on personal projects. And printing was a big infraction. If you let anyone print anything outside of class assignments, then others will expect to do the same. Then there would be students writing and printing and...wait, isn't that one goal of education- greater literacy? There was an investigation. I'm serious. I had to turn over the pages in question. An investigation about when and where and who typed and printed what and in whose class. My fellow teacher didn't approach me about out or even discuss it with me at the time. She feared retribution if our boss found out that she'd let a student print something in class. As she told me later, "I am not marketable. I can't get a job anywhere else. I absolutely need this job and can't afford to deviate from the rules for any reason." My student almost got an infraction for what I asked him to do. In the end, my student got his story back and he didn't get in trouble. My fellow teacher apologized and I understand her fear of being seen, of being perceived as deviant in any fashion. It made me wonder though, about the goals of the "education department". Exactly what did we teach that guy?



In my teaching journal, I also noted resistance to institutional social norms. During the six week induction correctional officer training school, I felt isolated and pressured to conform to the new norms, and to cast off my sense of self. It felt as though I had to submit to lesser standards:

I hope I don't get any more memos. I earn myself "memos" by exhibiting bad behavior- coming back from break late or infracting some other ridiculous rule like putting my hands in my pockets or accidentally bringing a banana into the classroom. I shit you not. Monday mornings are special because we have quizzes- ten multiple choice questions regarding the material from the previous week. I have not studied. Nor will I. I don't need to, or even need to study to pass these tests.

Each week we had written tests containing three questions. The first week, feeling rather deflated by the apparently single-mindedness of indoctrination into the corrections culture, I answered the questions honestly. There were only four points possible every week. I did not receive all of the points from the reviewer, who commented that my answers were "good, but too wordy". I realized that I would have to attempt to assimilate into the culture in order to pass the exams and resume my position at the institution (Goffman, 2001). The second week, I decided to answer the questions as though I were regurgitating exactly the words used from the books and from the class lectures. I received perfect credit. The third week I returned to

answering the questions thoroughly and with examples and citations. While I had written two pages the previous two weeks, I wrote three pages the third. The reviewer subtracted points based solely on the following comment: “Answers...are very vague I think you should read The Questions again.” I read the questions again, and my answers. I had bulleted out the answers in response to the questions. (Essential Questions, Correctional Worker Core, 2007) It seemed that of each of the six weeks, my grade depended on whether or not the reviewer liked me. None of the trainers had a hand in curriculum development- materials, research or presentations- only in the articulation.

It seemed that the concept of strict hierarchy and panopticism (Foucault, 1977) would be strictly enforced in the prison system in Washington and that the principles applied to me. The indoctrination at Core training was demonstrated time and again: that if one did not adhere strictly to their given place, someone would see. Someone would rat them out or be themselves exposed for treason to the institution, resulting in discipline and punishment. I was effectively put on notice that I was being watched and that I was just as suspect as a single, attractive woman as those in the disciplinary class (Foucault, 1977). I was angry at my treatment in the correctional class and was glad when the course ended.

My work week was Monday through Friday. I taught a class from 12:30-3:30 p.m. and from 5:30 – 8:30 p.m. To access the education building, I would first enter the prison and lock up all of my personal belongings. I would then take a “chit”, a metal coin embossed with my first initial and last name,

and trade it for a numbered keyring. The keys corresponded to my building and the contents thereof- all file cabinets were locked. Printers were locked, supplies, copy rooms, bathrooms, offices, classrooms and inner and outer doors. This would be important one night when I had to evade one of my students. I crossed the yard every day, past the pay telephones and the chain link fences with barbed wire strung across. I crossed the path of the basketball court and a picnic table where inmates routinely hung out and through the group of men who invariably waited at the doors. I carried keys attached to my waist by a clip, always mindful of special rules. Do not take your hands off of your keys. In the event of a hostage situation, get rid of them in a secure area if possible. I entered buildings and locked them behind me. I walked the same, I kept the same bored expression outside, I hardly acknowledged people that I knew- faculty, staff or inmates. To do so would be a breach of etiquette. Who looks happy and friendly in a prison?

I did often connect with my students. The prison was a strange place, both socially and physically. There were often cases of MRSA, hepatitis, and other ailments that beset the inmates from close proximity to each other at all times. I never touched inmates for that reason alone and never left my coffee cup unattended or touched anyone's pens or pencils. It was just good policy. But humans inevitably seek community and the classroom was the obvious place to engage them.

Education in prison is not voluntary- if one does not have a GED, one must work towards obtaining it. This is under the guise that education levels

have an effect on recidivism rates (Eggert, 2002). Many of my students had poor reading and writing skills. Their greatest fears were writing and math, in that order. The writing test was often the last one they would take, putting it off as long as possible. One student comes to mind who had anger management issues. On top of that, he probably had an undiagnosed learning disorder and would frequently become frustrated with the writing process altogether. A large man, over 6'4", he would grind his teeth and sometimes yell about how stupid a writing assignment was. He reminded me of the fictional character "The Incredible Hulk", only without the mild alter ego. I would ask him to go get a drink of water, to walk up and down the hallway for a few minutes. Then he would sit at his desk and try again- first with guided practice, then on his own.

While it was particularly gratifying to see him get his GED, I wondered at the kinds of teachers he had previously had who taught him how to fail. In fact, seeing the many bright students who learned just because someone took time to help and to listen to their questions in a non-judgmental way and who allowed the use of their own languages, knowledge and cultures in their writing led me to wonder about the education system in general. How did so many slip through the cracks? Was it easiest to force children out of school if they didn't conform to standards? Was it the abrasive nature of these men that scared their teachers? As I reflect on the experience of teaching this student, I compare his educational experience with the one I had at the correctional officers training. I also behaved poorly in the face of frustration. If we are

taught to fail, most of the time we do so. If we are taught to succeed and have some sense of belief that we can, I think it's possible.

I also never revealed to anyone what my students wrote to me. I wanted them to trust me. According to Ric Scarce (2002), who did five months in the Spokane County Jail just 100 miles from my institution, staff and guards would do one of two things. One the one hand, they would stick entirely to the letter of the code of conduct and refuse to take into account the context of the situation, enforcing the letter of the rule regardless of any circumstance. On the other, in Scarce's experience, they might make decisions according to situational context and through a sense of humanity and fairness- I might even call it compassion or kindness. Generally speaking, Scarce and his fellow inmates acted to make the rule-holder's lives as difficult as possible. There was usually no question about the course of my actions. However, in the case of keeping confidence as a professional, I used my best judgment.

One student who I will call Jorge would write about how he grew up, how proud he was of his sister when she joined a gang and was eventually made a lieutenant and how this inspired him to do the same. He also wrote of a time when he had to save her when she killed a man and almost died from having her throat cut. As horrific as this may sound, my student was not trying to scare me or to sensationalize his experiences. He was following a writing prompt about what his life was like then, what it was like now and how he'd like his life to be in ten years. I asked him to be authentic; I cannot blame a student for telling me the truth when I ask him to do so. I might have given his

writing to my supervisor, but I didn't. I didn't want to break his trust and his writing began to improve once he figured out that he wouldn't be arrested for what he wrote. Of course, there is a line. If he had written of any planned violence or illegal activities, I would have felt bound to turn him in.

I later taught Jorge, and many like him, how to write in cursive. I made photocopies of the letters and how to draw them and let him practice in the back of the classroom at his computer desk. He hid them in a National Geographic magazine and if anyone besides me came by, he closed it so they couldn't see what he was doing. In return, Jorge taught me terms like "plaqua", which is Spanish slang for police officer, "church", meaning that everything is alright, and how to recognize a member of a certain gang by the symbols they wear and the gestures they make. I taught him middle-class vocabulary words so the he might fulfill a small dream of his: to talk to someone in a coffee shop. Inmates talk to each other, and Jorge was an important part of that rumor mill. In this way, and in replicating this behavior, I became an accepted outsider into the prison and helped create our own community. I taught an aspiring real estate broker how to calculate mortgages. I taught poets about Langston Hughes, Robert Frost, Tupac Shakur, Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. I wrote found poems based on dialog with others. These were the ways I connected with my students- by sharing my enthusiasm for teaching and learning and offering unconditional positive regard as a teacher. It was the only thing in the prison to combat the isolation. Rather than spend my time with my co-workers complaining about

administration and students, I chose instead to leave for lunch breaks and avoided interactions in my off hours. It was easy to do so.

### Unanticipated Effects

Isolation, I believe, is the opposite of sense of community. And in that community, every person has a sense of the social self. I lived between two main communities (though I also maintained a social presence online), that of a teacher in prison and as a member of my family. Where I lived out in the desert was in a two-bedroom apartment in a rural, tightly-knit community wary of outsiders. I lived alone, ate my meals that way during the week, walked and jogged most of the time by myself, taught in isolation in the classroom and only felt a sense of community on the weekends when I visited my family. I felt uneasy discussing my work with my aging grandparents. I did not want them to worry, so I only gave minimal details of incidences and my observances of the violence of the institution and the inmates. I felt insecure most of the time and as a result, my weight dropped. I am not a slender built person and maintained an active lifestyle and healthy vegetarian eating habits. My grandmother remarked that I “didn’t eat enough to keep a bird alive”, and my sister confided that she worried about me because she could see the bones in my chest. Eventually, I made the decision to leave the institution and return to Oklahoma to pursue a doctoral degree.

I remember being caught off guard by any alterations in inmate’s physical appearance. Usually, the standard issue wardrobe consisted of a pair of trousers, a teeshirt, sweatshirt, and sweat pants. No street clothes were

allowed- it was part of the rules and the treatment of inmates *en masse*. Orange jumpsuits were worn only if someone were in isolation (commonly referred to as the hole) or if they were to be transported.

Me, I go bopping in to work today...and the front door is busy. They're ready to transport someone.

One of my students.

He has most of the requirements finished for an Associates degree in English. He hates algebra and he had been working last quarter on his math. Always, his hair was clean and in a pony tail or two. He didn't have the greatest attitude in the world but he tried. He was well-spoken and if not a gentleman, I believe he was honest with me about the things pertinent to our classroom discussions. I didn't take it personally and didn't think much of it when he earned enough points to leave the class. I had done my job.

I did a double take. Behind a glass framed office door he stood, orange jumpsuit rather than the tucked in shirt/trousers he usually wore.

Shackles. Stringy hair flying wild like he's been in segregation (the hole) for a week or more. You get two showers a week there whether you need it or not.

You know, he could have been going someplace good- a facility closer to family members or perhaps to donate a kidney for a loved one. I won't rule that out. We recognized each other at the same time.

Painfully so. My face must've looked very surprised. I wanted to burst



through the door and say "Hey, stop. Get him a pony tail holder. Give him a little dignity. That's a person there." And I remembered at that moment that I was in a prison, and prisons deal with sometimes violent criminals. And I think my student realized what I was seeing too. I could see it in his eyes. If you've ever met me, you know that everything I've ever felt has crossed my visage. I wish I could describe the look on his face- embarrassment, shame, not wanting to be seen this way- I don't know. Stricken, maybe. I won't forget it.

And he dropped his eyes, and I dropped mine. And I walked on, taught my class, came home and went jogging. Like nothing in the world is out of the ordinary and nothing has changed, except that I can't sleep at night. I cannot unknow the things that I have observed and learned.

### **Leaning on the Institution.**

There were times when the environmental tension got under my skin. Each inmate had had it drilled into them that whenever a staff member ordered them to "stand for a search", they were to immediately turn their back and put their arms out. This renders a person vulnerable and breaks eye contact.

Aggressive eye contact can escalate out of control behavior so the technique can have a de-escalating effect. I've never done it but have seen it employed.

The tension Goffman (2001) talks about in his discussion of the characteristics of a total institution say that "the goal of the institution is not to provide a different culture but to develop a tension between the home world and the institutional world." That was the tension I experienced every day, the line I

walked between prison life and street life. I showed no emotion as a student was arrested and handcuffed outside of my classroom after class. I refrained from comment when two of my students disappeared and I learned they beat each other up pretty bad and were moved immediately to different institutions. I cried at home when I saw photographs of one of my particularly difficult students, who had lately been making academic progress, broke his ocular bone and fractured his ribs but claimed it had happened by falling out of bed.

A few times, I had to lean on the institution to protect me. I was threatened by one of the students in my night class. He had some obvious learning disabilities and was rumored to be doing his time for crimes against women. I did not know that until later, though I don't think it would've changed the outcome for me. The rule of the classroom is that you must be making progress- you must be actively doing something such as working on one of the subject areas. Just goofing off or hanging out are not permitted. I had been tested on this many times by the students and was adept at politely returning their attention to school work. It was much more difficult to keep them focused at night, when the students had gotten up at 4 a.m. and worked all day, then run to class at 5:30. This night, though, this student was not only rude and mean, but made sexual remarks about me when I caught him looking at pornographic materials stuck in the pages of his book. I had given him as much leeway as possible up until that point, but removed him from the class. It was wise to do so, in my opinion, because while all of the students could still see us, in the hallway was a security camera. This is the one time I've been

consciously thankful for Foucault's (1977) panopticism. I told him to return to his unit, the living quarters. He refused and stepped into my space. He was extremely agitated. A person like this can be very scary, with their behavior escalating out of control. At this point I did what I was trained to do- I broke eye contact commanded him to do so. I also did something I was trained to do long before I ever entered a prison- I took a concealed defensive stance and took a pencil from my hair as unobtrusively as possible, to use as a weapon if he attacked me. There was little doubt in my mind as to who would win in a physical confrontation- me. I had taught martial arts for many years. My goal was to prevent violence. He began walking down the hall and I walked purposefully towards my office. I unlocked the door and locked it behind me, picking up the phone at the same time. That's when he began banging on the door. An officer- one who was sympathetic and would frequently do checks on me in the evenings- responded within a minute. In the meantime, we regarded one another through the reinforced glass. The other officers took more than two minutes to reach my building. While I had come to loathe the institution, I was glad to be able to use its constructs when necessary. I wondered for some time if this isn't a weakness on my part- if my supposition that people can grow and that we don't have to be what someone else makes us- is wrong. I don't want to think that anyone would be destructive because it is their nature to be so. At that moment, I didn't have time to anticipate or contemplate. My training took over as I leaned on the institution that I believe created the situation in the first place.

In one respect, the institution did fail in that the incident did not end there. The night sergeant- who informed me that the video camera didn't record well and who had not even spoken to me- decided that I had overreacted and that if the student apologized for his actions I should "forgive" him and allow him to return the next evening. The student was not apologetic, he was angry and his body language threatening. But the sergeant assured me that no report had to be filed. I immediately emailed everything I could remember to my superior. The next day, furious, she filed my reports for me and the inmate had been shipped to a maximum security prison by the time I reached work that afternoon. The night sergeant and I never did come to civil terms and no special consideration for my safety was ever undertaken. As understanding as my superior was, she did not have authority to change security procedures in the facility. I'm not sure she would have if she did have authority.

My repeated verbal requests for tighter security were met with staffing difficulties, logistical difficulties and excuses. Months went by. My classes filled up. Instead of the 17 to 19 students I should have had and for whom I had room, I had 22 students. By this time, I had a reputation and the inmate/students felt more comfortable with me. Looking around the room-standing room only- one of the students raised his hand. "How are you going to teach us?" he said. I said, "I'm going to need your help", and they mostly did cooperate. I raised concerns with my superior verbally and in writing, copying the human resources department at the college.

Overcrowding is the main cause of riots in prisons and my contract specifically stated that there would be class sizes of 19 or fewer. She relented; she had no choice. Eventually, I got back to 19 students. The problem is that they were transferred to day classes, overfilling those classrooms as well.

The second incident wasn't as dramatic, but the backlash was. Again, during the evening class, one of my students picked up a heavy metal stool that weighed about 15 pounds. He began yelling at another student that he would hit him in the head with it. Of course, I did not think. I stepped between them, which was the wrong thing to do. I was able to prevent physical violence and asked the very large man who had held the stool to step into the hallway with me as I called the officers. Again, my friend responded immediately, followed this time much more quickly by the other officers. They interrogated him in the hall. By this time, my class was in disarray. I attempted to calm everyone (myself included) and called for us as a group to discuss what acceptable behaviors in the classroom looked like. "Welcome to prison", said one with a smirk. "We can do better than that. We have to." Was my response.

The sergeant this time was a woman. She entered my class and asked me rather loudly in front of my students what my problem was. I excused myself from the classroom for a few minutes, leaving my aide in charge of an algebra equation, and led her to the hallway. I described the incident. Her response? "Welcome to prison. That's how they are." I wondered about how minimal the differences are between the inmates and the guards and how we are all subject to the same pressures of institutionalization.

Again, the inmate was excused from class for the evening and I sent a similar email to my superior. Again, she filed a complaint, though this time the inmate was not removed from the facility. She had him transferred to a day class. However, the sergeant read my report, including the things she had said to me. She came to the education building in an attempt to pull me out of my class. I know this because I heard her in my closed classroom, yelling at my boss. She was sent away. She never approached me again, though it was clear from her body language and lack of verbal greetings that this was not by her own choice.

**Conclusion.**

I realized that every evening that my friendly officer did not work that I would be truly on my own in that classroom. I would have no security and little access to security. Those who taught right next door, while as deserving of compassion as anyone else, would be afforded no more trust than the inmates. There would be more incidences. I had little security, no administrative support to speak of, no camaraderie with my co-workers and only inmates and a few friendly correctional officers with whom to identify. My unwillingness to open up to my family created a rift on my part, and after eight months, I had made but one friend in the town where I lived. The choice was clear at that point: I could keep my place in the prison and give up on the idea of making a difference, assimilate fully and purposefully ignore my compassion for others, forego my education, training, experience and instincts and continue on the path I was on. Alternatively, I could continue to disrupt

the system until I got hurt or was forced out- I had already been denied a transfer to a facility closer to a populated area. Or I could quit and try to find peace from a distance. The tension between my constructivist, humanist approach to education is at odds with the corrections system. I decided to go back to Oklahoma, to return to graduate school and change the world as much as I could for the better and that this would be the very best I could do to end human suffering. I didn't want my students to think that I would just abandon them, so I told them of my decision to return to graduate school, and I wrote them a poem to say goodbye. It was published in English Journal in April of 2009.

For My Students Who Are Incarcerated  
I can't believe this is our last day together,  
That when I leave here tonight,  
After the 5:30 class,  
I will go home, finish packing, and leave for graduate school.  
But it's just like I always say, that education  
is the most important thing in the world.  
You know how I'm always at the board, teaching math,  
and going on about how  
there's more than one way to skin a cat,  
That half of the answer is knowing what the question is  
and that it's always the little things that catch us off guard?  
Those things are also true in life.  
I hope what I didn't say, I showed:  
That every human is worthy of respect and dignity,  
That I learn from you just like you learn from me  
And that education isn't just about math and English  
and social studies.  
Education is about life  
and how you think of yourself and  
how you treat people around you with care  
even when they don't do the same for you.  
That's integrity.  
I learned that the first time in college, from a book.  
I learned it for real from you,  
The living breathing students

who made me laugh and tested my patience,  
and my infraction-writing skills.  
You know nothing of me personally  
but you let me in, conditionally, to see what I would do.  
You taught me how to speak the language,  
read the environment,  
Who could or would or would not work with whom  
How to make pruno, a tattoo gun,  
to never leave my coffee cup unattended  
and always bend from the knees.  
Not the easiest lessons, sometimes, but I needed to know.  
So, please accept my thanks  
for being my teachers, my brothers,  
and for sharing the road this little while.

### **Activism**

I did not set out to become “an activist”. I would hardly term myself that way. The word reminds me of a stereotype, a caricature, of hippies and flower children from the 1960’s who do not shave their legs, forego bathing and who indulge in illegal drugs, often protesting the cutting of a tree or something else I might term as “nonsense”. Then a few months ago, one of my colleagues asked me to come speak to her activism class. Me, an activist? How did I get here? If not me, then who? More importantly, how can I continue on this path of speaking my mind and demanding change, demanding justice and demanding equality? I spoke to that class, and then another and then another. *Yes, I realized, Yes, I am an activist. Yes!*

It began at the community college. It began small. I ran in 5k foot races to raise money for the Susan Komen Foundation, Toys for Tots, and other charity events. I ran in the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon, completing the half marathon three years in a row. I wore the name of



Gabreon Bruce on my shirt. Gabreon was only three months old when he was killed in the bombing. He and his mother were there to apply for a Social Security card. It felt good to take action, even if small and symbolic. I wrote about it in my blog. I organized a relay team for the Memorial Run, and cried with my team mate as he visited the memorial after nearly ten years to grieve for a friend who had been killed.

I taught English courses at the community college and ran the Communications Lab, a combination writing center/ language center/ computer lab. My tutors and I handled all of the extra help and current language skills testing for the English classes and tutored any who were falling behind or needed extra help. The Theater Director asked me to lend my presence in a production of “The Laramie Project”, and since it opened the same day and time as one of my classes, I took my students to see it. They wrote responses that shocked and intrigued me. The responses were honest, misguided and some were right on the mark. I had stumbled onto a new method of eliciting response from my classes. I began pairing this play with a discussion of the murder of Matthew Shepard, and did assignments on the Westboro Baptist Church, who initially came to national attention for their website, which made claims of “Gods hate” and had a picture of Matt and a counter detailing how long “Matthew Shepard has been burning in hell”.

Some female students and I staged our first production of “The Vagina Monologues” that spring, raising a few thousand dollars for the local women’s crisis center. Again, as I helped produce and played a few parts in it, I required

my students to attend. Many expressed shock at seeing me in the play, that I would say such words. One student I distinctly remember wrote of his experience as a shocking awakening, one that was painful and that he treasured because he felt he needed to know. There were no mild reactions, to say the least. I became a snowball rolling downhill.

My time spent in the penal system spurred me to action. I was angry at having my voice squashed and decided I would act whenever possible as an advocate for myself and for others. I remembered the suicide counselor and the nurse who had acted as an advocate for me many years earlier. I remembered a lot more times when nobody advocated for me, when I did not know how to advocate for myself or that I even could or should. I decided that since I know the power of speaking up and the dangers of not doing so, it has become my responsibility to say something where I find injustice in the world.

As I entered graduate school for the second time, a friend invited me to a protest at the state capitol to voice concern for women's reproductive rights here in Oklahoma. It was a good feeling to use my first amendment rights, unpopular as my opinion is here. Nobody could stop me and the members of Planned Parenthood, from using our voices to protest what we feel is an injustice.

After that came another production of "The Vagina Monologues" and more protests for women's rights. I wrote a list of what issues are important to me as a human, as a woman, as a teacher and as an Oklahoman. I care about issues related to reproductive health access, incarceration (Oklahoma

incarcerates more women per capita than any other place in the world), the death penalty, marriage equality and religious intolerance.

Whenever possible, I attend parades, rallies, protests and counter protests in support of the causes I believe in. I am careful to carry a rhetoric of love, peace and tolerance rather than incendiary messages of anger and hate. As I counter-protested the Westboro Baptist Church this year, I also brought donuts for the crowd, smiled, held my sign and spoke in soothing tones. Some of my students and former students have also elected to counter protest this particular group, and these conversations have taken place inside and outside of the classroom. Next to writing and teaching, being an activist is what makes me feel the most alive.

### **Spring, 2011**

This spring, I kept a teaching journal (as usual) to collect my thoughts and observations in the classroom, of my students and of my interactions with colleagues and others involved in the educational process. From an overall standpoint, I would say that my students appreciate my accessibility. I keep generous office hours and am willing to stay after classes to meet with them either in the classroom or in my office. I schedule one-on-one appointments with all the students, every semester so that we might meet to discuss the strengths as writers and where they might improve. My student Facebook page is awash in student comments and my inbox is crowded with 41 individual message threads begun at the beginning of the semester. The majority of my students have 'friended' me. Additionally, I give my cell phone number to all

students in the syllabus, post it on my office door and put it on Facebook. On average, I receive 20 text messages and four phone calls weekly from students who could use advice or assistance.

The first two units in my Composition I and II classes center on social justice in the college composition classroom. In Composition I, the first essay is a personal narrative of their experiences connecting (and sometimes commenting on the disconnect of) language and power. We read an essay on literacy and school systems by Jean Anyon (1980), discuss the work of Langston Hughes and Frederick Douglass and read an essay on learning to read and write by Sherman Alexie. I also tell stories from my time spent teaching in the prison system. The systematic tracking and sorting that Anyon speaks of was a shock to the students, many of whom indicated that the majority of their learning experiences were spent with teachers who followed an authoritarian style that was evidenced in the poverty class and middle class schools.

In the Composition II class, we wrote a definition essay over a word for the first essay. We discussed what a word means today, what it used to mean, how it is used depending on the rhetorical context. I gave several presentations using Prezi, which is online presentation software. I also taught students how to use it. We first defined the word “beauty”, and discussed beauty in the natural world, and human beauty standards. I showed pictures of anorexia and obesity and young and old models (both women and men). We discussed the

political nature of language and students wrote reflections over the word, sometimes adding in their own interpretations and research.

Sometimes my students really surprise me. I mean, I think they will be one thing but they turn out to be another entirely.

Take for instance, two of my “farm kids”. They are both the same age and come from rural backgrounds. During our narrative assignment, T comes to me outside of class, during correct office hours to discuss how he might approach his essay assignment. He wants to write about pigs and how he learned to show pigs. He doesn’t know how to connect agricultural activities with language and power. Blew me away, this willingness to say “hey, I don’t know, but here is what I do know and how can you guide me?”. I love that. He wrote three drafts and a final essay. All of the points of the assignment were covered and ultimately he told a story he owns and is proud of.

The other farm kid S, used a similar strategy. He is not a good writer but he knows he has to pass this class. He doesn’t seem afraid. He writes his papers longhand and his mom types them up for him. He’s responsible for the grammar. I’m not sure if that’s cheating but I hope not. His mom is a teacher so I’m assuming that she understands boundaries and doesn’t help him beyond what is appropriate. I know several times students have other people write their papers entirely. A girlfriend helping out, an overzealous relative who thinks junior just needs more than what I can provide or just someone trying to cheat the system. In any case, S seems interested in telling his own story, because he visits me several times during office hours. He equates power with

engines and writes an essay with photographs (which I encourage) about communicating with his dad via the rebuilding of engines and the way that as he has grown, so has the size of the motorized vehicle he has driven. I can relate because my nine year old nephew got his second motorcycle for Christmas and he has started competing in motorcross trials.

Several of my students are pregnant right now. I didn't always know it. I learned of this through their writing about past children, drug and alcohol abuse and prison sentences all connecting power, language an authority. It seems to have hit a nerve with the women in my Comp 1 classes. One student in particular stands out because she has three children and one on the way. She had her first two when she was 15 and 16, then went to prison for drugs and had her parental rights terminated. She didn't understand the language and was also unable to convince a jury, to find the right words, to convince them that she could change. She didn't change for a good long time. She almost went back to prison but eventually pulled out of her funk. Now in her 30's, her third child is small and her fourth will be born by the end of this semester.

The students who fool me best are the ones who sit to the side and Facebook or text during class. Too much makeup, too much hair gel and too little clothing, even in winter. The Uggs are the ultimate giveaway. I tend to judge them harshly, given my own less than stellar experiences with girls in high school. Last semester I caught one of these women cheating on an assignment and confronted her. She apologized and asked me for another chance. Three weeks later, she asked to see me after class and asked for an

extension on the paper due that day. Her alcoholic father was missing in action, her mother was too cracked out (and waiting on a liver transplant) to care and her two little sisters (ages 8 and 14) were living with her in Ada while she worked full time and went to school full time. She was 18 years old. I would have never guessed. I felt ashamed for thinking poorly of her and gave her the time she needed to finish the essay and connected her with the counselor here on campus. I am not a counselor myself and felt that she might benefit from someone who could help her get assigned legal custody and services through the state. She eventually earned a “B” in the course. She would have had an “A” if she had not cheated. I have seen her several times here on campus and she now has full custody of her sisters and only has to work one job. They live on campus.

This semester, there is a trio of young women who fit the modus operandi for the “too cool for school” model of student. One of them missed class a few times but kept trying to turn in her daily assignments late. I refused because as the syllabus clearly states, assignments are not accepted late. She got angry and cried and gathered her things to leave class. I got everyone working on small group projects and asked to speak to her in the hall. By this time she was full-on crying. Her father had been arrested again, no internet access and the small town people where she lived were gossiping about them again. She had also far overblown the value of daily assignments and writing, thinking that for not turning in 3 of them she couldn’t earn an “A” in the class and keep her scholarship. I did my best to reassure her but I’m not sure she

believed me. Her first essay centered on a time when her dad was really blotto and the paramedics couldn't control him, so the police had to subdue him and he had a seizure. She described clearly and in great detail the hurtful things the townspeople said. Those things stuck in my mind. Her aspect of sullen resistance I now understand; she is a child of alcoholism.

One of the other women in that group seems happy and bubbly all of the time. She does all of her homework but only participates in her own group; does not seem comfortable branching out into others. Her first essay was on the suicide of her friend from high school, two days after they won the state softball tournament. Nobody had any idea there was something wrong.

In my Comp II class, I have other women to comment about. Two seem joined at the hip; art majors, moms and wild hair colors plus piercings and tattoos seem to be their commonalities. They seem creative. I mixed up their names for the first month, to my own embarrassment. One is a good writer and attends every class. The other seems to have other priorities and her husband likes to get drunk and fight in bars.

Another student, K, is the mom for our group. She has assumed responsibility for handing back papers to the class. Each class gets access to daily papers and they take turns handing them out. K is in her mid-40's, has read everything I have ever assigned her and watched almost all of the movies I recommended for the assignment. She was in my comp I class and read the entire textbook. Her children are grown. She is here not for a grade but to



learn. This is my easiest kind of student and K has never earned less than an “A” and has always given her best.

I’m going to lump three students in together in my Comp II class. J, C and D. Their writing skills are rather lacking in grammar and they cannot seem to extend paragraphs to pages. They are White and present a smiling face to me, one that I have learned from past experience means that they hope to get by with a grade based on charm. It does not work well with me, and I busted D for plagiarism this semester. I even warned him that this would happen. They try to stay quiet during class so as to go unnoticed. It works, sometimes.

E is an African-American student. He took my Comp I class last semester and I suspected that his girlfriend wrote his first essay. He re-did it and I realized that he does not read quickly and has difficulty with writing paragraphs. He plays basketball, which is how I became friends with his coach. Last semester he sat in my office every other day and worked on his work. He earned a pretty hard B in the class. Right now basketball season is just over so he has once again turned his attention to coursework. Since his first essay wasn’t very good, his second one was more structured and I asked his coach to work closely with E on revisions. He spends all of his time on the court and hopes to be picked up on a European team professionally after he gets done with college ball.

My three football players in Comp I are sort of different. They knew another player who was in my class last semester. They invited their other friend, an

English major, to come visit a few times. I invited him back. He's very bright and contributes to our class. But the players have this mixture of bemused thoughtfulness on their faces most of the time. I asked R why one day, when we were conferencing about his paper. He said he had never heard a White woman say the things I say. That sort of threw me for a loop and I didn't press. Of course, I noticed a distinct air of marijuana floating about the person of my second player, L, during our conference. Hard to hide, as were his eyes and uncharacteristically goofy smile.

The third football player, Ty, seems the most focused. He always does the writing assignments but rarely turns things in. He didn't turn in the first essay and I wonder how he's going to make it through the class. These three guys seem comfortable talking to everyone else in the class. L likes to talk to the young women while Ty enjoys talking politics with a mid-twenties woman who is decidedly Christian in her aspect and speech. R talks to TC, a young man in his late 20's who is the co-owner of a body shop with his dad. He does all of the window tinting and wrote his first essay on why he didn't like learning to read but loved Harry Potter and thought that if he didn't get his degree, he would be stuck in the life he has. It was a good essay and I enjoyed the image of a professional wrestler type with his nose stuck in the latest Harry Potter epic.

Then there is S. There sometimes comes a young man who wants to romance the teacher. I am not unattractive but I do not flaunt my sexuality and often wear a wedding ring to deter interest. Not S. He asked me to pose nude

for him in one of his response papers so that he could draw me. The prompt was in response to Langston Hughes' "Theme for English B". S is a graphic artist and sculptor. I chose to be neutral and declined on the grounds of conflict of interest.

In any of my classes these days I might get and usually do get soldiers back from deployment in Iraq. Some have been injured. Some have been snipers (as one of my students admitted in his paper. He regrets it every day even though it was his job. He was in basic training when he got the news that his older brother had been killed in Afghanistan). Most have been traumatized. I offer a war poem by Wilfred Owens called "Dulce Et Decorum Est" for them to discuss. I'm considering adding back in "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'brien. Not sure how to work it in, but I will try. Their stories break my heart. One surprised me. R wrote his personal narrative on how he, as a former marine and police officer (at the time), talked a guy down who was aiming a loaded rifle at him. He could've shot and killed the man but relied on communication skills instead because he sensed the guy's intent wasn't murderous. He just wanted to see his grandfather's body (the grandpa had just been killed in a machine accident on a farm). The kid was just grieving. Quite a story, and one that touched me. R has a closed brain injury and cannot type. He uses Dragonware software.

Essay II Comp I and II

This second unit was one which really confronted issues of equality, social justice and discrimination. In my Comp I class, we read and discussed the

glory and toll of war. We read work by President Obama, Elvis Presley, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Westboro Baptist Church and others. We analyzed contemporary advertising that students brought in, discussing anorexia as a disease and the pressure on women to conform to societal norms and expectations of beauty.

I gave a short lecture on the life and death of Matthew Shepard and introduced the Westboro Baptist Church. We would have done a rhetorical analysis of their website, but the site went down the day of the lecture and we were unable to access it or any of the Westboro sister sites for the next two weeks. My students always get riled up about the Westboro Church and their activities. It's a great lesson in pathos- that appeal to emotion to sell a product or idea. WBC wants hate and hate they get. As the Southern Poverty Law Center reports: "He's not an anti-gay activist. He's a human abuse machine." My students took to their Facebook accounts to vent their newly-awakened outrage. I've got a fb page just for students so it was convenient to check up on them in this way. Their discussions there are entirely voluntary as I put no stipulations or limitations on interaction with me or anyone else. But I think it's a good gauge to find out what is sinking in and what isn't. That one really hits home.

Speaking of Facebook, my Comp II students made a special group for us to interact. Most of my students are thus occupied and after the viewing of "Smoke Signals", one student tracked down some for dinner that night and

posted a picture of her ripping it over her head the way that Victor's mom did in the movie. This was much to the delight of the other students.

We watched "Smoke Signals" as a class, and made a board trace discussing aspects of stereotyping of Native Americans, then discussed how the movie either reinforced those stereotypes or refuted them and sometimes both. But the students really wanted to talk about it. They wanted to talk about stereotyping and injustice and how inconsiderate other people are. I talked about how inconsiderate WE are, how inconsiderate I have been and what can be done about it. We discussed the American stereotype and how we are sometimes seen as hamburger/beer/popcorn eating machines who hang out watching television all day. We talked about Asian stereotypes and gay/lesbian stereotypes and jock stereotypes. Then we ran out of time. I hate 50 minute classes. Often during the course of this unit, the class and I opted to stay a few extra minutes to finish our conversations, even when they were uncomfortable. A few students chose this movie for their evaluation essays, including H, a young woman from a nearby small town who is a champion barrel racer. Her first essay was about the word "beauty" as it pertained to her horse. She missed the mark on the assignment but wrote a great narrative. She tries hard and what I admire about this young woman is her willingness to say "I don't know" And then listen.

All of the Comp II students were required to respond to the movie, and the results of that reflection were about what I would guess. Most expressed enjoyment at watching such a film that made them laugh, showed them

something new that they had never thought about and also challenged their own assumptions. One student wrote that he thought this film would be difficult, if not impossible, to make by a non-Indian. And one student, as is predictable, merely gave his own opinion of how true it is that Indian people have options for reservation housing and government assistance and that they really are lazy and drunk—in his opinion and personal experience, of course. Other students chose to write about films such as “The Color Purple”, “White Chicks” “Precious”, “American History X”, “Boys Don’t Cry” and “A Day Without A Mexican”. One student in particular took my suggestion to evaluate “The Handmaid’s Tale”. The ex-soldier with a two-time tour of Iraq under his belt, he returned the movie to me, saying “That is the most fucked up movie I have ever seen. I read the reviews too. Everything in there has actually fucking happened.” Rather than wait for presentation day, he took time to hold the class over for a few minutes to tell everyone why they should watch it. He also watched an interview on Youtube with author Margaret Atwood regarding the choices she made in writing the book.

In this essay, I stressed the importance of researching the social issue, be it gender discrimination, racism or religious intolerance. One student, DT, came to my office after watching “A Day Without A Mexican”, which we saw in class. “I feel so guilty!”, he said. “I want to apologize to Mexican people and Black people and all of the people discriminated against by White people. I feel so bad just being White and I’ve never been discriminated against”.

## **Insights**

I realized something. I don't think I offer enough to young women in the curriculum beyond discussions and depictions of anorexia and the overblown societal expectations of young women. They really do fall under enormous pressure. I expect, however, that perhaps of any grouping of students in my classes, this group needs the least amount of help. Is this a bias on my part- that women are better writers than men? In the past, I have used material from Kate Chopin and discussed the way women are treated in the world. I do take time every semester to talk to my classes (and listen to them) about how many women in Oklahoma have been incarcerated. I know this hits home with women. I know of two women in my classes right now who have been to prison for drug offenses. Last semester one of my students murdered her boyfriend and is currently awaiting sentencing. Here is my fear: that I am biased not against young women, but young, middle-class women who make their way to my classroom. I think I have the highest expectations of them and offer them the least assistance, followed by young, White, affluent males. Why? I am sensitive to the needs of many other groups in my classes, but an examination of my own teaching journal reveals that I seem least concerned with these students.

This is a question I have returned to several times. I discussed it with my peers at the College of Education and with friends and colleagues. I have looked at my own experiences and the literature I have read. I have two hypotheses to offer. First is that I am most comfortable working with

oppressed groups of people and people who suffer from harmful stereotypes to the point of either violence or outright discrimination. My curriculum and my experience are both geared towards these populations. I spend time with these groups and find a kinship and connection with these students. Second, I developed a bias when teaching at the large university, as it was a young, affluent, White female who complained of reverse discrimination and asked why racism was bad because it was working in her favor. It was the White males who most often attempted plagiarism and attempted to minimize the damage to their grades through using charm as a tool. Part of me recognizes the conditioning they have undergone and the tendency to reproduce societal norms, fail to recognize their own complicity in the matter and go right on doing what they are doing once they become fully aware of their place of privilege in the world. Society, after all, tells them they deserve it.

In her 1999 autobiography, Waris Dirie, an international supermodel, first spoke out about female genital mutilation. In Somalia, it was commonplace for such mutilation to occur and Dirie, at the age of five, had lost an older sister to sepsis from unsanitary practices. In the book, she details the procedure, discussing how it was a woman with a rusty blade who cut off her labia and clitoris, who used a thorn to pierce her flesh and twine to sew her vulva shut, leaving a hole the size of a pencil eraser from which to pass both blood and urine. It was her mother who held her down and who bound her legs so that she would not move for several days afterwards. Dirie almost died from her ordeal (Dirie, 1999).



What I have learned is that while the expectations of oppression are societal in nature, and it was her father who would not profit later from selling his thirteen year old daughter to a much older man, it is not only men, but women who take the actions to perpetuate societal reproduction of oppressive behaviors. On the other hand, it was Dirie's mother who awakened her daughter in the pre-dawn hours on her wedding day so that she might run off in the desert and escape her fate (Dirie, 1999).

### **Conclusion**

It is perhaps this knowledge that makes me expect so much from my own students. They have such potential to either create or destroy society, to speak on their own behalf and advocate for others. I rejoice to see any awakening of critical consciousness and cringe when I spy apathy. The lessons I have learned from this exercise concern my behavior in the classroom. I can always listen more and talk less. I can change my curriculum to meet the changing needs of my students and their own goals. I do some things well- I connect with students, elicit responses from them and meet or exceed educational objectives set forth by the college, and I do this best when I acknowledge honestly who we all are, that I am a person with some privilege and while it makes me uncomfortable- some modicum of power. I have always been uncomfortable wielding such power and often deny the mantle of authority.

Many students report liking writing more than they did and learning new ways of approaching their writing. In my last teaching evaluation, we

discussed both my attrition rate and the 1-to-5 scale by which professors at the university are measured. In order for faculty to be considered “outstanding” and become eligible for merit raises, they must score at least a 4.5 on the evaluations solicited from students in their classes. They must also have an attrition rate of less than 25%, including those who withdraw after the drop date, earn a grade of “F” or who fail to complete the course. My attrition rate was 20% for the 125 students I had last semester. The English department rated an overall score of 4.58 and the university scored 4.59. My score was 4.72. I attribute this to my education and training as a professional educator, as an emancipatory educator and as someone who teaches with her whole heart, warts and all.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Introduction**

This section seeks to accomplish two tasks. The first is an explication of the data collected and discussed in Chapter 4, including insights, implications and limitations of the study. The second task is a creative synthesis of my experiences in writing this dissertation, my interactions with the materials, research and methodology and even how the process of writing this document has had a profound effect on my life and world view.

### **Insights.**

I have always been told that as a writer, one is always alone as writing is a singular process. This has never been my opinion or experience. When I write I feel connected to my audience. I think of them, what they need to hear, what their level of literacy might be and how I might best convey a truth that I perceive and feel compelled and moved to pull that truth from the running stream of ideas flowing all around us and somehow show it to other people. I feel that I owe the truth about myself as well. I have been more alone in crowds of people than I feel at this moment, sitting at a computer at three in the morning, writing.

I am reminded of the words of Ruth Behar (1996) as she commented on the function of ethnography: “a personal voice, if creatively used can lead the reader not into miniature bubbles of navel-gazing, but into the enormous sea of social issues” (p. 14). I spent my time immersed in recalling my past and scouring old journals as well as academic writing concerned with issues of

social justice and teaching experiences. I read and walked away, paced and returned gain a larger perspective. I called old friends to see if I could use their names. I observed my classroom, wrote my teaching journal and reflected on what it means to be an English teacher who is White and interested in issues of social justice. I failed a few times and learned from those mistakes. It was when I looked at myself, at the life I have lived and the issues of race, White privilege and discrimination that have affected me and those I care for that I began to understand how deeply these issues affect me. I believe that if other teachers look at their own lives and classrooms in terms of hegemony, power and emancipatory education that a greater understanding can occur.

Vocabulary can form and be put into practice. If George Orwell (2009) is right and “if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought”, then other teachers can have those moments of epiphany, embarrassment, enlightenment and openness to change and changing perspectives.

These thoughts, issues of race, power, inequality and oppression, I have learned are not new to me. They have been present my whole life. As Paulo Freire (1987) discusses, learning the words, learning the world first as a child and again as an adult, has put a word to a feeling and a theory to the sweeping aside and dismissal of my own voice as a woman. This has also helped me to realize my own privileged place in society and offered me an appreciation of the languages spoken by the students who enter the classroom. My voice, similar and yet unique in the social sciences, is my contribution. I am drawn to and passionate about this profession because of who I am. Authors like Peggy

McIntosh who have the courage acknowledge the need to give up some of their privilege so that others might enjoy equality inspire my own work and encourage me to continue in places where they leave off.

I recently discussed my work with a close friend and fellow graduate student. We have taken almost every class together throughout this program. I recommended to her on the first evening of our propaedeutic seminar to switch to the same major as me. She is African-American, from a professional, middle-class family and teaches at a Title I school. I gave her my first four chapters to read and discuss. As she finished the final words she looked at me over her glasses and said “you are not a normal White girl”. I asked her what that meant and she replied that I was not what she expected in the College of Education. I would not leave her alone and insisted on being her friend. I spent Thanksgiving with her and her family this year; she has been a good friend to me too. We have laughed and puzzled over racial and cultural differences and discussed at length the implications of bi-racial relationships and found more commonalities than differences. She has recommended many scholars such as Lisa Delpit who have influenced my understanding of what it means to be an educator and member of the dominant ideology while many of my students are not of the mainstream race, socio-economic status or culture. We had many discussions over my research question. She challenged me to explore any unconscious racist attitudes and my strong reactions to perceived racism in the classroom. She helped me untangle my perceptions social class and privilege and knows the contents of this document better than any other I

have asked to read it. In the end, I have come to understand that a large part of my function in the classroom is to raise awareness and help structure vocabulary.

I felt fear, I realized, when approaching a classroom. I am always cognizant of my race and that I sometimes represent the dominant ideology. I worry that I will automatically or unconsciously impress my culture, my values or my opinions upon students who do not feel comfortable disagreeing with me. I want to always allow students to grow from within the classroom and in support of culture while offering a venue through which to find success by learning Standard American English and the constructs of essay writing.

One conclusion I draw is that it is important for teachers to ask those difficult questions, first of themselves and then to open dialog in their classes. Where better to begin than the English Composition classroom, where critical thinking skills are commonly taught? It is better to shed light in the dark places than to close the door and pretend the darkness does not exist. This dissertation is my light.

As an educator interested in emancipatory education, I want to make students aware of their place in society, of some of the political structures in place and actions they might take to combat hegemony, including increased literacy, college completion, voting and protesting. But before I do, I must perform a rigorous examination to ensure that this isn't just my agenda that I am pushing, for then I would only be changing from regular oppression to a benevolent oppression. This may be worse, as someone who believes that

what they are doing by imposing what they think is in the best interest of their student might do much more harm than good.

As I wrote the autoethnography for this work, a song played repeatedly in my head. It was the Beatles, from their final album. The song is “The End” and it is the last song that the Beatles recorded together as a group in 1969. “And, in the end, the love you take/ Is equal to the love you make”, a rhyming couplet which seems to have significance to my study. I put my heart into my classes and as such, I have to make sure that what I am doing is not detrimental to other students.

I made an unpleasant discovery about myself on this journey. I was in possession of a strong bias. I had a preconceived judgment against young middle-class to affluent class White students. I believed that the young women were least in need of what I can offer as an educator and human being, and that the young men are the most likely to attempt plagiarism and care the least about studying English. My experiences have mostly involved populations of students who I might think of as more oppressed than those members born into the dominant ideology. I was shocked at myself- what kind of a teacher does that make me? These students need me too, perhaps even more than others. For it is in my own explication of what it means to be White that has set me free. Self-awareness is the key. If I am aware that I hold a bias and am unafraid to acknowledge it in myself, then I am more likely to overcome that particular bias.

While my White students often report discomfort at the discussions of inequality and power imbalances, my students of color often tell me in private (and sometimes in public) how much they enjoy our discussions of race, class and culture.

### **Implications.**

My questions have led to more questions. I would like to find out more about my students' experiences in a college composition classroom that leans heavily towards a social justice perspective. How do they perceive the assignments? Do they find it worthwhile? Do they feel as though they have grown at the end of the semester? Do they feel resentment or that I am forcing them to reconsider a world view? I am often approached by students at the end of the semester to thank me for bringing up such dialogs and allowing them a safe place to discuss fears the issues. My next study might be an ethnographic or case study, one that focuses mainly on the experiences of the students.

I would like to share what I have learned with others. Appendix A is the film unit I developed while teaching at the university, so that my students might have a comfortable environment from which to confront issues of social justice without feeling judged. I have used it several times now and will continue to refine and re-use as is necessary and possible given the teaching objectives at whatever institution I land in next.

Appendix B is a workshop I developed as part of my creative synthesis. This is a 90 minute workshop designed with English teachers and pre-service English teachers in mind, to highlight the importance of discussing issues of



race and White privilege in the language arts classroom. It includes a lesson plan, a note to educators, a vocabulary definition list and literary and research sources to facilitate the journey.

I envision my next steps as participating in an upcoming Social Justice Training Institute. As this institute leans on one of my references for support, I believe there is much that I can garner from attendance. I will also find venues for presentation for the workshop, to calibrate and refine my presentation in front of smaller audiences much the way I have with my activism presentation.

I also have a book in mind, a handbook on teaching about social justice in the language arts classroom. In it, I can give the theoretical basis of emancipatory education, outline readings for teachers, and create curriculum, assignments and activities designed to help students simultaneously learn to enjoy reading and writing more and become more socially conscious. All lesson plans will be linked to Oklahoma P.A.S.S. Objectives.

### **Limitations of the Study.**

Further studies include a larger pilot study in which I shift focus more on the student experience as a companion to my own autoethnography. This part was eliminated from the original plan, and taking time later to collect student artifacts, conduct interviews and report findings that focus on the experience of the students- all of which are options available in the autoethnography- might enrich and inform my own teaching practices.

My own experiences may not transfer to the experiences of others. As this research focused on the self, it may not generalize to others. I have a

particular socio-economic background and unique experiences. With a study population of only one person, it may not be entirely feasible to generalize what I have written to the experiences of others. However, I do believe that there can be commonalities, such as discomfort at realizing and discussing openly one's own race privilege and biases, the difficulty with putting others at ease when speaking of social justice issues and the importance of reaching out and connecting to others as a vital tool in the learning process. I also maintain that this must be done encourage greater participation of students in the democratic process.

I consulted with a fellow professor at the college where I teach. A Sociology professor who is African-American, she reports a good deal of defensiveness from her White students and says they view her as an “angry Black woman”. Just as bell hooks (1994) argues that Black students should have Black teachers, perhaps it could be easier and less threatening to White students to have another White professor discuss and help them come to terms with their own privilege.

In addition to the film unit curriculum (Appendix A) and the social justice workshop (Appendix B), the poetry and prose set into appropriate venues in this dissertation, I have written two pieces of poetry. The first, addressed to my students in the composition classroom, gives an argument for why we do what we do. The second is a reflective poem on the process of writing a dissertation using autoethnography.

## Literacy In B Minor

(with respect to Langston Hughes and Dr. King)

*Hey teach, why do we gotta talk about this?*

Literacy? Because.

Today

The middle class is falling into the sea, the sea of poverty. Rich get richer, the poor get poorer.

*You don't know me.*

You're right, I don't. But I know that you and me and we can talk can write on and puzzle through to become more than just individuals in a room. We will

Write

And share

And show and practice

Looking beyond the surface the clothes my dialect your shoes and

See our true humanity- pretty, stinky, scared, sacred, vulnerable

And we will touch each other with hands with pens with voices

And those shitty, shitty first drafts.

Maybe learn like Dr. King said that our lives are truly connected.

I don't know know you, but I know me, and I know we, and

What we make is hope.

If you become what you should be then I will too.

*That's the only way this is going to work.*

I wrote this as a way to exemplify the interactions that take place between teacher and students in a classroom where writing and social justice issues are both exemplified. It is my argument, but also my hope that students will engage with me in the search for greater literacy and an acknowledgement of culture and the role of hegemony in education.

I do hope, as is suggested in the poem, that students have the last word, that they ask questions and take risks and that I take those risks right alongside, as is my duty as a teacher and a human being.

This Is Not a Test

Worry worry worry

Overshare. Undershare. Misrepresent. Misinterpret. Leave out the wrong things. Put in too much.

Is an N=1 good enough? Valid? Reliable? Too subjective?

Look, look, look

Again and again

Walk away/ come back (waves washing on the shore, refining that one pebble with the sea)

Read and write and remember. Stay focused

Put everything on the table and illuminate, elucidate, exaggerate

Extrapolate and balance.

This is a test of the broadcast system

How broad can you cast your net?

This is not a test.

Is it too late to go to bartender school?

I worried about the risks I took in writing an autoethnography. I did research about the benefits of narrative in qualitative research and found authors who approach from highly personal ways of knowing (Muncy, 2005) to a less personal and more distant, clinical approach to the materials (Duncan, 2004). Each situation mentioned in my autoethnography is focused on highlighting incidences of discrimination, sexism, racism heterosexism or White privilege as they appear in everyday life. Wall (2008) made sense to me

as she wrote an autoethnography focused on her experience as an adoptive mother of an international child. Autoethnography, says Wall, is a part of “the production of a historically, politically, and personally situated representation of human life” (p. 43). This work, then, is political and historical in nature. Narrative is first and often the best thing that students encounter in the language arts classroom. Students cannot find a place in the world if they do not know who they are and I and other teachers cannot lead them without knowing who we are.

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Appendix A  
The Film Unit

*The* UNIVERSITY *of* OKLAHOMA

The Evaluation Argument: American Film and  
Social Commentary With a Focus on Race,  
Religion or Gender  
By Mindie Dieu

M. Dieu  
ENGL 1213  
Spring, 2011

### Evaluation Argument: Film

NOTE: Assignments are **due** on the date listed.

|        |   |         |  |
|--------|---|---------|--|
| Day 1  | M | Feb. 15 | Introduction to film. Receive assignment and requirements for 2nd essay.   |
| Day 2  | W | Feb. 17 | Discuss film terms, and the use of these in your essay.<br><br>View clips to determine suitability for essay topics.                   |
| Day 3  | F | Feb. 19 | Submit your chosen film and a short rationale about how you will approach your evaluation of it. View more clips and discuss criteria. |
| Day 4  | M | Feb. 22 | Finalize your criteria. Have ready to submit typed criteria you will use, written in complete sentences.                               |
| Day 5  | W | Feb. 24 | Watch film clips as a group and observe and discuss how film techniques are used to support criteria.                                  |
| Day 6  | F | Feb. 26 | Complete “match” section (showing how your film matches your criteria) paper. Bring a typed copy to class for evaluation.              |
| Day 7  | M | Mar. 1  | Class discussion on topics and approach to writing about film. Sample of a successful paper to be discussed.                           |
| Day 8  | W | Mar 3   | More film clips and discussion.  |
| Day 9  | F | Mar. 5  | In-Class work day; finalize drafts.  |
| Day 10 | M | Mar. 8  | Rough draft due. Peer review day. Conferences with teacher on an availability basis.   |

|        |   |         |   |
|--------|---|---------|---|
| Day 11 | W | Mar. 10 | Paper is due today. You will be giving a short presentation in class. |
| Day 12 | F | Mar. 12 | Finish presentations .  |

## **Day One**

**5 Minutes:** Show a clip from your favorite film- be it funny, romantic, visually appealing or what have you. Point out that many of us enjoy films (I actually have a student right now who has only seen three films in her life- at my direction!), and that we have individual tastes about what constitutes a “good film”.

**20 Minutes:** Writing Prompt

What makes a good film?

Students will write for about 7 minutes on what makes a good film. Some of them may have already had or are currently in a film class. They are a valuable resource! Once written, have students share with a partner, then ask the whole class to dictate elements as you write them on the board.

Once the board is full of words like character development, plot, genre, explosions, humor, intrigue, editing, music and other descriptors, point out that each of us already has a film evaluation system in place.

**15 Minutes:** Introduction to Social Commentary

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81LAELuB0yI>

Now that students have an idea of what film evaluation is, introduce social commentary.

I like to play a clip from *Bowling For Columbine*. In the clip, Moore has created an animated history of guns in the United States. It’s a clip highlighting and problematizing racism against Native Americans and African Americans. I warn the students beforehand that it’s sort of volatile. The instructor might ask students in the whole group what their responses are. Some might say the cartoon and humorous aspects are a contrast (juxtaposition) to the serious issues that Moore is attempting to bring up. Usually, someone is offended but most of them laugh a little. It is almost inevitable that someone will make a disparaging remark about Michael Moore. Usually, the issues of racism, hatred and fear come up. You might indicate that discussion of these issues is the goal of making the film and that social commentary is exactly what the students are talking about.

**10 Minutes:** Hand out and discuss the Film Evaluation Argument Assignment.

**Homework:** Ask students to bring five film terms to class. These can be found by doing a google search under “Film Terminology” or “Film Glossary”.

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ENGL 1213  
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Evaluation Argument: American Film and Social Commentary  
With a focus on Race, Religion, or Gender

**Introduction**

American film has increasingly been used to reflect or expose problems in American society. A film's depiction of race, gender, or religion is often deliberately crafted to comment on individuals or the reaction of society toward those individuals. Reactions among Americans to these films and their commentary are often varied and passionate.

In this unit, you will work intensely with a film in order to uncover the comments the film makes about certain groups or individuals. You will explore the film's use of social commentary and evaluate that commentary based on your chosen criteria. You will become familiar with film terms and show how the use of these techniques hinders or enhances the message of the film.

**The Assignment**

Using the criteria-match model provided by Ramage, Bean, and Johnson, conduct an evaluation argument that assesses an American film and its use of social commentary on the topics of Race, Religion, or Gender. You must choose an American film. This is an important element of the assignment that should not be ignored. Any additional ideas must be discussed with me.

You will be evaluating your chosen film in the category of 'social commentary'. You will determine the criteria for this category, but we will also discuss in class. You will use film techniques used by the producer to comment on how these either helped or hindered the message of social commentary.

***You must cite at least 5 sources in this paper.*** These sources should explore the film itself, critical reception of the film (reviews), popular reception of the film, and the issues the film explores (racial, religious, and sexist). You will use these sources in the match section of your argument.

The paper should be 4 to 6 full pages in length.

NOTE: This assignment is NOT intended to be a review of a film or a summary of its plot line. The paper should be organized around the criteria used for evaluation. You should provide specific details (lines of dialogue, dress or characteristics of a character, etc.) only as *evidence* to support your claims about whether the film adequately meets the criteria. Organization based on criteria is critical to ensure your success.

### **The Process of Evaluation Arguments**

Complete the following steps in developing your argument (refer to pp. 292ff in RB&J).

1. Determine the category in which the object (the film) being evaluated belongs: category is predetermined by the assignment to be 'social commentary'.
2. Determine the purpose or function of the category.
3. Determine criteria based on the purposes or functions of the category.
4. Give relative weight to the criteria (determine which is most important and order accordingly).
5. Determine and demonstrate whether the film meets the criteria and how well the criteria are met.

### **Criteria for the Evaluation Argument**

- The paper must examine in detail an American film approved by the instructor.
- The paper must develop criteria for the category; *social commentary about race, religion, or gender*, and evaluate the film based on those criteria.
- The paper must provide adequate, persuasive grounds garnered through extensive research. The paper will also use as grounds careful readings of individual scenes or analysis of characters from the chosen film.
- The paper must address the rhetorical appeals (logos, pathos, ethos, kairos) in order to persuade a general College audience.
- The paper must meet the source and length requirements.
- The paper must demonstrate appropriate use of MLA format and mechanics.



## Day 2

**5 Minutes:** Reiterate the film assignment, and ask for questions in order to provide clarification. It may be useful to discuss at least once a week what your expectations are and to refer to the evaluation of their papers listed in the assignment.

**15 Minutes:** Discuss film terms. Ask students to post their film terms to the discussion board if it's available. Otherwise, ask them to work in small groups to come up with a list of terms. Each group will write them on the board and elect a speaker to demonstrate what those terms mean.

You will see terms like camera angle, pan, zoom, split screen, oeuvre, editing, close, medium and long shot, and so on. If you don't see those, fill in the gaps. What I generally do not see are terms like shot-reverse-shot, diegetic and non-diegetic sound, montage, mis en scene, or a discussion of light and dark and shadows, or the use of red as an indicator in film.

To demonstrate montage, I like the Team America, World Police montage scene <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIi0vFyqWAc>. This one is useful because the students relate to it. It's about a minute long. There's also the pioneering film using montage, the Battleship Potemkin, by Eisenstein, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29GXaXnVdA8> that's about 17 seconds long, showing the lion statues sleeping, rising and roaring- the images seem to collide.

**10 Minutes:** Film Clips to Demonstrate Suitability

This part will depend on the knowledge and interest of the instructor. I like to use the trailer for Superfly to introduce the topic of how far an African-American man can get in the White man's world. I usually refer to and use clips from this film throughout the unit.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmZjD2UWoso>

I also screen The Handmaid's Tale trailer, based on Margaret Atwood's novel of the same name (it's high fidelity)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpCcw\\_\\_qvzY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpCcw__qvzY&feature=related)

Side note: The whole Handmaid's Tale movie is online. Here is the link to part one. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTnFQYW9CbY&NR=1>

After each clip, discuss elements of social commentary.

**15 Minutes:** Make three categories on the board: Race, Gender and Religion. Ask students for names of films related to each. They will surprise you! If any surprise you, discuss why they would not be suitable for evaluation. No Disney movies!!! Here are some common submissions:

Racism: Superfly, Do the Right Thing, Gran Torino, Remember the Titans, A Raisin In The Sun, American History X, Amistad, Mississippi Burning, Smoke Signals, The Searchers

Gender: Mona Lisa Smile, The Handmaid's Tale, Boys Don't Cry

Religion: Dogma, The Matrix, Schindler's List (American made film), Inglorious Basterds

These are by no means the only films available to students- they are just the most common ones.

**Homework:** Read about Film Evaluation in Ramage, Bean and Johnson. Write a one-page response on what film you have chosen and how you will approach the topic.

### **Day 3**

**5 Minutes:** Collect film topics plus rationale (or have students post to discussion board)

**15 Minutes:** Ask students to get into groups to discuss the reading over criteria for evaluation and what it means to weight criteria. If they seem sluggish, this indicates that they have not done the reading. Give a pop quiz instead. Each group will be asked to say something about evaluation. Use board traces to evaluate.

**10 Minutes:** Lecture/Discussion. When students report on categories and evaluation criteria, relate this to the assignment. Categories are useful for more than just film. If I were to purchase a blender, I would want to evaluate and compare blenders to each other, and not make my category just “household appliances”. That category is too broad and I will end up looking at vacuum cleaners and dishwashers rather than just blenders. Therefore, students have been given the category of “Social Commentary in Film”, and it is their job to come up with their own evaluation criteria and to weight it. Give an example on the board of appropriate criteria for evaluation. I usually use an example from the film *Smoke Signals*- instead of using non-Native American actors, the director, Chris Eyre, used all Native Americans in the film. This falls under the criteria of casting and is pretty important in my evaluation of the effectiveness of the film.

**20 Minutes:** Students will work in groups to figure out examples of criteria, each taking their own notes.

**Homework:** Finalize criteria and have typed or posted to the discussion board for the next class.

## **Day 4**

**10 Minutes:** Collect homework and discuss difficulties with the criteria.

**40 Minutes:** Show clips from the film *Inglorious Basterds*, showing only parts depicting the storyline of the character Shoshanna. Discuss not only elements of sexism, but also religious intolerance and racism. Discuss how people's positions and relative heights indicate power, how tension is built using sound or the lack of sound and where Shoshanna does and does not have power using camera angles and the actions that characters take. Discuss how, if the rest of the plot lines were removed, this might constitute an argument for social commentary. Ask how these film clips might meet student's criteria for evaluation of their own films.

**Homework:** Write a one-page response using film terms and discussing how the film clips from *Inglorious Basterds* might be used to constitute an argument regarding social commentary.

## **Day 5**

**5 Minutes:** Collect homework (return papers) and discuss any road blocks in the process of visualizing their papers.

**10 Minutes:** Writing prompt- what is the main criteria for evaluation in your essay? How do you plan to write about this topic? Students will share with a partner and large group discussion can clear up difficulties.

**15 minutes:** Lecture- how to do research on a film. Introduce the MLA bibliography through the OU Library, IMDB, Roger Ebert (<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/> ) and show an example of one of his film evaluations.

**20 Minutes:** Show a film clip or two from your favorite social commentary movie. I like to use Smoke Signals, Superfly and the Handmaid's Tale.

**Homework:** Complete match section- showing how the student's film does or does not meet the criteria for evaluation. Also, ask students to think about where they might find information on their films. Remind students to bring their books with them next time.

## **Day 6**

**15 Minutes:** Have students pull out the match section **and their books** and review with each other. If they haven't done so already, have them post to the discussion board. Collect at the END of class. Come together as a big group and list a few commonalities on the board. Usually, color is a big deal, as is the use of sound (music, breaking glass and so on), the ways that camera angles show the development or change in a character and so on.

**35 Minutes:** Show more film clips either from *Smoke Signals*, *Superfly*, or *Bowling for Columbine* and discuss ethos, pathos, logos and kairos in each.

**Homework:** Ask students for a one-page response on the presence of the rhetorical strategies in their films. Which strategy is most present and how is this accomplished?

## **Day 7**

**40 Minutes:** Each student will (optional for non-cmc classes) post their topics to the discussion board. Go around the room and ask each student to recite what film they are doing and what the most important criteria is for evaluation. Ask the class to ask them questions about it. This will take most of the class and students generally get a lot out of it. They discover who is doing the same film and get interested and sometime competitive in their endeavors.

**10 Minutes:** If you are behind in your time, this can be moved to the next day. Ask about sources and what makes a reliable source. Pull up and discuss an example of a successful film evaluation paper. If you need a good example or two, email me at [mindie@ou.edu](mailto:mindie@ou.edu) and I will be happy to send you some. This discussion will spur many questions, so be prepared for it to bleed into the next day. Don't forget to collect homework!

## **Day 8**

**10 Minutes:** Wrap up discussion from previous day and hand back old homework, with comments.

**30 Minutes:** Show film clips from Michael Moore's work, *Bowling for Columbine*, *Fahrenheit 9/11* or *Sicko*. After each clip, look at the tactics he uses to get his point across. Discuss his credibility and how he is sometimes tricky in his approach.

**10 Minutes:** Ask students if the message is being lost for the messenger. Ask if this can happen in their films. Have a short discussion, either as a large group or in small groups and ask students to write about this and share.

**Homework:** Students should bring to class their sources, their criteria, match section and whatever they have written to class.

## **Day 9**

In-class work day. Students are to work on their papers. The instructor will approach each student individually to make sure that they are on track and that their questions are all answered. Any reoccurring questions should be discussed with the whole class. This is a thinly-disguised individual conference day.

Homework: Rough Drafts are due next class period.

## **Day 10**

Peer Review day. Students will conference with each other, providing each other with a copy of their work to be written on and afterwards, their criteria. Students will conference with two people. The first reviewer will not be allowed to comment on grammar- content only! Sign up for presentations.

## **Days 11 and 12**

Final paper is due. I didn't mention it before, because this is optional and depends on how much time you have for other essays. I like students to do a short 3-minute presentation over their film, using optional multi-media assistance. This gives the students the opportunity to publish what they're doing and it gives the instructor the opportunity to get a preview of what they'll be grading. I make the presentation a completion grade.



**Appendix B**

**English Teacher's Workshop on  
Issues of Social Justice**

#### Greetings and Introductions: 5 Minutes

As students walk in, they will each receive a packet with vocabulary words, two pieces of research and creative works by Sherman Alexie, Frederick Douglass and Langston Hughes. Each person will introduce themselves and tells a little about their lives and work. This is aimed towards an audience of pre-service and current English teachers.

#### Quickwrite 1: 10 minutes

Ask participants to take out a piece of paper and pencil and respond to the following writing prompt for five minutes: *Think of a time when you have been discriminated against. Write down what was said and what the situation was, as well as how you felt during that exchange.*

Ask students to share in pairs if they feel comfortable reading their work out loud. If not, they may choose to just listen and thank the other person for sharing. They may also share in the large group if one or more people volunteer.

#### Quickwrite 2: 10 minutes

The second writing prompt is a self-check to think about diversity in one's professional and personal life: *The question is: What makes you nervous about raising issues of racism in your classroom?*

Ask students to share in pairs if they feel comfortable reading their work out loud. If not, they may choose to just listen and thank the other person for sharing. They may also share in the large group if one or more people volunteer.

#### Large Group Discussion: 20 minutes

Open up the floor for discussion of the definitions. Feel free to heavily scaffold and share your own experience.

#### Modeling Exercise: 10 minutes each scenario

##### Situation 1: In the Community

You are in the check out line at a convenience store. The customer ahead of you, a White male, is berating the cashier, who has a heavy accent. He says "Why don't you go back where you came from?" and gives an ethnic slur. What do you do?

##### Situation 2: In the Classroom Community

You overhear a group of students in your classroom who are bantering with each other use the phrases "that's so gay" and "you're such a fag" as they settle into their seats. How do you address the situation without alienating your students?

##### Situation 3: With Our Colleagues

One of your colleagues, a fellow teacher who is White, addresses a Hispanic student, saying that it does not matter if he tries hard in school. He is just going to work at a burger joint just like his parents unless he learns “proper English”. How might you address this situation in a way that invites the teacher towards open dialog?

Small Group Problem Solving: 10 minutes

How can we keep language learning expectations high for non-White students and yet not revert to a skill-and-drill-only approach?

Final Quickwrite: 10 minutes.

*How isolated are you? Think of how you got to be where you are today. How did you get to be here? Did you have a mentor or teacher or person in a position of authority who helped you get to where you are today? Was that person of the same race or ethnicity as you? Think of all of the authority figures in your life. Now think about all of the family and friends who have played an important role in your personal life. How many of those people are of a race or ethnicity that is not the same as yours?*

Issues of social justice in the classroom just aren't often addressed in teacher colleges. The embarrassing part is that while nobody wants to be labeled as classist, racist, oppressive, sexist or homophobic (among many other readily available labels), we are often unaware of some of our prejudices. These attitudes tend to transfer to our teaching until we become aware of our own social identities, confront our biases and learn to respond to biased comments made in the classroom, by our colleagues and in the community at large.

“In the social justice classroom, we struggle alongside our students with our own social identities, biases, fears and prejudices. We too need to be willing to examine and deal honestly with our values, assumptions and emotional reactions to oppression issues” (Bell, Washington, Weinstein, & Love qtd in Adams, Bell and Griffin, 1997, p. 299)

**Greetings!** Thank you for being here today. I applaud your courage to attend a workshop aimed at discussing issues of race, White privilege and discrimination in the Language Arts classroom. It is an uncomfortable subject, but one we must face if we are to move forward towards equality and social justice. I hope you will find this to be a safe and nonjudgmental place to discover more about yourself and to contribute to the learning of me and other participants.

There are reasons this topic is so difficult to talk about. We often lack the vocabulary to talk about race and are afraid to say the wrong things. Maybe we don't want to see race as a factor in our interactions at all, but the fact is that race is more quickly noticed than gender. I am including a vocabulary list as a starting point for us to talk about these issues, as well as a reference list you may wish to investigate on your own. Another factor in not talking about race is that we often do not have access to current research on this topic. It is also particularly difficult for White people to recognize our own White privilege, so I am attaching a copy of Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" for you.

We will also discuss the power of language in the Language Arts classroom. Many times, it is assumed that Standard English is somehow superior to other dialects, but it is just that... a dialect. The nice thing about Standard English is that in the United States, it is a common language that is generally agreed upon- you can speak it anywhere in our land and be understood.

The problem with English is that the printing press slowed down the evolution of the language and froze all of those weird spellings and words, so it takes a specialized study- we call it English class- to decode that language. Standard English is the language of power in the United States, but we have a wonderful and diverse set of languages here, in Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Also, the languages we speak at home feel good in our mouths, comfort us and are an effective way to navigate our non-school worlds. The same goes for our students. I am including an excerpt from an article by Jean Anyon called "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work", so that we can explore the way language and curriculum are used to reproduce current power imbalances in the United States. Finally, I am adding in work by Sherman Alexie, Frederick Douglass and Langston Hughes as points for discussion and further study.

I think it is fair to address a question that we would normally shy away from. This is not the time to be polite. Here is what someone might not say: *Why should I care if racism, White privilege, discrimination, oppression and issues of power do not affect me or my classroom directly?* Even if you are a White teacher in an all-White classroom (especially if this is the case!) then this workshop is for you. These issues may affect you directly, but perhaps you do not know it yet. And if you turn a blind eye, it's just like participating in the replication of the problems that have created hegemony in the first place. The wonderful thing is that we can do something about it. Besides, what affects one of us affects all of us. In the words of Dr. King, "*For some*

*strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be - this is the interrelated structure of reality”.*

Welcome, friends. Thank you for helping me to be all that I can.

## Vocabulary List

**Conscientization** involves the removal of the teacher as the sole arbiter of knowledge, acknowledges students as knowers and active participants in their own learning. Conscientization is ultimately an understanding of one's place in the world, the power structures and hegemony, and the opportunity to begin disrupting those practices as a matter of course. Education is inherently political in nature.

**Emancipatory Pedagogy** seeks to identify, usurp and disrupt oppressive power structures which limit the ability of students to realize their potentials, to move social and economic classes and to be able to make informed decisions and participate in a democratic society. Furthermore, emancipatory teaching practices often include a multicultural curriculum that "aims at challenging the goals and advantages of a curriculum based on Anglo-or Eurocentric interpretation of American culture" (Fletcher, 2000, p. 18). Critical pedagogy is often associated with Paulo Freire and Peter McLaren (Dalton, 2003), both of whom discuss the negotiation of power relations and learning. Those who practice emancipatory teaching pedagogies seek to collaborate with students, to ease tension and espouse a rhetoric of easing oppression and offer hope and an end to suffering.

**Race and Racism** are defined in sociological terms as "any of the major groupings of mankind, having in common distinct physical features or having a similar ethnic background". "Racism springs not from the hearts of "racists", but from the fact that dominant actors in a racialized social system receive benefits at all levels... whereas subordinate actors do not" (Bonilla-Silva, Lewis & Embrick, 2004). It is quite possible then for the person to act and speak in a racist fashion and not feel malicious nor prejudice? McIntosh (2004) discusses racism as being largely unconscious to members of the dominant class, who are unaware of their own White privilege.

**White Privilege:** Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us." (McIntosh, 2004). Furthermore, those who are unaware of their place in society, those who unconsciously participate as advantaged or disadvantaged groups and people, are most likely to reproduce the same power structures within the society.

**Reproduction:** Bordieu and Passeron (1990), of the Centre de Sociologie Europeenne in Paris, discuss the replication of the dominant culture in their work, "Reproduction: In Education, Society and Culture". In it, they assert that education is a vehicle through which culture is transmitted. Furthermore, the passing down of White dominance from one generation to the next is learned through the educative process. This is not explicit, but part of the hidden curriculum (Bordieu & Passeron, 1990). The hidden curriculum

encompasses “those unspoken values, norms and ideologies that are passed on to students as common sense” (Kanpol, 1994, p. 34). After all, it is the dominant class which selects which texts to value and present, which stories to tell and which skews the language in their favor, using it to reinforce existing power structures. Social reproduction is “defined as the reproduction of the structure of the relations of force between the classes...” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 11) . Jean Anyon (1980) posits that students are educated according to the social class they are born into and are prepared for further education and jobs that will be the same social and economic state as what their parents have. In this way, over time, power structures are reiterated and poverty class students become poverty class parents, whose children will be taught marginal literacy skills and language which is not emancipatory nor expected to give access to power (Anyon, 1980). One important aspect of this is in the English classroom. “Storytelling most often reproduces power relations, as the specific stories we tell tend to reinforce the social order” (Bonilla-Silva, Lewis & Embrick, Dec. 2004). Another word for reproduction is hegemony.

**Hegemony:** Barry Kanpol of Indiana University describes the necessity of reproduction in schools as “paramount” because these enforced inequalities contribute to hegemonic power. “This reproduction, or what we shall term hegemony, occurs when administrative, teacher and student experience is unquestioned and when values and actions are lived as commonsensical despite, it could be argued the best intentions for modernism’s quest for community and enlightenment “ (Kanpol, 1994, p. 35).

**Colorblindness** is a “strategy practiced by many Whites to regulate the appearance of prejudice during social interaction...to avoid talking about race, or even acknowledging racial difference” (Apfelbaum, Sommers & Norton, 2008, p. 918). Apfelbaum, Sommers and Norton conducted an empirical study in 2008 to observe the phenomena of colorblindness in social interaction and concluded, among other things, that this is primarily a strategy to “appear unbiased during social interaction” (p. 918). Further, they assert that generally speaking, “people are not, by any means, “actually colorblind perceivers in most instances” (p. 919). This means that race is relatively easy to discern and is automatic in many cases. In fact, Ito and Umland (2003) showed random yearbook photos to 80 participants for a short timespan (1,000 ms) and asked for categories from the respondents. Race was recognized more quickly than gender (p. 617).

**Whiteness Studies:** What does it mean to be White? Is this just about skin tone, and do White people in the United States have a culture of their own? Often referred to as White dominance, White privilege is that advantage given to those who look White and who are able to access and work within the mainstream culture simply because of that ethnic heritage (McIntosh, year, Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Whiteness studies are undertaken in the interest of fighting racism, of making the invisible and of disrupting hegemonic actions (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003).



## **THEME FOR ENGLISH B**

**By Langston Hughes**

The instructor said,  
Go home and write  
a page tonight.  
And let that page come out of you---  
Then, it will be true.  
I wonder if it's that simple?  
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.  
I went to school there, then Durham, then here  
to this college on the hill above Harlem.  
I am the only colored student in my class.  
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem  
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,  
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,  
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator  
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me  
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what  
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:  
hear you, hear me---we two---you, me, talk on this page.  
(I hear New York too.) Me---who?  
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.  
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.  
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,  
or records---Bessie, bop, or Bach.  
I guess being colored doesn't make me NOT like  
the same things other folks like who are other races.  
So will my page be colored that I write?  
Being me, it will not be white.  
But it will be  
a part of you, instructor.  
You are white---  
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.  
That's American.  
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.  
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.  
But we are, that's true!  
As I learn from you,  
I guess you learn from me---  
although you're older---and white---  
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

1951

## Superman and Me

by Sherman Alexie  
Los Angeles Times, April 19 1998

*The following essay appeared as part of a series, "The Joy of Reading and Writing." This essay is also printed in [The Most Wonderful Books: Writers on Discovering the Pleasures of Reading](#).*

I learned to read with a Superman comic book. Simple enough, I suppose. I cannot recall which particular Superman comic book I read, nor can I remember which villain he fought in that issue. I cannot remember the plot, nor the means by which I obtained the comic book. What I can remember is this: I was 3 years old, a Spokane Indian boy living with his family on the Spokane Indian Reservation in eastern Washington state. We were poor by most standards, but one of my parents usually managed to find some minimum-wage job or another, which made us middle-class by reservation standards. I had a brother and three sisters. We lived on a combination of irregular paychecks, hope, fear and government surplus food.

My father, who is one of the few Indians who went to Catholic school on purpose, was an avid reader of westerns, spy thrillers, murder mysteries, gangster epics, basketball player biographies and anything else he could find. He bought his books by the pound at Dutch's Pawn Shop, Goodwill, Salvation Army and Value Village. When he had extra money, he bought new novels at supermarkets, convenience stores and hospital gift shops. Our house was filled with books. They were stacked in crazy piles in the bathroom, bedrooms and living room. In a fit of unemployment-inspired creative energy, my father built a set of bookshelves and soon filled them with a random assortment of books about the Kennedy assassination, Watergate, the Vietnam War and the entire 23-book series of the Apache westerns. My father loved books, and since I loved my father with an aching devotion, I decided to love books as well.

I can remember picking up my father's books before I could read. The words themselves were mostly foreign, but I still remember the exact moment when I first understood, with a sudden clarity, the purpose of a paragraph. I didn't have the vocabulary to say "paragraph," but I realized that a paragraph was a fence that held words. The words inside a paragraph worked together for a common purpose. They had some specific reason for being inside the same fence. This knowledge delighted me. I began to think of everything in terms of paragraphs. Our reservation was a small paragraph within the United States. My family's house was a paragraph, distinct from the other paragraphs of the LeBrets to the north, the Fords to our south and the Tribal School to the west. Inside our house, each family member existed as a separate paragraph but still had genetics and common experiences to link us. Now, using this logic, I can see my changed family as an essay of seven paragraphs: mother, father, older brother, the deceased sister, my younger twin sisters and our adopted little brother.

At the same time I was seeing the world in paragraphs, I also picked up that Superman comic book. Each panel, complete with picture, dialogue and narrative was a three-dimensional paragraph. In one panel, Superman breaks through a door. His suit is red, blue and yellow. The brown door shatters into many pieces. I look at the narrative above the picture. I cannot read the words, but I assume it tells me that "Superman is breaking down the door." Aloud, I pretend to read the words and say, "Superman is breaking down the door." Words, dialogue, also float out of Superman's mouth. Because he is breaking down the door, I assume he says, "I am breaking down the door." Once again, I pretend to read the words and say aloud, "I am breaking down the door" In this way, I learned to read.

This might be an interesting story all by itself. A little Indian boy teaches himself to read at an early age and advances quickly. He reads "Grapes of Wrath" in kindergarten when other

children are struggling through "Dick and Jane." If he'd been anything but an Indian boy living on the reservation, he might have been called a prodigy. But he is an Indian boy living on the reservation and is simply an oddity. He grows into a man who often speaks of his childhood in the third-person, as if it will somehow dull the pain and make him sound more modest about his talents.

A smart Indian is a dangerous person, widely feared and ridiculed by Indians and non-Indians alike. I fought with my classmates on a daily basis. They wanted me to stay quiet when the non-Indian teacher asked for answers, for volunteers, for help. We were Indian children who were expected to be stupid. Most lived up to those expectations inside the classroom but subverted them on the outside. They struggled with basic reading in school but could remember how to sing a few dozen powwow songs. They were monosyllabic in front of their non-Indian teachers but could tell complicated stories and jokes at the dinner table. They submissively ducked their heads when confronted by a non-Indian adult but would slug it out with the Indian bully who was 10 years older. As Indian children, we were expected to fail in the non-Indian world. Those who failed were ceremonially accepted by other Indians and appropriately pitied by non-Indians.

I refused to fail. I was smart. I was arrogant. I was lucky. I read books late into the night, until I could barely keep my eyes open. I read books at recess, then during lunch, and in the few minutes left after I had finished my classroom assignments. I read books in the car when my family traveled to powwows or basketball games. In shopping malls, I ran to the bookstores and read bits and pieces of as many books as I could. I read the books my father brought home from the pawnshops and secondhand. I read the books I borrowed from the library. I read the backs of cereal boxes. I read the newspaper. I read the bulletins posted on the walls of the school, the clinic, the tribal offices, the post office. I read junk mail. I read auto-repair manuals. I read magazines. I read anything that had words and paragraphs. I read with equal parts joy and desperation. I loved those books, but I also knew that love had only one purpose. I was trying to save my life.

Despite all the books I read, I am still surprised I became a writer. I was going to be a pediatrician. These days, I write novels, short stories, and poems. I visit schools and teach creative writing to Indian kids. In all my years in the reservation school system, I was never taught how to write poetry, short stories or novels. I was certainly never taught that Indians wrote poetry, short stories and novels. Writing was something beyond Indians. I cannot recall a single time that a guest teacher visited the reservation. There must have been visiting teachers. Who were they? Where are they now? Do they exist? I visit the schools as often as possible. The Indian kids crowd the classroom. Many are writing their own poems, short stories and novels. They have read my books. They have read many other books. They look at me with bright eyes and arrogant wonder. They are trying to save their lives. Then there are the sullen and already defeated Indian kids who sit in the back rows and ignore me with theatrical precision. The pages of their notebooks are empty. They carry neither pencil nor pen. They stare out the window. They refuse and resist. "Books," I say to them. "Books," I say. I throw my weight against their locked doors. The door holds. I am smart. I am arrogant. I am lucky. I am trying to save our lives.

## Frederick Douglass

### *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*

#### Chapter VII

I lived in Master Hugh's family about seven years. During this time, I succeeded in learning to read and write. In accomplishing this, I was compelled to resort to various stratagems. I had no regular teacher. My mistress, who had kindly commenced to instruct me, had, in compliance with the advice and direction of her husband, not only ceased to instruct, but had set her face against my being instructed by any one else. It is due, however, to my mistress to say of her, that she did not adopt this course of treatment immediately. She at first lacked the depravity indispensable to shutting me up in mental darkness. It was at least necessary for her to have some training in the exercise of irresponsible power, to make her equal to the task of treating me as though I were a brute.

My mistress was, as I have said, a kind and tender-hearted woman; and in the simplicity of her soul she commenced, when I first went to live with her, to treat me as she supposed one human being ought to treat another. In entering upon the duties of a slaveholder, she did not seem to perceive that I sustained to her the relation of a mere chattel, and that for her to treat me as a human being was not only wrong, but dangerously so. Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. She had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner that came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness. The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me. She now commenced to practise her husband's precepts. She finally became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself. She was not satisfied with simply doing as well as he had commanded; she seemed anxious to do better. Nothing seemed to make her more angry than to see me with a newspaper. She seemed to think that here lay the danger. I have had her rush at me with a face made all up of fury, and snatch from me a newspaper, in a manner that fully revealed her apprehension. She was an apt woman; and a little experience soon demonstrated, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other.

From this time I was most narrowly watched. If I was in a separate room any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book, and was at once called to give an account of myself. All this, however, was too late. The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the ~inch,~ and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ~ell.~

The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent of errands, I always took my book with me, and by going one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. I am strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids;--not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country. It is enough to say of the dear little fellows, that they lived on Philpot Street,

very near Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard. I used to talk this matter of slavery over with them. I would sometimes say to them, I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got to be men. "You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, ~but I am a slave for life!~ Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?" These words used to trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the hope that something would occur by which I might be free.

I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being ~a slave for life~ began to bear heavily upon my heart. Just about this time, I got hold of a book entitled "The Columbian Orator." Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book. Among much of other interesting matter, I found in it a dialogue between a master and his slave. The slave was represented as having run away from his master three times. The dialogue represented the conversation which took place between them, when the slave was retaken the third time. In this dialogue, the whole argument in behalf of slavery was brought forward by the master, all of which was disposed of by the slave. The slave was made to say some very smart as well as impressive things in reply to his master-- things which had the desired though unexpected effect; for the conversation resulted in the voluntary emancipation of the slave on the part of the master.

In the same book, I met with one of Sheridan's mighty speeches on and in behalf of Catholic emancipation. These were choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with unabated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind, and died away for want of utterance. The moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder. What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights. The reading of these documents enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery; but while they relieved me of one difficulty, they brought on another even more painful than the one of which I was relieved. The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery. I loathed them as being the meanest as well as the most wicked of men. As I read and contemplated the subject, behold! that very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me. There was no getting rid of it. It was pressed upon me by every object within sight or hearing, animate or inanimate. The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing. It was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm.

I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead; and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed. While in this state of mind, I was eager to hear any one speak of slavery. I was a ready listener. Every little while, I could hear something about the abolitionists. It was some time before I found what the word meant. It was always used in such connections as to make it an interesting word to me. If a slave ran away and succeeded in getting clear, or if a slave killed his master, set fire to a barn, or did any thing very wrong in the mind of a slaveholder, it was spoken of as the fruit of ~abolition.~ Hearing the word in this connection very often, I set about learning what it meant. The dictionary afforded me little or

no help. I found it was "the act of abolishing;" but then I did not know what was to be abolished. Here I was perplexed. I did not dare to ask any one about its meaning, for I was satisfied that it was something they wanted me to know very little about. After a patient waiting, I got one of our city papers, containing an account of the number of petitions from the north, praying for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and of the slave trade between the States. From this time I understood the words ~abolition~ and ~abolitionist,~ and always drew near when that word was spoken, expecting to hear something of importance to myself and fellow-slaves. The light broke in upon me by degrees. I went one day down on the wharf of Mr. Waters; and seeing two Irishmen unloading a scow of stone, I went, unasked, and helped them. When we had finished, one of them came to me and asked me if I were a slave. I told him I was. He asked, "Are ye a slave for life?" I told him that I was. The good Irishman seemed to be deeply affected by the statement. He said to the other that it was a pity so fine a little fellow as myself should be a slave for life. He said it was a shame to hold me. They both advised me to run away to the north; that I should find friends there, and that I should be free. I pretended not to be interested in what they said, and treated them as if I did not understand them; for I feared they might be treacherous. White men have been known to encourage slaves to escape, and then, to get the reward, catch them and return them to their masters. I was afraid that these seemingly good men might use me so; but I nevertheless remembered their advice, and from that time I resolved to run away. I looked forward to a time at which it would be safe for me to escape. I was too young to think of doing so immediately; besides, I wished to learn how to write, as I might have occasion to write my own pass. I consoled myself with the hope that I should one day find a good chance. Meanwhile, I would learn to write.

The idea as to how I might learn to write was suggested to me by being in Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard, and frequently seeing the ship carpenters, after hewing, and getting a piece of timber ready for use, write on the timber the name of that part of the ship for which it was intended. When a piece of timber was intended for the larboard side, it would be marked thus--"L." When a piece was for the starboard side, it would be marked thus--"S." A piece for the larboard side forward, would be marked thus--"L. F." When a piece was for starboard side forward, it would be marked thus--"S. F." For larboard aft, it would be marked thus--"L. A." For starboard aft, it would be marked thus--"S. A." I soon learned the names of these letters, and for what they were intended when placed upon a piece of timber in the ship-yard. I immediately commenced copying them, and in a short time was able to make the four letters named. After that, when I met with any boy who I knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he. The next word would be, "I don't believe you. Let me see you try it." I would then make the letters which I had been so fortunate as to learn, and ask him to beat that. In this way I got a good many lessons in writing, which it is quite possible I should never have gotten in any other way. During this time, my copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk. With these, I learned mainly how to write. I then commenced and continued copying the Italics in Webster's Spelling Book, until I could make them all without looking on the book. By this time, my little Master Thomas had gone to school, and learned how to write, and had written over a number of copy-books. These had been brought home, and shown to some of our near neighbors, and then laid aside. My mistress used to go to class meeting at the Wilk Street meetinghouse every Monday afternoon, and leave me to take care of the house. When left thus, I used to spend the time in writing in the spaces left in Master Thomas's copy-book, copying what he had written. I continued to do this until I could write a hand very similar to that of Master Thomas. Thus, after a long, tedious effort for years, I finally succeeded in learning how to write.

## **WHITE PRIVILEGE: UNPACKING THE INVISIBLE KNAPSACK**

By: McIntosh, Peggy. Independent School, Winter90, Vol. 49 Issue 2, p31, 5p

I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group.

Through work to bring materials from women's studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are overprivileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women's status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in women's studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "Having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?"

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us."

### Daily effects of white privilege

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place, and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area that I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.

4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can deal with my hair.
10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
12. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color, who constitute the world's majority, without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge" I will be facing a person of my race.
18. If a traffic cop pulls me over, or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
19. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
20. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
21. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
22. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
23. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my race will not work against me.
24. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.
25. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color that more or less match my skin.

#### Elusive and fugitive

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience that I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these perquisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant, and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turf, and I was among those who could control the turf. My skin color was an asset for any more I was educated to want to make. I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making



social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color.

For this reason, the word "privilege" now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work systematically to overempower certain groups. Such privilege simply confers dominance because of one's race or sex.

Earned strength, unearned power

I want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred systemically. Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups.

We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages, which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantage, which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an unearned entitlement. At present, since only a few have it, it is an unearned advantage for them. This paper results from a process of coming to see that some of the power that I originally saw as attendant on being a human being in the United States consisted in unearned advantage and conferred dominance.

I have met very few men who are truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance, and, if so, what we will do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see "whiteness" as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and dangers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantages associated with them should not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage that rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex, and ethnic identity than on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the members of the Combahee River Collective pointed out in their "Black Feminist Statement" of 1977.

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms, which we can see, and embedded forms, which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the systems won't be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitudes. But a "white" skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen

dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subjects taboo. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that systems of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Although systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and, I imagine, for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.

Permission to reprint this excerpt must be obtained from Peggy McIntosh at the address above or by calling her at 617-431-1453.

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By Peggy McIntosh

Peggy McIntosh is associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. This essay is excerpted from Working Paper 189, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming To See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies" (1988), by Peggy McIntosh; available for \$4.00 from the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley MA 02181. The working paper contains a longer list of privileges.

## From *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*

JEAN ANYON *This essay first appeared in Journal of Education, Vol. 162, no. 1, Fall 1980.)*

*It's no surprise that schools in wealthy communities are better than those in poor communities, or that they better prepare their students for desirable jobs. It may be shocking, however, to learn how vast the differences in schools are - not so much in resources as in teaching methods and philosophies of education. Jean Anyon observed five elementary schools over the course of a full school year and concluded that fifth-graders of different economic backgrounds are already being prepared to occupy particular rungs on the social ladder. In a sense, some whole schools are on the vocational education track, while others are geared to produce future doctors, lawyers, and business leaders. Anyon's main audience is professional educators, so you may find her style and vocabulary challenging, but, once you've read her descriptions of specific classroom activities, the more analytic parts of the essay should prove easier to understand. Anyon is chairperson of the Department of Education at Rutgers University, Newark;*

Scholars in political economy and the sociology of knowledge have recently argued that public schools in complex industrial societies like our own make available different types of educational experience and curriculum knowledge to students in different social classes. Bowles and Gintis<sup>1</sup> for example, have argued that students in different social-class backgrounds are rewarded for classroom behaviors that correspond to personality traits allegedly rewarded in the different occupational strata--the working classes for docility and obedience, the managerial classes for initiative and personal assertiveness. Basil Bernstein, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michael W. Apple focusing on school knowledge, have argued that knowledge and skills leading to social power and regard (medical, legal, managerial) are made available to the advantaged social groups but are withheld from the working classes to whom a more "practical" curriculum is offered (manual skills, clerical knowledge). While there has been considerable argumentation of these points regarding education in England, France, and North America, there has been little or no attempt to investigate these ideas empirically in elementary or secondary schools and classrooms in this country.<sup>3</sup>

This article offers tentative empirical support (and qualification) of the above arguments by providing illustrative examples of differences in student *work* in classrooms in contrasting social class communities. The examples were gathered *as* part of an ethnographical<sup>4</sup> study of curricular, pedagogical, and pupil evaluation practices in five elementary schools. The article attempts a theoretical contribution as well and assesses student work in the light of a theoretical approach to social-class analysis... It will be suggested that there is a "hidden curriculum" in schoolwork that has profound implications for the theory - and consequence - of everyday activity in education....

### The Sample of Schools

... The social-class designation of each of the five schools will be identified, and the income, occupation, and other relevant available social characteristics of the students and their parents will be described. The first three schools are in a medium-sized city district in northern New Jersey, and the other two are in a nearby New Jersey suburb.

The first two schools I will call *working class schools*. Most of the parents have blue-collar jobs. Less than a third of the fathers are skilled, while the majority are in unskilled or

semiskilled jobs. During the period of the study (1978-1979), approximately 15 percent of the fathers were unemployed. The large majority (85 percent) of the families are white. The following occupations are typical: platform, storeroom, and stockroom workers; foundry-men, pipe welders, and boilermakers; semiskilled and unskilled assembly-line operatives; gas station attendants, auto mechanics, maintenance workers, and security guards. Less than 30 percent of the women work, some part-time and some full-time, on assembly lines, in storerooms and stockrooms, as waitresses, barmaids, or sales clerks. Of the fifth-grade parents, none of the wives of the skilled workers had jobs. Approximately 15 percent of the families in each school are at or below the federal "poverty" level;<sup>5</sup> most of the rest of the family incomes are at or below \$12,000, except some of the skilled workers whose incomes are higher. The incomes of the majority of the families in these two schools (at or below \$12,000) are typical of 38.6 percent of the families in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

The third school is called the *middle-class school*, although because of 5 neighborhood residence patterns, the population is a mixture of several social classes. The parents' occupations can be divided into three groups: a small group of blue-collar "rich," who are skilled, well-paid workers such as printers, carpenters, plumbers, and construction workers. The second group is composed of parents in working-class and middle-class white-collar jobs: women in office jobs, technicians, supervisors in industry, and parents employed by the city (such as firemen, policemen, and several of the school's teachers). The third group is composed of occupations such as personnel directors in local firms, accountants, "middle management," and a few small capitalists (owners of shops in the area). The children of several local doctors attend this school. Most family incomes are between \$13,000 and \$25,000, with a few higher. This income range is typical of 38.9 percent of the families in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

The fourth school has a parent population that is at the upper income level of the upper middle class and is predominantly professional. This school will be called the *affluent professional school*. Typical jobs are: cardiologist, interior designer, corporate lawyer or engineer, executive in advertising or television. There are some families who are not as affluent as the majority (the family of the superintendent of the district's schools, and the one or two families in which the fathers are skilled workers). In addition, a few of the families are more affluent than the majority and can be classified in the capitalist class (a partner in a prestigious Wall Street stock brokerage firm). Approximately 90 percent of the children in this school are white. Most family incomes are between \$40,000 and \$80,000. This income span represents approximately 7 percent of the families in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

In the fifth school the majority of the families belong to the capitalist class. This school will be called the *executive elite school* because most of the fathers are top executives (for example, presidents and vice-presidents) in major United States-based multinational corporations - for example, AT&T, RCA, Citibank, American Express, U.S. Steel. A sizable group of fathers are top executives in financial firms in Wall Street. There are also a number of fathers who list their occupations as "general counsel" to a particular corporation, and these corporations are also among the large multi-nationals. Many of the mothers do volunteer work in the Junior League, Junior Fortnightly, or other service groups; some are intricately involved in town politics; and some are themselves in well-paid occupations. There are no minority children in the school. Almost all the family incomes are over \$100,000 with some in the \$500,000 range. The incomes in this school represent less than 1 percent of the families in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Since each of the five schools is only one instance of elementary education in a particular social class context, I will not generalize beyond the sample. However, the examples of schoolwork which follow will suggest characteristics of education in each social setting that appear to have theoretical and social significance and to be worth investigation in a larger number of schools.

### *The Working Class Schools*

In the two working-class schools, work is following the steps of a procedure. The procedure is usually mechanical, involving rote behavior and very little decision making or choice. The teachers rarely explain why the work is being assigned, how it might connect to other assignments, or what the idea is that lies behind the procedure or gives it coherence and perhaps meaning or significance. Available textbooks are not always used, and the teachers often prepare their own dittos or put work examples on the board. Most of the rules regarding work are designations of what the children are to do; the rules are steps to follow. These steps are told to the children by the teachers and are often written on the board. The children are usually told to copy the steps as notes. These notes are to be studied. Work is often evaluated not according to whether it is right or wrong but according to whether the children followed the right steps.

The following examples illustrate these points. In math, when two-digit division was introduced, the teacher in one school gave a four-minute lecture on what the terms are called (which number is the divisor, dividend, quotient, and remainder). The children were told to copy these names in their notebooks. Then the teacher told them the steps to follow to do the problems, saying, "This is how you do them." The teacher listed the steps on the board, and they appeared several days later as a chart hung in the middle of the front wall: "Divide, Multiply, Subtract, Bring Down." The children often did examples of two-digit division. When the teacher went over the examples with them, he told them what the procedure was for each problem, rarely asking them to conceptualize or explain it themselves: "Three into twenty-two is seven; do your subtraction and one is left over." During the week that two-digit division was introduced (or at any other time), the investigator did not observe any discussion of the idea of grouping involved in division, any use of manipulables, or any attempt to relate two-digit division to any other mathematical process. Nor was there any attempt to relate the steps to an actual or possible thought process of the children. The observer did not hear the terms *dividend*, *quotient*, and so on, used again. The math teacher in the other working-class school followed similar procedures regarding two-digit division and at one point her class seemed confused. She said, "You're confusing yourselves. You're tensing up. Remember, when you do this, it's the same steps over and over again--and that's the way division always is." Several weeks later, after a test, a group of her children "still didn't get it," and she made no attempt to explain the concept of dividing things into groups or to give them manipulables for their own investigation. Rather, she went over the steps with them again and told them that they "needed more practice."

In other areas of math, work is also carrying out often unexplained fragmented procedures. For example, one of the teachers led the children through a series of steps to make a 1-inch grid on their paper *without* telling them that they were making a 1-inch grid or that it would be used to study scale. She said, "Take your ruler. Put it across the top. Make a mark at every number. Then move your ruler down to the bottom. No, put it across the bottom. Now make a mark on top of every number. Now draw a line from..." At this point a girl said that she had a faster way to do it and the teacher said, "No, you don't; you don't even know what I'm making yet. Do it this way or it's wrong." After they had made the lines up and down and across, the teacher told them she wanted them to make a figure by connecting some dots and to measure that, using the scale of 1 inch equals 1 mile. Then they were to cut it out. She said, "Don't cut it until I check it."

In both working-class schools, work in language arts is mechanics of punctuation (commas, periods, question marks, exclamation points), capitalization, and the four kinds of sentences. One teacher explained to me, "Simple punctuation is all they'll ever use." Regarding punctuation, either a teacher or a ditto stated the rules for where, for example, to put commas. The investigator heard no classroom discussion of the aural context of punctuation (which, of course, is what gives each mark its meaning). Nor did the investigator hear any statement or

inference that placing a punctuation mark could be a decision-making process, depending, for example, on one's intended meaning. Rather, the children were told to follow the rules. Language arts did not involve creative writing. There were several writing assignments throughout the year but in each instance the children were given a ditto, and they wrote answers to questions on the sheet. For example, they wrote their "autobiography" by answering such questions as "Where were you born?" "What is your favorite animal?" on a sheet entitled "All About Me."

In one of the working-class schools, the class had a science period several times a week. On the three occasions observed, the children were not called upon to set up experiments or to give explanations for facts or concepts. Rather, on each occasion the teacher told them in his own words what the book said. The children copied the teacher's sentences from the board. Each day that preceded the day they were to do a science experiment, the teacher told them to copy the directions from the book for the procedure they would carry out the next day and to study the list at home that night. The day after each experiment, the teacher went over what they had "found" (they did the experiments as a class, and each was actually a class demonstration led by the teacher). Then the teacher wrote what they "found" on the board, and the children copied that in their notebooks. Once or twice a year there are science projects. The project is chosen and assigned by the teacher from a box of 3-by-5-inch cards. On the card the teacher has written the question to be answered, the books to use, and how much to write. Explaining the cards to the observer, the teacher said, "It tells them exactly what to do, or they couldn't do it."

Social studies in the working-class schools is also largely mechanical, rote work that was given little explanation or connection to larger contexts. In one school, for example, although there was a book available, social studies work was to copy the teacher's notes from the board. Several times a week for a period of several months the children copied these notes. The fifth grades in the district were to study United States history. The teacher used a booklet she had purchased called "The Fabulous Fifty States." Each day she put information from the booklet in outline form on the board and the children copied it. The type of information did not vary: the name of the state, its abbreviation, state capital, nickname of the state, its main products, main business, and a "Fabulous Fact" ("Idaho grew twenty-seven billion potatoes in one year. That's enough potatoes for each man, woman, and...") As the children finished copying the sentences, the teacher erased them and wrote more. Children would occasionally go to the front to pull down the wall map in order to locate the states they were copying, and the teacher did not dissuade them. But the observer never saw her refer to the map; nor did the observer ever hear her make other than perfunctory remarks concerning the information the children were copying. Occasionally the children colored in a ditto and cut it out to make a stand-up figure (representing, for example, a man roping a cow in the Southwest). These were referred to by the teacher as their social studies "projects."

Rote behavior was often called for in classroom work. When going over 15 math and language art skills sheets, for example, as the teacher asked for the answer to each problem, he fired the questions rapidly, staccato, and the scene reminded the observer of a sergeant drilling recruits: above all, the questions demanded that you stay at attention: "The next one? What do I put here? . . . Here? Give us the next." Or "How many commas in this sentence? Where do I put them . . . The next one?"

The four fifth grade teachers observed in the working-class schools attempted to control classroom time and space by making decisions without consulting the children and without explaining the basis for their decisions. The teacher's control thus often seemed capricious. Teachers, for instance, very often ignored the bells to switch classes - deciding among themselves to keep the children after the period was officially over to continue with the work or for disciplinary reasons or so they (the teachers) could stand in the hall and talk. There were no clocks in the rooms in either school, and the children often asked, "What period is this?"

"When do we go to gym?" The children had no access to materials. These were handed out by teachers and closely guarded. Things in the room "belonged" to the teacher: "Bob, bring me my garbage can." The teachers continually gave the children orders. Only three times did the investigator hear a teacher in either working-class school preface a directive with an unsarcastic "please," or "let's" or "would you." Instead, the teachers said, "Shut up," "Shut your mouth," "Open your books," "Throw your gum away-if you want to rot your teeth, do it on your own time." Teachers made every effort to control the movement of the children, and often shouted, "Why are you out of your seat??!!" If the children got permission to leave the room, they had to take a written pass with the date and time....

### *Middle-Class School*

In the middle-class school, work is getting the right answer. If one accumulates enough right answers, one gets a good grade. One must follow the directions in order to get the right answers, but the directions often call for some figuring, some choice, some decision making. For example, the children must often figure out by themselves what the directions ask them to do and how to get the answer: what do you do first, second, and perhaps third? Answers are usually found in books or by listening to the teacher. Answers are usually words, sentences, numbers, or facts and dates; one writes them on paper, and one should be neat. Answers must be given in the right order, and one cannot make them up.

The following activities are illustrative. Math involves some choice: one may do two-digit division the long way or the short way, and there are some math problems that can be done "in your head." When the teacher explains how to do two-digit division, there is recognition that a cognitive process is involved; she gives you several ways and says, "I want to make sure you understand what you're doing-so you get it right"; and, when they go over the homework, she asks the *children* to tell how they did the problem and what answer they got.

In social studies the daily work is to read the assigned pages in the textbook and to answer the teacher's questions. The questions are almost always designed to check on whether the students have read the assignment and understood it: who did so-and-so; what happened after that; when did it happen, where, and sometimes, why did it happen? The answers are in the book and in one's understanding of the book; the teacher's hints when one doesn't know the answers are to "read it again" or to look at the picture or at the rest of the paragraph. One is to search for the answer in the "context," in what is given.

Language arts is "simple grammar, what they need for everyday life." The language arts teacher says, "They should learn to speak properly, to write business letters and thank-you letters, and to understand what nouns and verbs and simple subjects are." Here, as well, actual work is to choose the right answers, to understand what is given. The teacher often says, "Please read the next sentence and then I'll question you about it." One teacher said in some exasperation to a boy who was fooling around in class, "If you don't know the answers to the questions I ask, then you can't stay in this *class!* [pause] You *never* know the answers to the questions I ask, and it's not fair to me-and certainly not to you!"

Most lessons are based on the textbook. This does not involve a critical perspective on what is given there. For example, a critical perspective in social studies is perceived as dangerous by these teachers because it may lead to controversial topics; the parents might complain. The children, however, are often curious especially in social studies. Their questions are tolerated and usually answered perfunctorily. But after a few minutes the teacher will say, "All right, we're not going any farther. Please open your social studies workbook." While the teachers spend a lot of time explaining and expanding on what the textbooks say, there is little attempt to analyze how or why things happen, or to give thought to how pieces of a culture, or, say, a system of numbers or elements of a language fit together or can be analyzed. What has

happened in the past and what exists now may not be equitable or fair, but (shrug) that is the way things are and one does not confront such matters in school. For example, in social studies after a child is called on to read a passage about the pilgrims, the teacher summarizes the paragraph and then says, "So you can see how strict they were about everything." A child asks, "Why?" "Well, because they felt that if you weren't busy you'd get into trouble." Another child asks, "Is it true that they burned women at the stake?" The teacher says, "Yes, if a woman did anything strange, they hanged them. [*sic*] What would a woman do, do you think, to make them burn them? [*sic*] See if you can come up with better answers than my other [social studies] class." Several children offer suggestions, to which the teacher nods but does not comment. Then she says, "Okay, good," and calls on the next child to read.

Work tasks do not usually request creativity. Serious attention is rarely given in school work on *how* the children develop or express their own feelings and ideas, either linguistically or in graphic form. On the occasions when creativity or self-expression is requested, it is peripheral to the main activity or it is "enriched" or "for fun." During a lesson on what similes are, for example, the teacher explains what they are, puts several on the board, gives some other examples herself, and then asks the children if they can "make some up." She calls on three children who give similes, two of which are actually in the book they have open before them. The teacher does not comment on this and then asks several others to choose similes from the list of phrases in the book. Several do so correctly, and she says, "Oh good! You're picking them out! See how good we are?" Their homework is to pick out the rest of the similes from the list.

Creativity is not often requested in social studies and science projects, either. Social studies projects, for example, are given with directions to "find information on your topic" and write it up. The children are not supposed to copy but to "put it in your own words." Although a number of the projects subsequently went beyond the teacher's direction to find information and had quite expressive covers and inside illustrations, the teacher's evaluative comments had to do with the amount of information, whether they had "copied," and if their work was neat.

The style of control of the three fifth-grade teachers observed in this school varied from somewhat easygoing to strict, but in contrast to the working-class schools, the teachers' decisions were usually based on external rules and regulations--for example, on criteria that were known or available to the children. Thus, the teachers always honor the bells for changing classes, and they usually evaluate children's work by what is in the textbooks and answer booklets.

There is little excitement in schoolwork for the children, and the assignments are perceived as having little to do with their interests and feelings. As one child said, what you do is "store facts up in your head like cold storage - until you need it later for a test or your job." Thus, doing well is important because there are thought to be *other* likely rewards: a good job or college.<sup>10</sup>

### *Affluent Professional School*

In the affluent professional school, work is creative activity carried out independently. The students are continually asked to express and apply ideas and concepts. Work involves individual thought and expressiveness, expansion and illustration of ideas, and choice of appropriate method and material. (The class is not considered an open classroom, and the principal explained that because of the large number of discipline problems in the fifth grade this year they did not departmentalize. The teacher who agreed to take part in the study said she is "more structured this year than she usually is.) The products of work in this class are often written stories, editorials and essays, or representations of ideas in mural, graph, or craft form. The products of work should not be like anybody else's and should show individuality.



They should exhibit good design, and (this is important) they must also fit empirical reality. The relatively few rules to be followed regarding work are usually criteria for, or limits on, individual activity. One's product is usually evaluated for the quality of its expression and for the appropriateness of its conception to the task. In many cases, one's own satisfaction with the product is an important criterion for its evaluation. When right answers are called for, as in commercial materials like SRA (Science Research Associates) and math, it is important that the children decide on an answer as a result of thinking about the idea involved in what they're being asked to do. Teacher's hints are to "think about it some more."

The following activities are illustrative. The class takes home a sheet requesting each child's parents to fill in the number of cars they have, the number of television sets, refrigerators, games, or rooms in the house, and so on. Each child is to figure the average number of a type of possession owned by the fifth grade. Each child must compile the "data" from all the sheets. A calculator is available in the classroom to do the mechanics of finding the average. Some children decide to send sheets to the fourth-grade families for comparison. Their work should be "verified" by a classmate before it is handed in.

Each child and his or her family has made a geoboard. The teacher asks the class to get their geoboards from the side cabinet, to take a handful of rubber bands, and then to listen to what she would like them to do. She says, "I would like you to design a figure and then find the perimeter and area. When you have it, check with your neighbor. After you've done that, please transfer it to graph paper and tomorrow I'll ask you to make up a question about it for someone. When you hand it in, please let me know whose it is and who verified it. Then I have something else for you to do that's really fun. [pause] Find the average number of chocolate chips in three cookies. I'll give you three cookies, and you'll have to *eat* your way through, I'm afraid!" Then she goes around the room and gives help, suggestions, praise, and admonitions that they are getting noisy. They work sitting, or standing up at their desks, at benches in the back, or on the floor. A child hands the teacher his paper and she comments, "I'm not accepting this paper. Do a better design." To another child she says, "That's fantastic! But you'll never find the area. Why don't you draw a figure inside [the big one] and subtract to get the area?"

The school district requires the fifth grade to study ancient civilization (in particular, Egypt, Athens, and Sumer). In this classroom, the emphasis is on illustrating and re-creating the culture of the people of ancient times. The following are typical activities: the children made an 8mm film on Egypt, which one of the parents edited. A girl in the class wrote the script, and the class acted it out. They put the sound on themselves. They read stories of those days. They wrote essays and stories depicting the lives of the people and the societal and occupational divisions. They chose from a list of projects, all of which involved graphical presentations of ideas: for example. "Make a mural depicting the division of labor in Egyptian society."

Each wrote and exchanged a letter in hieroglyphics with a fifth grader in another class, and they also exchanged stories they wrote in cuneiform. They made a scroll and singed the edges so it looked authentic. They each chose an occupation and made an Egyptian plaque representing that occupation, simulating the appropriate Egyptian design. They carved their design on a cylinder of wax, pressed the wax into clay, and then baked the clay. Although one girl did not choose an occupation but carved instead a series of gods and slaves, the teacher said, "That's all right, Amber, it's beautiful." As they were working the teacher said, "Don't cut into your clay until you're satisfied with your design."

Social studies also involves almost daily presentation by the children of some event from the news. The teacher's questions ask the children to expand what they say, to give more details, and to be more specific. Occasionally she adds some remarks to help them see connections between events.

The emphasis on expressing and illustrating ideas in social studies is accompanied in language arts by an emphasis on creative writing. Each child wrote a rebus story for a first grader whom they had interviewed to see what kind of story the child liked best. They wrote editorials on pending decisions by the school board and radio plays, some of which were read over the school intercom from the office and one of which was performed in the auditorium. There is no language arts textbook because, the teacher said, "The principal wants us to be creative." There is not much grammar, but there is punctuation. One morning when the observer arrived, the class was doing a punctuation ditto. The teacher later apologized for using the ditto. "It's just for review," she said. "I don't teach punctuation that way. We use their language." The ditto had three unambiguous rules for where to put commas in a sentence. As the teacher was going around to help the children with the ditto, she repeated several times, "where you put commas depends on how you say the sentence; it depends on the situation and what you want to say. Several weeks later the observer saw another punctuation activity. The teacher had printed a five-paragraph story on an oak tag and then cut it into phrases. She read the whole story to the class from the book, then passed out the phrases. The group had to decide how the phrases could best be put together again. (They arranged the phrases on the floor.) The point was not to replicate the story, although that was not irrelevant, but to "decide what you think the best way is." Punctuation marks on cardboard pieces were then handed out, and the children discussed and then decided what mark was best at each place they thought one was needed. At the end of each paragraph the teacher asked, "Are you satisfied with the way the paragraphs are now? Read it to yourself and see how it sounds." Then she read the original story again, and they compared the two.

Describing her goals in science to the investigator, the teacher said, "We use ESS (Elementary Science Study). It's very good because it gives a hands-on experience--so they can make *sense* out of it. It doesn't matter whether it [what they find] is right or wrong. I bring them together and there's value in discussing their ideas."

The products of work in this class are often highly valued by the children and the teacher. In fact, this was the only school in which the investigator was not allowed to take original pieces of the children's work for her files. If the work was small enough, however, and was on paper, the investigator could duplicate it on the copying machine in the office.

The teacher's attempt to control the class involves constant negotiation. She does not give direct orders unless she is angry because the children have been too noisy. Normally, she tries to get them to foresee the consequences of their actions and to decide accordingly. For example, lining them up to go see a play written by the sixth graders, she says, "I presume you're lined up by someone with whom you want to sit. I hope you're lined up by someone you won't get in trouble with."...

One of the few rules governing the children's movement is that no more than three children may be out of the room at once. There is a school rule that anyone can go to the library at any time to get a book. In the fifth grade I observed, they sign their name on the chalkboard and leave. There are no passes. Finally, the children have a fair amount of officially sanctioned say over what happens in the class. For example, they often negotiate what work is to be done. If the teacher wants to move on to the next subject, but the children say they are not ready, they want to work on their present projects some *more*, she very often lets them do it.

### *Executive Elite School*

In the executive elite school, work is developing one's analytical intellectual powers. Children are continually asked to reason through a problem, to produce intellectual products that are both logically sound and of top academic quality. A primary goal of thought is to

conceptualize rules by which elements may fit together in systems and then to apply these rules in solving a problem. Schoolwork helps one to achieve, to excel, to prepare for life.

The following are illustrative. The math teacher teaches area and perimeter by having the children derive formulas for each. First she helps them, through discussion at the board, to arrive at  $A = W \times L$  as a formula (not *the* formula) for area. After discussing several, she says, "Can anyone make up a formula for perimeter? Can you figure that out yourselves? [pause] Knowing what we know, can we think of a formula?" She works out three children's suggestions at the board, saying to two, "Yes, that's a good one," and then asks the class if they can think of any more. No one volunteers. To prod them, she says, "If you use rules and good reasoning, you get many ways. Chris, can you think up a formula?"

She discusses two-digit division with the children as a decision-making process. Presenting a new type of problem to them, she asks, "What's the *first* decision you'd make if presented with this kind of example? What is the first thing you'd *think*? Craig?" Craig says, "To find my first partial quotient." She responds, "Yes, that would be your first decision. How would you do that?" Craig explains, and then the teacher says, "OK, we'll see how that works for you." The class tries his way. Subsequently, she comments on the merits and shortcomings of several other children's decisions. Later, she tells the investigator that her goals in math are to develop their reasoning and mathematical thinking and that, unfortunately, "there's no time for manipulables."

While right answers are important in math, they are not "given" by the book or by the teacher but may be challenged by the children. Going over some problems in late September the teacher says, "Raise your hand if you do not agree." A child says, "I don't agree with sixty-four." The teacher responds, "OK, there's a question about sixty-four. [to class] Please check it. Owen, they're disagreeing with you. Kristen, they're checking yours." The teacher emphasized this repeatedly during September and October with statements like "Don't be afraid to say you disagree. In the last [math] class, somebody disagreed, and they were right. Before you disagree, check yours, and if you still think we're wrong, then we'll check it out." By Thanksgiving, the children did not often speak in terms of right and wrong math problems but of whether they agreed with the answer that had been given.

There are complicated math mimeos with many word problems. Whenever they go over the examples, they discuss how each child has set up the problem. The children must explain it precisely. On one occasion the teacher said, "I'm more--just as interested in *how* you set up the problem as in what answer you find. If you set up a problem in a good way, the answer is *easy* to find.

Social studies work is most often reading and discussion of concepts and independent research. There are only occasional artistic, expressive, or illustrative projects. Ancient Athens and Sumer are, rather, societies to analyze. The following questions are typical of those that guide the children's independent research. "What mistakes did Pericles make after the war?" "What mistakes did the citizens of Athens make?" "What are the elements of a civilization?" "How did Greece build an economic empire?" "Compare the way Athens chose its leaders with the way we choose ours." Occasionally the children are asked to make up sample questions for their social studies tests. On an occasion when the investigator was present, the social studies teacher rejected a child's question by saying, "That's just fact. If I asked you that question on a test, you'd complain it was just memory! Good questions ask for concepts."

In social studies--but also in reading, science, and health--the teachers initiate classroom discussions of current social issues and problems. These discussions occurred on every one of the investigator's visits, and a teacher told me, "These children's opinions are important - it's important that they learn to reason things through." The classroom discussions always struck the observer as quite realistic and analytical, dealing with concrete social issues like the

following: "Why do workers strike?" "Is that right or wrong?" "Why do we have inflation, and what can be done to stop it?" "Why do companies put chemicals in food when the natural ingredients are available?" and so on. Usually the children did not have to be prodded to give their opinions. In fact, their statements and the interchanges between them struck the observer as quite sophisticated conceptually and verbally, and well-informed. Occasionally the teachers would prod with statements such as, "Even if you don't know [the answers], if you think logically about it, you can figure it out." And "I'm asking you [these] questions to help you think this through."

Language arts emphasizes language as a complex system, one that should be mastered. The children are asked to diagram sentences of complex grammatical construction, to memorize irregular verb conjugations (he lay, he has lain, and so on ...), and to use the proper participles, conjunctions, and interjections in their speech. The teacher (the same one who teaches social studies) told them, "It is not enough to get these right on tests; you must use what you learn [in grammar classes] in your written and oral work. I will grade you on that."

Most writing assignments are either research reports and essays for social studies or experiment analyses and write-ups for science. There is only an occasional story or other "creative writing" assignment. On the occasion observed by the investigator (the writing of a Halloween story), the points the teacher stressed in preparing the children to write involved the structural aspects of a story rather than the expression of feelings or other ideas. The teacher showed them a filmstrip, "The Seven Parts of a Story," and lectured them on plot development, mood setting, character development, consistency, and the use of a logical or appropriate ending. The stories they subsequently wrote were, in fact, well-structured, but many were also personal and expressive. The teacher's evaluative comments, however, did not refer to the expressiveness or artistry but were all directed toward whether they had "developed" the story well.

Language arts work also involved a large amount of practice in presentation of the self and in managing situations where the child was expected to be in charge. For example, there was a series of assignments in which each child had to be a "student teacher." The child had to plan a lesson in grammar, outlining, punctuation, or other language arts topic and explain the concept to the class. Each child was to prepare a worksheet or game and a homework assignment as well. After each presentation, the teacher and other children gave a critical appraisal of the "student teacher's" performance. Their criteria were: whether the student spoke clearly, whether the lesson was interesting, whether the student made any mistakes, and whether he or she kept control of the class. On an occasion when a child did not maintain control, the teacher said, "When you're up there, you have authority and you have to use it. I'll back you up."

The executive elite school is the only school where bells do not demarcate the periods of time. The two fifth-grade teachers were very strict about changing classes on schedule, however, as specific plans for each session had been made. The teachers attempted to keep tight control over the children during lessons, and the children were sometimes flippant, boisterous, and occasionally rude. However, the children may be brought into line by reminding them that "It is up to you." "You must control yourself," "you are responsible for your work," you must "set your own priorities." One teacher told a child, "You are the only driver of your car-and only you can regulate your speed." A new teacher complained to the observer that she had thought "these children" would have more control.

While strict attention to the lesson at hand is required, the teachers make relatively little attempt to regulate the movement of the children at other times. For example, except for the kindergartners the children in this school do not have to wait for the bell to ring in the morning; they may go to their classroom when they arrive at school. Fifth graders often came early to read, to finish work, or to catch up. After the first two months of school, the fifth-grade

teachers did not line the children up to change classes or to go to gym, and so on, but, when the children were ready and quiet, they were told they could go--sometimes without the teachers.

In the classroom, the children could get materials when they needed them and took what they needed from closets and from the teacher's desk. They were in charge of the office at lunchtime. During class they did not have to sign out or ask permission to leave the room; they just got up and left. Because of the pressure to get work done, however, they did not leave the room very often. The teachers were very polite to the children, and the investigator heard no sarcasm, no nasty remarks, and few direct orders. The teachers never called the children "honey" or "dear" but always called them by name. The teachers were expected to be available before school, after school, and for part of their lunchtime to provide extra help if needed.

The foregoing analysis of differences in schoolwork in contrasting social class contexts suggests the following conclusion: the "hidden curriculum" of schoolwork is tacit preparation for relating to the process of production in a particular way. Differing curricular, pedagogical, and pupil evaluation practices emphasize different cognitive and behavioral skills in each social setting and thus contribute to the development in the children of certain potential relationships to physical and symbolic capital,<sup>11</sup> to authority, and to the process of work. School experience, in the sample of schools discussed here, differed qualitatively by social class. These differences may not only contribute to the development in the children in each social class of certain types of economically significant relationships and not others but would thereby help to reproduce this system of relations in society. In the contribution to the reproduction of unequal social relations lies a theoretical meaning and social consequence of classroom practice.

The identification of different emphases in classrooms in a sample of contrasting social class contexts implies that further research should be conducted in a large number of schools to investigate the types of work tasks and interactions in each to see if they differ in the ways discussed here and to see if similar potential relationships are uncovered. Such research could have as a product the further elucidation of complex but not readily apparent connections between everyday activity in schools and classrooms and the unequal structure of economic relationships in which we work and live.

#### NOTES

1. S. Bowles and H. Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1976). [Author's note]
2. B. Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control, Vol. 3. Towards a Theory of Educational Transmission*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977); P. Bourdieu and J. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1977); M.W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (Boston: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1979). [Author's note]
3. But see, in a related vein, M.W. Apple and N. King, "What Do Schools Teach?" *Curriculum Inquiry* 6 (1977); 341-58; R.C. Rist, *The Urban School: A Factory for Failure* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973). [Author's note]
4. *ethnographical*: Based on an anthropological study of cultures or subcultures--the "cultures" in this case being the five schools being observed.
5. The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines *poverty* for a nonfarm family of four as a yearly income of \$6,191 a year or less. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1978* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 465, table 754.

[Author's note]

6. U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Money Income in 1977 of Families and Persons in the United States," *Current Population Reports Series P-60*, no. 118 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 2, table A. [Author's note]

7. Ibid. [Author's note]

8. This figure is an estimate. According to the Bureau of the Census, only 2.6 percent of families in the United States have money income of \$50,000 or over. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports Series P-60*. For figures on income at these higher levels, see J.D. Smith and S. Franklin, "The Concentration of Personal Wealth, 1922-1969," *American Economic Review* 64 (1974): 162-67. [Author's note]

9. Smith and Franklin, "The Concentration of Personal Wealth." [Author's note]

10. A dominant feeling expressed directly and indirectly by teachers in this school, was boredom with their work. They did, however, in contrast to the working-class schools, almost always carry out lessons during class times. [Author's note]

11. *physical and symbolic capital*: Elsewhere Anyon defines *capital* as "property that is used to produce profit, interest, or rent": she defines *symbolic capital* as the knowledge and skills that "may yield social and cultural power."

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