

MULTICULTURAL CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN THE COMMUNITY- BASED CLASSROOM: A MOTIVATION FOR FOREGROUNDING THE PERSONAL

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Composition is a complex, ever-changing field of study that owes its existence and continued growth to its link to the writing courses that almost all students must take as they enter the academy. Because of how these required courses are situated in the academy, theories and practices about student writing are constantly re-evaluated, causing multiple areas of focus. According to Richard Fulkerson in his article “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century” (2005), the current work in the field revolves around the following axiologies (or theories of value): (1) critical/cultural studies, (2) expressivism, and (3) procedural rhetoric.

The critical/cultural studies axiology is a major movement in the field marked by attention to cultural issues and/or the sociopolitical critique of critical pedagogy, which Fulkerson claims can supplant attention to the teaching of writing (2005, p. 659-660). In this approach, “the course aim is not ‘improved writing’ but ‘liberation’ from dominant discourse” (Fulkerson, 2005, p. 660). The expressivism axiology is about consciousness-raising and coming-to-voice, with a focus on more personal writing in which “many of the traditional features of academic writing, such as having a clear argumentative thesis and backing it up to convince a reader, are put on the back burner” (Fulkerson, 2005, p. 666). The axiology that pertains to the more traditional features of academic writing is procedural rhetoric, which includes focus on argument and students’ adoption of academic discourse (Fulkerson, 2005, p. 670).

Although Fulkerson’s axiologies are important for understanding current theoretical and pedagogical controversies in composition studies, I take somewhat of a departure in terms of how he has set aside the discussion of personal writing versus academic writing. I contend that the rise of critical/cultural goals actually reconfigures this debate in certain contexts. In particular, much contemporary

interest in personal writing versus academic writing can be tied to community-based writing courses, also referred to as service learning courses. This chapter explores how community-based courses, when linked to critical pedagogy and multicultural goals, raise questions about the type of writing students should be asked to produce, personal or academic (Herzberg, 1997; Rhoads, 1997).

The intersection of community-based learning and critical pedagogy is an example of Fulkerson's claim that the field has embraced a focus on critical studies. This convergence is viewed as an optimal strategy for promoting students' engagement with critical course objectives because real-life experiences serve as catalysts for learning. As Cynthia Rosenberger in "Beyond Empathy" claims, "consensus exists in the literature that service learning is action and reflection integrated with academic curriculum to enhance student learning and to meet community needs" (2000, p. 24). In particular, Rosenberger argues community-based learning resonates with Freire's problem-posing concept of education; she contends that problem posing education "has the potential to help students construct knowledge about economic and social complexities, and with this knowledge, to begin to entertain alternatives to the present reality" (2000, pp. 41-42). In this way—if the context of the community-based classroom is used inductively to help students explore alternative ways of knowing—critical pedagogy can be introduced without reinstating the banking model of education that Freire denounces by setting up an "I know" and "you don't know" binary (Dobrin, 1997, p. 141). In *Constructing Knowledge*, Sidney Dobrin argues that "like most of the theories that come to composition, Freire's theory of radical pedagogy creates tensions when converted from theory to practice" (1997, p. 139). More specifically, Dobrin questions applications of critical pedagogy where "teachers seem to appropriate the very agency they claim to wish to return to students by prescribing a particular set of values as to what and how students should think 'critically'" (1997, p. 141). Instead, Dobrin encourages attention to the context in which teaching takes place, encouraging a more culturally-centered form of writing instruction (1997, p. 145).

Combining context and content as a pedagogical strategy, Robert Rhoads argues for a cultural studies approach to community-based learning to promote the postmodernist charge to foster dialogue across difference, which exemplifies Fulkerson's claim that the field has turned to cultural studies. Rhoads calls for students to develop an ethic of care that results from an exploration of the self in relationship to diverse others. He argues that "fostering a sense of self grounded in an ethic of care is a necessity as our society becomes increasingly diverse and diffuse" (1997, p. 2). This approach falls under what Thomas Deans argues is the reigning "social perspective" in the field of composition students and which provides the theoretical reasoning for the growth of community-based programs

(2000, p. 9). It is a perspective which, according to Cy Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, “presumes that American citizens should understand, accept and live amiably amidst the realities of cultural diversity—along axes of gender, race, class, and ethnicity” (1993, p. 6). More specifically, according to Gregory Jay in “Service Learning, Multiculturalism and the Pedagogies of Difference,”

service learning reinforces the necessity that students analyze their own ethnoracial and cultural identity formation, becoming consciously aware of how their identity affects others and how their perception of others is shaped by their identities. The experiences of cross-cultural collaboration promoted by service learning encourage such reflection, which is done formally in directive writing assignments and online postings or through a variety of student-centered projects. (2008, p. 260-261).

Students’ reflexive writing, informed through a Freirean lens situating action and reflection as praxis, is, as Jay contends, at the heart of community-based initiatives because it provides students with opportunities to think critically about them/us binaries and other culturally specific issues they encounter in their community contexts. However, questions about the type of reflexive writing students should be asked to produce in community-based writing classroom is why I maintain that the context calls for a renewed discussion about personal writing versus academic writing.

Three theorists whose work raises question about the type of writing students should be asked to produce in the community-based writing classroom—personal or academic—are Robert Rhoads, Bruce Herzberg, and Linda Flower. On opposite sides are Rhoads and Herzberg. Rhoads advocates a theoretical lens that involves personal reflection and explores the self and the self in relationship to the social (1997, p. 4). Herzberg, on the other hand, argues that the use of more traditional, abstract academic writing in lieu of personal, reflexive writing is necessary to promote students’ critical thinking about sociopolitical issues (1997, p. 58). However, it is Flower’s work that suggests a more nuanced approach. Her noted research mentions students’ assignments based on hybrid genres that include personal, academic, and community discourses. Although the focus in the field on her work has primarily been regarding hybrid texts that university students produce collaboratively with community members (Flower, 2003; Flower, 1997; Deans, 2000, p. 132), her scholarship hints at a type of student writing that is both reflexive and critical in ways that address the claims of both Rhoads and Herzberg.

While I do not dispute the value of having students produce more traditional academic writing, I do believe Herzberg’s movement away from the personal in

students' writing in connection with community-based learning limits the possibilities of critical pedagogy by not taking into account changing definitions of academic writing. First, a movement away from the personal in the experience and a return to the abstraction of academic discourse (Bizzell, 2002) could minimize an important claim about the impact of community-based learning; i.e., it promotes an understanding and critique of the self in relationship to a larger community (Flower, 1997; Rhoads, 1997). Secondly, the type of writing Herzberg describes as academic discourse, particularly when it is defined as working with the works of others (Bartholomae 2003), can be produced without the exclusion of the personal. Peter Elbow opens this collection with a discussion of the complexity—and dare I say expansiveness—of what is considered personal writing. According to Elbow, there is a continuum associated with personal writing in which the “topic can be personal or not; the language can be personal or not; and the thinking can be personal or not.” In Elbow's claims, I hear the openness of Deans' assertion about community-based writing classrooms. According to Deans, the “options available for writing about the community are almost without limit, ranging from the personal/affective to the social/analytical” (2000, p. 104).

The following sections in this chapter are based on a larger study that explores the efficacy of using an expanded notion of personal writing—one that foregrounds the personal yet contains elements of more traditional academic texts—in four sections of a community-based classroom with a multicultural approach to critical pedagogy (henceforth referred to “multicultural critical pedagogy”). The progression of writing assignments throughout each term prepared students to produce end-of-term projects that reflected personal yet academic writing. Using Elbow as an inspiration, students initially wrote personal “thinking” texts in which they explored their reactions to the site; shifting to a more Bartholomae-inspired approach, they then produced more traditional academic texts about the works of others before moving to the creation of the hybrid texts that were both personal and academic. I undertook a study of the students' texts as artifacts of the type of work that gets done in the writing classroom and to support the claim that writing that foregrounds the personal is essential for providing students with opportunities to work through the emotional issues of border crossing.

I focus on students' texts because, according to Susan Wells in *Sweet Reason*, pedagogy can be understood as the production of particular texts; “what students write provides us with a way to think about the knowledge that we are creating with them” (1996, p. 219-20). To set the groundwork for my study, I collected and coded four semesters' worth of students' papers, although I ultimately focus on two semesters since external factors at the community site for the other two

semesters fundamentally changed the overall scope of my classroom and context. Nevertheless, to get a sense of what all students wrote for all key assignments before honing in on just two terms, I entered extended excerpts from 266 student essays so that I could sort and review the content of their texts by assignment. I then created coding categories based on Thomas Newkirk's work on performative responses, and Rochelle Harris' concept of inductive "emergent moments;" I then noted all references to race as this was central to my sense of a multicultural critical pedagogy. I subsequently re-analyzed student essays to look for specific features in these areas and entered information into 342 new data fields.

I touch upon the specifics of this intense process of data coding and analysis because of two driving rationales that underlie my study. First, I wanted to conduct an analysis that went beyond a theoretical debate about the efficacy of personal writing versus academic writing, especially as it relates to the multicultural course goal. Secondly, I wanted to look at the impact of an enactment of critical pedagogy given what instructors actually have at the end of the term—students' writing—against the temporality of a college semester. It might not be possible over the course of a fifteen-week term to see the emergence of a student version of a Nelson Mandela or César Chávez. What is more likely to occur is social change at the incremental level as "small, fleeting, [and] local" moments" that represent the tinkering of progress in the lives of both teachers and students (Gallagher, 2002, p. 87).

Given the site of my study—the Greater Detroit area—I recognized that the exploration of issues of race and place issues could not be fully unpacked within the scope of a single semester. The narratives of negativity about Detroit and its African-American residents are deeply entrenched, and it was not easy for students to discard ingrained messages. Still, the process of constructing personal texts about such prevailing negative sentiments opened up the possibility of incremental changes in the students' perceptions of the other. I contend that their racialized narratives allowed the students to create critical distances between themselves and their constructed beliefs in such a way that those beliefs became open for investigation and potential change. As Patricia Web Boyd claims in her chapter in this collection, "students need to begin with their own experiences in order to be active participants in the larger society." Their experiential, personal texts provided them with opportunities "to see how the personal already intersects with and is embedded within cultural narratives, to study how their texts write them as they write the texts, and to understand how they name the world around them" (Harris, 2004, p. 405). As an assent to the Freirean claim that the world must be named before it can be changed (2003, p. 88), the study in this chapter investigates how personal writing helped students name their struggles with border crossing as part of the community-based program.

BEFORE THE STUDY: A QUESTION OF ETHICS

Before moving to the specifics of this study about a multicultural enactment of critical pedagogy in a community-based classroom, I think it is necessary to address an ethical question tied to such an initiative: is it ethical to take students to communities they may otherwise not wish to enter under the guise that doing so might eventually help them become more civic minded? Because the Greater Detroit region in which my study was conducted is highly segregated, why should White university students be forced to interact with African-American middle schools students? University students might have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo (Bickford, 2002; Trainor, 2002)—the racial distance separating them from the African-American students and also marked by economic disparity. And what about the middle school students? Should they be forced to interact with university students who may view them as charity cases, individuals who are sub par by virtue of their race and economic standing (Bickford, 2002; Himley, 2004)? According to Beverly Tatum, a psychologist who explores racialized identify development, African-American youth can display hostility toward Whites in response to their growing awareness of racial inequalities (1997, p. 60). Thus, should either of the student groups be placed in a setting in which any group could be hostile toward the other? As Deans asserts, “Many teachers are wary, and rightly so, of the dangers of community service, and in particular the habit of casting individuals and communities in the uneven roles of ‘server’ and ‘served’” (2000, p. 21).

Answers to these questions are important and reflect that community-based learning always entails risk. While focusing on the answers to these difficult questions via exhaustive theoretical and philosophical deliberation could “ultimately lead to intellectual detachment, fatalism, or paralysis” (Deans, 2000, pp. 23; 24), I nevertheless believe that ethical issues should be considered and addressed on a case-by-case basis with the understanding that “perfect balance, perfect dialectic, perfect consideration will ever be elusive” (Deans, 2000, p. 24). Yet, I also believe any possible ethical issues regarding the project explored in this study should be subsumed under compelling reasons for implementing community-based learning within the context, a highly segregated region of the country. As Tatum and Thomas Sugrue both claim, segregation is costly, and any effort to address its effects is worth pursuing. Tatum makes the following statements about the impact of racial distances on White individuals in general:

When I ask White men and women how racism hurts them, they frequently talk about their fears of people of color, the social incompetence they feel in racially mixed situations, the alienation they have experienced between parents and

children when a child marries into a family of color, and the interracial friendships they had as children that were lost in adolescence or young adulthood without their ever understanding why. (Sugrue, 2005, p. 14)

While Tatum calls attention to these general intangible costs, Sugrue, a native Detroit and historian, focuses on the more identifiable impacts of racial segregation in the greater Detroit area. He argues the distance between Whites, African Americans, and other racial groups translates into separate but not equal school systems and “limits the access of many minorities to employment opportunities, particularly in predominantly White areas (largely rural and suburban areas) that have experienced rapid development and economic growth over the last half century” (1999, p. 6). Given these costs of segregation, community-based initiatives are important programs because of their attempts to help collapse them/us binaries between university students and community members. Although these programs cannot completely eradicate a history of separation and inequality that is reflected in the lives and minds of both groups, they represent a small and positive step toward a more socially just society. Additionally, the pedagogical cost of possibly grappling with a few ethical issues in a community-based classroom pales in comparison to the cost of doing nothing. In the context of pervasive regional segregation, the primary question of ethics should not be about issues that arise within the community-based classroom; the primary concern should be whether or not it is ethical to do nothing to address this social problem although doing so can be emotionally taxing.

A STUDY ABOUT PERSONAL WRITING AND BORDER CROSSING

In the context of a qualitative, ethnographic research study I conducted in Detroit, Michigan—where racial segregation is the norm—personal writing became the vehicle to help bridge the connection between students’ lived realities regarding race and place and the critical pedagogy goal of multiculturalism. For two and a half years that began in January 2002, I participated in a community-based initiative in which intermediate writing students worked with Detroit middle school students as part of an after-school program. For my first term in the site, I was merely as a participant observer, studying the dynamics in preparation to teach and looking for possible areas of research. When I began teaching in the site, the community-based school was a charter institution associated with the university. During my last two terms, the school underwent a change in location, administration, and student population as its classification shifted

from that of a charter institution to a Detroit public school. Because of this shift, which created a fundamentally different community site, my research focuses on my last two semesters, Fall 2003 and Winter 2004.

The writing that university students produced was tied to a semester-long ethnographic project that included a range of assignments that began with personal writing, moved to more traditional academic writing, and ended with a hybrid genre which included elements of both academic writing and personal writing but foregrounded the personal. David Seitz presents this type of ethnographic student research as particularly effective when using a multicultural critical pedagogy in urban settings. According to Seitz

many critical writing teachers in urban schools design their teaching practices on a process of “defamiliarizing the familiar,” making the familiar strange, urging students to look at experience through sociological or anthropological lenses. This approach can be persuasive especially for urban students who have experienced various forms of sociocultural conflict. (2004, p. 67)

The text used to help the university students conduct their research, H. L. Goodall’s *Writing the New Ethnography* (2000), presents a type of ethnographic work that foregrounds critical thinking about one’s own positioning—i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, social class, regional particularities, etc.—and how that positioning affected interpretations of various cultures and contexts.

Because my ethnographic study centers on students’ texts as a key data source for artifacts of the pedagogy, I relied on the work of Charles Bazerman, Thomas Newkirk, and Rochelle Harris to inform my methodology. To better understand the efficacy of instruction in critical pedagogy along with personal writing and academic writing, I synthesized their approaches so that I could evaluate students’ texts in terms of how the moves in those texts represented possible changes in thinking and how those moves correlate to the type of writing students produced, both personal and academic. Bazerman’s work was useful for viewing pedagogical strategies and texts as exerting influence upon students’ writing. Newkirk’s and Harris’ scholarship was useful for investigating elements within students’ texts that reflected, or did not reflect, pedagogical goals.

In particular, I used Bazerman’s concepts of genre systems and genre sets that he outlines in *What Writing Does and How It Does It* (2004). Within the ethnographic research of a classroom, Bazerman claims analyses of genre systems (pedagogical practices and the flow of course documents) and genre sets (the specific course documents) can help one see “the range and variety of the writing work”; “how individuals writing any new text are intertextually situated within a

system and how their writing is directed by genre expectations and supported by systemic systems”; “the effectiveness of the total systems and the appropriateness of each of the genred documents in carrying forward that work”; and “whether any change in any of the documents, distribution, sequence, or flow might improve the total activity system.” (2004, p. 326). Regarding the work in this study, the combining of Bazerman’s concepts of the genre system and the genre set of a classroom were used as a method to analyze how the differences between pedagogical texts and practices and the contexts of the writing classrooms and the community-based setting impacted students’ writing.

While Bazerman’s work was useful for analyzing the systemic factors of the classroom on students’ writing, I used Newkirk’s and Harris’ work to investigate what took place within students’ writing to hint at how they grappled with the course’s multicultural goal of border crossing. Newkirk’s work in *The Performance of Self in Student Writing* (1997) was used to analyze the choices students made in their writing that reflected the critical pedagogy aim of multiculturalism. Confronting issues of race, ethnicity, etc., can be an emotionally loaded undertaking in the writing classroom (hooks, 1994; Jay, 2008; Trainor, 2002), and it has been argued that personal writing allows students to make the emotional connections necessary to reflect upon and process moments of border crossing (Kamler, 2001; Micciche, 2007; Rhoads, 1997).

Newkirk, a proponent of personal writing, identifies performative responses in students’ texts that reflect the possibility of progressive movement or personal development (1997, p. 22), which in the case of this research, is movement toward a more critical, multicultural worldview. He identifies several performances of the self frequently present in students’ personal writing: the “turns,” also known as before-and-after conversion narratives; expressions of emotion; student optimism; heroes and antiheroes, or testimonials (for the living) and eulogies (for the dead); and pleasure, or more specifically, hedonism. Of the performances that Newkirk identifies, it is two—the “turns” and optimism—that are relevant to this investigation. Turns are before-and-after conversion narratives that show “the writer as someone open to the potentially transforming effect of a life sensitively encountered” (Newkirk, 1997, p. 13). Optimism is a youthful belief in the “ability to transform the disagreeable” (Newkirk, 1997, p. 42). I coded student essays looking for these turns as part of a critical pedagogy aimed at student movement toward more multicultural awareness and border crossing. Although these turns in students’ writing might otherwise be easily dismissed (Newkirk, 1997, p. 10), a reading of students’ texts through the lens of critical pedagogy counters such a stance.

To investigate students’ texts for the critical pedagogy goal of movement toward critical consciousness, I used Harris’ concept of “emergent moments.”

The term “emergent moments” “names the point at which the personal, the critical, and the rhetorical intersect in a text, a point at which the student can hold multiple perspectives simultaneously and reflexively,” “allowing them to become authors of their own experiences, to resist or revise cultural narratives, and to see opportunities to critique and transform themselves and the cultural systems around them” (Harris, 2004, p. 403). Or stated another way, it is at that textual moment when students consider themes and/or see issues as part of larger cultural realities. I analyzed students’ texts for the “emergent moments” that represented responses to the pedagogical goal of critical consciousness as critique of issues tied to the community site.

The story of the community that constitutes the setting of the course is one of segregation. The Detroit metropolitan area is one of the most segregated areas of the country, and as a result, many individuals live in isolated pockets of racial groups. Regarding the community-based writing course, this segregated region 1) affected who entered the writing classroom and, in particular, the lived experiences of those students in relationship to the curricular goal of critical pedagogy, and 2) was central to the systemic issues embedded in the course design, i.e., the selection of the site, course readings, and course assignments.

Often, these community-based experiences represented the first time many of the university students had sustained contact with individuals who were African American. Although Wayne State University is located within the city of Detroit, which has a large African-American population, its student body does not reflect the demographics of the city (about 80% of Detroit’s population is African American, but over 70% of Wayne State’s student population is not (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008; WSU Student Profile, 2006). Many of the students who attend the university come from surrounding counties that are predominantly White. Or in a few cases, they come from communities that are non-White but also non-African-American; for example, the greater Detroit area includes enclaves of racially segregated communities of Middle Eastern and Hispanic peoples.

This racial segregation is exacerbated by a prevailing sentiment portrayed repeatedly in local media: Detroit is a “bad place to be” and its African-American residents are to be feared. Because of this, it was advantageous to enact a cultural studies approach to critical pedagogy that provided writing students with an opportunity to address these emotional commonplaces. About 74% of the student participants, or 17 out of 23, included negative statements about Detroit in their beginning-of-the-term assignment in which they explored their initial reactions to the community site. The six students who did not do so included four of the six African-American students, all Detroit residents, and two other students who attended European schools during their middle school years. The

following comments made by a White male student in a beginning-of-the-term assignment exemplifies the impact of anti-Detroit messages that are a part of the daily realities of regional residents:

I thought, there was no way I was going to a public school, and especially in downtown Detroit. That's where all the black people live. I had heard many stories about the danger in such urban neighborhoods, and I wasn't about to put myself in any situation like that. Not only that, but I didn't have anything in common with these people. Even the color of our skin wasn't the same. I don't listen to hip-hop music and I can't even understand the idioms they use, or their slang. I had heard many stories where black people were considered illiterate and lazy. Most of them were thought to be involved in criminal activities and don't value family, honesty and respect. Women are viewed as objects of sexual satisfaction and are often abused. As I was told, the neighborhoods that these people live in, after a while, would turn into slums or ghettos. In their families, in quite a few instances, children don't even know their fathers. Even their style is different from what I am used to. They like flashy gold or platinum chains, bright color clothing and like to wear hats and have different hairstyles. As some White people believe, they are supposed to be inferior to them and, as in the past, they should be restricted to a separate territory, in order to be controlled.

This excerpt may seem like an exaggeration to anyone who is not familiar with the greater Detroit area, and those who are teachers of college writing might immediately want to question the student's sweeping generalizations regarding African Americans. However, few who live in the region would discount the reality that many, if not all, of the perceptions or misconceptions that this student holds are expressed by many individuals who live in and around the city of Detroit. While I do call attention to this phenomenon as it relates to students' comments in their essays, I am not doing so to reify the dichotomies, or the them/us barriers, between students and community members. Community-based initiatives are designed to challenge and ideally change such dichotomies (Rhoads, 1997; Trainor, 2002). Rather, I underscore students' statements about Detroit in recognition that the pervasiveness of the perceived dichotomies between the city and its suburbs impacted what students wrote about the community-based experience.

Harris claims critical work can occur in such personal texts about topics and issues that are significant to individuals because “the texts we choose to write are important sites to understand the self, the world, and culture” (2004, p. 402). She focuses on the “composing and recomposing of reality and the self through language that happens in personal essays, autobiographies, and memoirs—to name a few genres” as critical work necessary for developing Freirean praxis (Harris, 2004, pp. 402; 405). From Harris’ perspective, critical pedagogy is implicitly personal because “a person has first to move to a knowledge of the world being named for him or her and then do the intellectual and emotional work necessary to rename his or her world” (2004, p. 405). In the critical classroom, then, storytelling becomes a medium for change (Harris, 2004, p. 407). Because of the widespread negative sentiments associated with place and race—inner city Detroit and its African-American citizens—students’ established beliefs and/or emotional responses were not overlooked but elicited, regardless of whether the responses were positive or negative.

Without opportunities to explore negative emotional responses, Jennifer Seibel Trainor claims that white students in particular might resist a multicultural-based critical pedagogy where whiteness is essentialized in discussions of racism and class. White students are presented with a worldview that situates them, solely by virtue of birth, “as perpetrators of injustice who must be taught to disavow whiteness” (Trainor, 2002, p. 634). In such instances, Trainor argues, many students will “read multicultural texts about difference in essentialist and, thus, defensive terms” (2002, p. 642). Instead, educators should be critically aware of this unintended outgrowth—e.g., essentialized whiteness and an “angry white identity”—and provide space for discourse that allows white students to structure identities outside of a limited rhetorical framing (2002, p. 647).

The progression of writing assignments throughout the term, from personal to academic to hybrid, which included elements of both but foregrounded the personal, was essential to providing students with opportunities to work through the emotional issues of border crossing. It was necessary for students to begin at the personal juncture of emotion as a route to engagement with the site and the course content related to the multicultural course aim because, as Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Antonio Damasio claim in “We Feel, Therefore We Learn: The Relevance of Affective and Social Neuroscience to Education,” minimizing the emotional aspects would have been “encouraging students to develop the sorts of knowledge that inherently do not transfer well to real-world situations” (2007, p. 9).

The move to more traditional academic writing (i.e., article summaries and annotated bibliographies) as an exploration of issues that grew out of students’ ethnographic investigation of the community-based context was key to helping

students develop broader worldviews regarding sociocultural issues. It gave them practice with what David Bartholomae identifies as academic writing, i.e., the ability to “work with the past, with key texts ... with others’ terms ... with problems of quotation, citation, and paraphrase” (1995, p. 66). Bartholomae argues that producing such writing helps students adopt an insider stance that reflects “the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse” of the academic community (2003, p. 623). While having students write both personal and more traditional essays were central to carrying forward the work of the term as part of the classroom genre system (Bazerman, 2004), it was the hybrid genre that students used in their final project that most helped them consider the complex work of border crossing that was embedded in the multicultural, critical pedagogy course goal.

In my analysis of students’ final projects, I used Harris’ identification of “emergent moments” of critical praxis, reflection and action (Freire, 2003, p. 79). I looked at that textual moment when students consider themes, see issues in their texts as part of larger cultural issues but with recognition that the “emergent moment “cannot be imposed (although it certainly can be facilitated)” (Harris, 2004, pp. 403; 413)—an important claim given the inductive process of ethnographic writing and meaning making. Sometimes they were brief glimpses of students’ critical thinking embedded in longer narratives. However, these moments are worthy of analysis and consideration as part of a progressive process of change; they reflected Newkirk’s “optimistic turns” that hinted at possible steps toward change. As Chris Gallagher claims, mainstream critical pedagogy calls for grand, sweeping gestures of change, but this is not the stuff of everyday writing classrooms (2002, p. 87). In “the unpredictable and messy terrain of pedagogy, we are not likely to find many grand moments of social transformation, but we are likely to find important (though small, fleeting, and decidedly local) moments” (Gallagher, 2002, p. 87). Thus, I looked at the students’ essays for “emergent moments” of critical thinking as a way to investigate the efficacy of a multicultural critical pedagogy.

From my analysis of students’ essays from the Winter 2004 term, I focus in this chapter on the essay of 47-year-old Eva. Her entire essay is about the interpersonal connections made, and not made, during the term as she explores the distance and hostility between the university students and the middle school students and the ways in which she believed university students contributed to the environment.

Eva wrote two distinct drafts of her final project because she was initially hesitant about whether she had the license to write about the emotionally charged atmosphere she perceived in the community-based site. Eva stopped me after

one class session and asked if she could write about the problematic, interpersonal dynamics of the after-school class. I recorded some of our conversation in my fieldnotes for the day:

Eva wanted to write about the racial divide that had occurred this term between the middle school students and the non-African-American Wayne Students. We had talked the previous week about the topic. I communicated to her that she had an excellent topic; she just needed to go ahead and make the analysis she alluded to in her first draft.

She was hesitant to set up the dichotomy between her and the other non-African-American university students. It was as if doing so, even in her paper, would be politically incorrect ... Why did she feel silenced in her desire to express this racially-related dynamic? Had she previously been silenced? Was she oppressed (Freire)? Had she not had the experience of presenting her own voice in text?

Because Eva had difficulty putting her positionality in the beginning of her paper, the text was choppy and disconnected. It seemed as if she felt compelled to maintain a distance from the issue, from the text.

I talked to Eva about the discussions we had earlier in the term about positionality and the ethics of ethnography versus what could be considered the more traditional, anthropological telling of the other. "You have to put yourself on the page. If you talk about your positionality, your age, your race, how they affected what you saw and how you reacted to the setting, then I think it will be easier for you to move into what you really want to talk about," I stated.

"You mean I can go there?" she grinned, tilted her head.

"Yes, you can." I smiled in reply.

"Alright!" Eva smiled ecstatically, "You told me I could, so I'm going there."

Eva's response to my statement that she could write about what she felt was problematic affirms Barbara Kamler's claim that "to be authorized by the academy to write about one's life is a powerful and often startling experience for university students" (2001, p. 157). Her initial hesitancy about addressing a sensitive topic reflects that, given her age, Eva more than likely attended school at a time when academic writing comprised a constructed worldview that spoke

“through an academic persona who is objective, trying to prevent any emotions or prejudices from influencing the ideas in the writing” (Bizzell, 2002, p. 2). Nevertheless, Eva did revise her essay to take a more personal and ethnographic stance. Following is an extended excerpt from her text:

I have been privileged to mentor in the [after-school program] with several bright enthusiastic African-American middle school students ... I intend to investigate information on the mentor/students relationships that I observed at [the middle school] There are four African-American female mentors. Our ages range from 20-47. We all seem to be straight-forward, generous, and thoughtful. These three characteristics impacted our roles as mentors and we seem to have a good rapport with the students. The students like us. There are several male/female White mentors. While listening to their conversations, it seemed evident that they all live outside of the city of Detroit. They reside in the Tri-county area, namely the suburbs. There is one mentor who is always making some negative comment about Detroit and the people that they see on their way to UPS. He is a White male mentor who always seems to have the right answer and is occasionally humorous. He would talk quietly and could draw other White mentors into his conversations. However, when a Black mentor intervened, he would draw up and be quiet. I threw a flag up in my mind and I thought, “He needs to be watched.”

I spend a lot of time tutoring urban Black students. I am very much attuned to the interaction between the young middle school students and the mentors The middle school students ... need to be monitored by their mentors; otherwise I've noticed that the whole time spent in the session [the middle school students] will be playing games and listening to, or watching, videos on the computers As I observed throughout the room, some [middle] students, especially some male students, were isolating themselves from their mentors, mostly by being preoccupied on the computers.

I overheard this conversation with two male middle school students as they were waiting for their mentors ... “I know he does not like me. I don't know why we have to do this. I could probably show him more about the computer than he

can show me. He never does anything. They don't even talk to us. He probably doesn't even know my name." ... As I turned to observe the mentor that they were discussing, it was the White male mentor, the White male that always had the right answer and was occasionally humorous. And then my flag went up. Maybe, I thought all parties involved were having a culture shock reaction ...

I believe the students felt the mentor's communication skills represented a problem. As I observed the mentor, the mentor never approached the students with a "hello." He always waited for the instructor to tell everyone to group up with [their] mentees ... Although, there were no African-American male mentors, I believe they would have settled for one of us. Maybe the students thought the mentor was not willing to work and was afraid to ask questions because they were Black. Maybe the students thought that he was going to make it hard for them and try to set them up to fail. When I looked at the mentor, I thought, "Where was his sense of humor, the I'm the man kind of attitude?" His facial expression was like, "I really don't want to be here." ... I noticed a vicious cycle had taken place that had pitted the two male students against their mentor. It seemed like they were never going to resolve their differences. I believe that until the mentor begins to see his problem and seek out a solution, he will continue to engage in a struggle interacting with Black students.

Many problems attributed to "Children of Color" are actually the result of miscommunication at school and other people's children struggle with the imbalance of power and the dynamics of inequality plaguing our system (Delpit, 1995) The person in the role of a mentor, especially if the person is from another ethnic and cultural background, must be keenly aware of the miscommunication that can result from cultural diversity. Every effort must be made to keep communication open and free from prejudice I made a promise to myself to share this information with the White mentor especially if he planned to teach in a predominantly Black school district.

This excerpt from Eva's essay shows her attempts to make sense out of the hostility and distance between university and middle school students that persisted throughout the term. Her reasoning explores the reality of the racially

segregated region in which the university and middle school students reside. Her essay also demonstrates the course's pedagogical goal of having students produce texts that could be called hybrid, including elements of the personal and the academic. Eva cites Lisa Delpit and others in her argument about ways to create connections with African-American youth. Throughout Eva's essay is the theme that the interpersonal distance between university and middle students was problematic for her, particularly given the reason why she had returned to academia: to become a teacher.

Eva's move to critical consciousness—echoing Freire's praxis, "the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (2003, p. 79), or the "emergent moment,"—happens at the end of her essay when she claims, "I made a promise to myself to share this information with the White mentor especially if he planned to teach in a predominantly Black school district." In this claim to action is praxis; she has seen the impact of the interpersonal and often hostile distance and is willing to take action against it if faced with a similar situation. What Eva produced is an essay in which she immerses herself in ways that clearly foreground her personal connection to the middle school students. For example, she begins her essay by recounting what she believes are the personal characteristics that she and the other three African-American university students possess: "We all seem to be straight-forward, generous, and thoughtful." She then spends the bulk of her essay explicating why she and the other females were liked by the middle school students and some of the White university students were not. Eva's essay demonstrates a central claim regarding enactments of critical pedagogy: emotions matter. As Laura Micciche reminds us, "emotion matters drive motives for action, speech, judgment, and decision-making" (2007, p. 105), important elements given a pedagogical goal of student movement towards a consciousness that leads to change. The absence of emotional connections can lead to objectified analyses of critical issues that are more intellectual games than potential steps toward individual or collective action (Barnett, 2006, p. 361).

Given these assertions about emotion driving action (Micciche, 2007; Barnett, 2006), it is not surprising that Eva's essay ends with a claim to individual action. She maintains she will take future action against "miscommunication that can result from cultural diversity." I believe this action was arrived at inductively because Eva was able to establish an emotional connection to her essay topic. Because Eva felt strongly about what she had observed, she was willing to take the writerly risk to tell her story, one that I believe was aided by the fact that students throughout the term were invited to write in a genre that foregrounded the personal. As Jane Danielwicz claims in her essay, *Personal Genres, Public Voices*, "writing in personal genres fights alienation (common to academic pursuits from the student's point of view) and instead promotes connectivity: 'You

are a part of this world” (2008, p. 443). Eva took the risk to express her desire to be a change agent because of her experiences in the community-based course in which multicultural critical pedagogy had been enacted. Her response hinted at ways in which she could promote border crossing in diverse settings.

A FEW FINAL WORDS

Emotions matter in general regarding all learning but are particularly central when course content asks students to do the socially complex work of border crossing. As Immordino-Yang and Damasio claim, “emotion-related processes are required for skills and knowledge to be transferred from the structured school environment to real-world decision making because they provide an emotional rudder to guide judgment and action” (2007, p. 3). Thus, in a community-based-writing classroom or any writing classroom in which multicultural critical pedagogy is implemented, students must be given an opportunity to write in ways that allow them to be emotional. Reflexive, personal writing allows students to emote about their experiences of border crossing and construct themselves as influencing, and being influenced by, contexts. When elements of academic writing are added in such texts where the personal is foregrounded, the end result is a hybrid text where emotions meet critical concepts and students are given an opportunity to move from having knowledge about difference to making real-world, incremental steps toward embracing difference.

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