

Chapter One

Challenging Theories of Knowing

Words, words, words.

—Hamlet

The word *challenging* in the title of this chapter should be read as both a verb and an adjective. First we need *to challenge* theories of knowing that privilege only one way of conceiving ideas. Then we need to develop *challenging* pedagogies that use and develop alternate literacies, that expect the most from us and our students.

It may seem at first absurd to question an over-emphasis on writing in a discipline whose *raison d'être* is, like no other discipline, for and about writing. That common-sense assumption, however, may be what makes it so difficult for us in Composition to see word-based pedagogies in any way other than supportive of learning.¹ Generally speaking, Composition believes that writing is not simply *one* way of knowing; it is *the* way. In Composition theory courses, readings attest mostly to writing's benefits. That commonplace may be what makes it so difficult for us in Composition to see word-based epistemologies in any way other than liberatory and promoting of social justice. A sampling of our most influential theorists will give a sense of how many Compositionists view the role written language plays in making knowledge. The

first three are from essays that appear in Victor Villanueva's *Cross-Talk in Comp-Theory* (1997), a popular anthology.

- "Rather than truth being prior to language, language is prior to truth and determines what shape truth can take" (243). This is part of James Berlin's summary in "Contemporary Composition" of what he calls the New Rhetoric, which he says is "the most intelligent and most practical alternative available, serving in every way the best interests of our students" (234).
- "Without the word there is no world" (462). That statement is from Charles Schuster's summary of Mikhail Bakhtin's view of speaking and writing, which, Schuster argues, supports "the *primacy of language* as the means by which we conceive the world" (my emphasis, 461).
- In "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty," Patricia Bizzell contrasts two main "camps" in Composition: (1) the "inner-directed" theorists who focus on the individual, seek universal writing processes, and support a "standard" language; and (2) the "outer-directed" theorists, some of whom would say that "one learns to think only by learning a language, and one can't have an idea one doesn't have a word for" (367-71).

This second, "outer-directed" view of language-as-determiner-of-thought structure, as Bizzell points out, was greatly influenced by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and she recommends Adam Schaff's description of it, part of which is as follows:

1. Language is a social product. The language system in which we are educated, and in which we think, shapes the way we perceive the world around us.
2. In view of the differences between the various language systems, people thinking in different languages perceive the world in different ways. These differences of language are reflections of the different environments that produce them (1973, 62).

This ethnolinguistic hypothesis of the 1930s rejects by implication the theories of the "inner-directed" camp Bizzell described above. It explains how people's ideological assumptions regarding time, reality, gender, etc., are shaped by, and also shape, language. If this hypothesis is sound, we cannot teach "universal" rules about language; we cannot get beyond language. Here are more statements about language that support "the primacy of language."

Drawing on Locke, Descartes, and Kant, C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon make the point in *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing* (1984) that language is not (as they say the ancient rhetoricians be-

lieved) the dress of thought. Rather, "discourse makes knowledge . . ." (57). They do leave the door open for other ways of knowing besides language: "All human beings share and apply the competence to make meaning through symbolic representation, including language" (61). However, what their book ultimately stresses is that "knowledge is a linguistic construction, a 'discourse.' Knowing is an activity of creating and shaping 'texts,' just as Descartes had implied, not an absolute state or condition" (55). This creating and shaping can happen "through discourse, linguistic or otherwise" (54), but they do not discuss the "otherwise." They point out John Locke's associating "the active character of the mind" with how people interpret experience (55), but their book on the teaching of writing focuses almost exclusively in manifestations of that active mind in discourse, language, and words.

Ann E. Berthoff's attention to meaning making has also had a profound influence on our field. In the Preface to *Reclaiming the Imagination* (1984), she names language as the most important intellectual tool: "those learning to write and to teach writing will discover that language is itself the great heuristic." And Walter Ong, who is perhaps the strongest and most controversial promoter of written language being superior to the oral form, writes, "Orally managed language and thought is not noted for analytic precision" (1987, 104).

"The Primacy of Language"

Although it seems clear that language structures are determined by and help determine ideologies, there is more to meaning making than linguistic structures. If we continue to focus on language as "the great heuristic," we should at least make as honest an effort as we can to examine our ideological base, as well as our possible vested interest in those beliefs.

In the same way the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis explains how language both shapes and is shaped by ideological assumptions, Composition's bag of evidence is filled with theories and methodological approaches that are shaped by, and shape, our beliefs about language and learning. Our beliefs about what it means to know, spring from and toward the theorists and theories we select to support our claims. This is true for every field and is not a criticism. However, since we have gotten into the business of analyzing the underlying assumptions in the discourses of other disciplines, we should continue Composition's admirable past efforts to be self-reflexive and examine the assumptions supporting our own. Compositionists seem to hold views of language so deeply that we take for granted its place on the top rung of the meaning-making ladder.

Drawing on Marxist definitions, Greg Myers uses the term *ideology* “to describe the whole system of thought and belief that goes with a social and economic system, the thoughts that structure our thinking so deeply that we take them for granted, as the nature of the real world” (1986, 156). What we must acknowledge in the social and economic system of Composition are the commonplaces informing our own view of “truth,” even if we are careful not to use that word. Composition should view its worship of the written word, its assumptions regarding “the primacy of language,” not as a given, but as itself an ideology. Our whole system of thought privileges written language as the best and most powerful way of thinking. One example can be seen in Villanueva’s *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*, where Janet Emig’s (1977) “Writing as a Mode of Learning” appears in a section of the table of contents called “The ‘Given’ in Our Conversations: The Writing Process.” This ideology regarding “the great heuristic” affects our preference for certain kinds of methodologies and certain kinds of theorists. It helps explain why we pick and choose who to cite and foreground.

It’s not that Composition has completely ignored alternate ways of knowing. Within our own field, this idea has surfaced fairly often. It’s just that it seems never to be taken seriously for very long. Ira Shor, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, Sharon Crowley, and others have pointed out (and critiqued the idea) that written language is unfairly privileged in school. Gerald Washington (1996) points to the “*different cognitive tasks*” students undertake when they use oral forms of communication. He argues further that “composition teachers can use this *alternative* manner of communication as a starting point for the teaching of writing skills” (his emphasis, 429). He also points out that for this to happen, “teacher attitudes” would first have to change. Donna LeCourt (1996), in “WAC as Critical Pedagogy: The Third Stage?” critiques most contemporary Writing Across the Curriculum programs for not paying enough attention to cultural critique or to “*alternative literacies and other ways of knowing*” (390).

Eleanor Kutz and Hepzibah Roskelly in *An Unquiet Pedagogy* (1991) call for “a reinvented curriculum” (310) in which teachers would “Allow other ways of knowing into the classroom” (115).² Karen Klein and Linda Hecker (1994) have worked with kinesthetics and teaching writing. More recently, Pam Childers, Eric Hobson, and Joan Mullin have used art as a pathway to learning and writing in their book, *ARTiculating Writing: Teaching Writing in a Visual World*. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, Peter Smagorinsky has done much work with Gardner’s multiple intelligences at the secondary level, and Dan Kirby, Tom Liner, and Ruth Vinz in their book *Inside Out* also suggest multi-sensory approaches for teaching English in the schools. In addition, there was an entire issue of *English Journal* devoted to teaching with

multiple intelligences, though the reaction to ideas discussed in that journal was predictively mixed, as we shall see in Chapter 6.

Whether an alternate conception of knowing comes from outside or inside Composition, it is an idea that has not been fully pursued or taken seriously in our field. Look in composition classrooms and you will see some group work and oral discussion. You may occasionally see people using art, film, or music. But what you will mostly see in composition classes are activities linked to "the primacy of language," especially writing, as a "unique" heuristic for thinking: students doing written drafts, written responses to peers, written reading journals, written reading logs, freewriting, written memos or metacognitive analyses, written outlines, or written online chats.

This focus on writing may partly account for the initial reception, and current foundering, of the Writing Across the Curriculum movement. It may partly account for why, as a field, we have not embraced research on voice-to-type word processing programs. It may partly explain why our rhetorical proofs lean heavily on testimony from people we as a field have invested with a kind of agreed-upon authority about language and learning (Berlin, Britton, Emig, etc.), as well as our use of theorists coming from, or influenced by, literary studies (Bahktin, Derrida, Foucault, Vygotsky, etc.).³ It's not that these theorists are never taken to task for something, but they are cited over and over in our field (as in this book, for example), the assumption being that their research and/or ideas are so respected that sometimes a quotation alone from one of them is enough support for a claim.

In a field that prides itself on its theoretical awareness, many of us in Composition believe we hold radical critiques of hegemonic world-views. However, we are sometimes quite conventional in our acceptance of either/or judgments regarding empirical research (positivist and essentialist), non-language-based theories of learning (romantic or sentimental), and any philosophy of life that is not 100 percent social constructivist (naive or untheoretical).

We are also quite conventional in our apparent acceptance of dominant views that written language is the most important indicator of intellectual sophistication. Composition is justly proud of its tradition of asking questions, of welcoming dialectic. To continue that tradition, we need to more fully articulate the implications of "the primacy of language."

The Backstory to "The Primacy of Language"

The social construction of knowledge is another commonplace of our field. As Lester Faigley observes in *Fragments of Rationality*, "In the 1980s, much of composition theory came to assume that knowledge is socially

constructed and rhetorical in nature, a development attributable to the impact of postmodern theory" (1995, 15). This is not to say that every Composition teacher/scholar subscribes to this view, but it seems no longer necessary to argue, at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) or in *College Composition and Communication* (CCC), for example, that ideology shapes perception.

James Berlin's view of language and "verbal constructs" as an exclusive way of knowing is well known. Here is Berlin, also anthologized in *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*, on the worldview he supports, "social-epistemic rhetoric":

For social-epistemic rhetoric, the real is located in a relationship that involves the dialectical interaction of the observer, the discourse community (social group) in which the observer is functioning, and the material conditions of existence. Knowledge is never found in any one of these but can only be posited as a product of the dialectic in which all three come together. (More of this in a moment.) Most important, this dialectic is grounded in language: *the observer, the discourse community, and the material conditions of existence are all verbal constructs*. This does not mean that the three do not exist apart from language: they do. *This does mean that we cannot talk and write about them—indeed, we cannot know them—apart from language.* (my emphasis, in Villanueva 1997, 692–93)

Berlin is right, of course, that we cannot talk or write about the observer, the discourse community, or the material conditions of existence without language. That we cannot "know them" without language is more troublesome, unless his view of "language" includes all symbol systems, all ways of conceiving of and representing ideas. However, many in Composition seem to have taken a narrow, literal view of social-epistemic rhetoric: that there is no way of "knowing" anything beyond "verbal constructs," and no way of representing a dialectic "apart from language." This impoverished view of what counts as legitimate intellectual activity, limiting it to that which involves "verbal constructs," explains our underuse of alternate representational systems.

This restrictive construction of how people make meaning may also be due to who "we" are, and our discourse community's constructed circular logic that resists intersections with non-verbal representational systems. The "we" who "cannot know" dialectic "apart from language" are, after all, Composition specialists and English professors. We are talkers, readers, and writers: people whose ways of knowing *are* grounded primarily in "verbal constructs," and whose ways of knowing have been rewarded by the very socially constructed privileges to which Berlin says we should pay more attention.

Mikhail Bakhtin is another oft-quoted theorist, whose words are powerful rhetorical proofs. His influence can be seen in theoretical ar-

ticles in both Literary Studies and Composition. However, we need to examine our assumptions behind the power we bestow on Bakhtin's writings. Bakhtin was a literary theorist, as Charles Schuster points out (in Villanueva 1997, 457), and Composition, housed as it mostly still is in English departments, has a strong historical association with literary and critical theory. Composition was born into an institutional culture that has a reverence not only for words, but for interpretations of words, as Stephen North points out (1987, 116). By celebrating and demonstrating the power of written language, we by extension promote our power to use, teach, and interpret writing. Therefore, we need to be aware of the possibility that we are, perhaps unconsciously, privileging theories and theorists that link thought and language.

Here is more of Schuster's anthologized interpretation of Bakhtin. Imagine a person not talented with language hearing this:

Without the word there is no world. Language is not just a bridge between "I" and "Thou," it is "I" and "Thou." *Language is thus fundamental not only to learning but to mind; it both creates and is created by the human intelligence.* When we speak and write, we create ourselves and the world. *No intellectual construct—no expression or idea—can exist without language,* and language is itself continuously interactive in its nature. (my emphasis, in Villanueva 1997, 462)

This linking of language use with intelligence is a double-edged sword. Fusing language and human meaning making supports the importance of studying language and teaching writing. However, we need to be aware that we are professionally and financially invested in privileging something we're announcing as "the primacy of language." We also need to be aware of a more troubling aspect of this privileging. Even if it is unspoken, there is an implied corollary in this announcement regarding lack of language skills, lack of intelligence—or even lack of humanness.

An analogous situation in American fiction is useful here. In "The War Prayer," Mark Twain's "aged stranger" articulates for oblivious churchgoers the "unspoken" prayer: what they must *also* be asking for when they send their loved ones off to war. The point is that as the people explicitly pray for victory and glory, and for the safety of their own army, they are implicitly praying for the destruction of their enemy's cities and the agony and death of its soldiers, who are also being sent off to war by their loving families. The pale man with long white hair enters the church, walks to the pulpit, and says aloud that unspoken prayer, the cruel underside of the noble-sounding victory prayer:

—for our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water

their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in the spirit of love, . . . (1983, 425)

Similarly, there is an unspoken prayer, or at least an unspoken backstory, to our enthusiastic promotion of language-as-indicator-of-intelligence, even of humanness.

Brenda Jo Brueggemann's (1999) discussion of deafness and rhetoric is relevant to this discussion. In a section of *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness* called "The Other Half of the Dialogue," Brueggemann traces the link between rhetoric and constructions of deafness back several millennia, but focuses on the Age of Reason. She reconstitutes the implied enthymeme that must explain why deaf education was the first "special education," the need to make children more "human" by giving them language: "And in this age, Reason was, of course the essence of being human. The syllogism created—rhetorical, faulty, and enthymematic as it is—sounds like this: *Language is human; speech is language; therefore, deaf people are inhuman, and deafness is a problem*" (her emphasis, 11).

Brueggemann's critique of the view that people who could not hear were not human without language/speech is applicable in Composition's worshipping of language, especially the written word. Her syllogism about deafness might be extended to a parallel syllogism about illiteracy:

Language is human.

Writing is language.

Therefore those who cannot write are less human.

This is the sword's other edge: the implication, the backstory, of our emphasis on writing. This is what we, at least most of us, do not say or consciously think. That implied episteme, however, may be absorbed by our students as the logical extension of our focus on writing-as-knowing, unless we also embrace non-language-based ways of knowing.

Other Ways of Knowing

"You can't describe it in words. Your fingers just find the right places."

—Brian Wilson on how he writes his songs⁴

Perhaps more than one thing is possible. Language reflects and shapes our thinking, but our thinking can also go to another room and play with things that precede or go beyond words. Here is dyslexic teacher Donald E. Lyman's answer to the question of how he thought as a child:

I thought, to the best of my recollection, in strong visual images. Quite simply, I pictured in my mind what I had just done and what I planned to do next. What I was doing, I simply did. A kind of sensory motor intelligence, a “body knowing,” guided me. You have experienced a similar knowing when you served a tennis ball, typed a letter, diapered a baby, or danced the night away. We all know that directing such activities with words causes a sudden drop in performance. (1986, 25)

Howard Gardner’s work on “multiple intelligences” is well known, as is Daniel Goleman’s emphasis on what he calls “emotional intelligence”: “such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to emphasize and to hope” (1995, 34). In neuroscience, Antonio R. Damasio has shown the role emotions play in thinking. He rejects the idea that language alone produces consciousness and knowing: “Language—that is, words and sentences—is a translation of something else, a conversion from nonlinguistic images which stand for entities, events, relationships, and inferences” (1999, 107).

Many people have described their thinking process as visual, not verbal. In his book on visual thinking, *In the Mind’s Eye*, Thomas G. West (1997) argues that many scientists and mathematicians through history have been gifted visual thinkers. West points out that James Gleick’s work in chaos theory focuses on “visual modes of thought and analysis” (36). West defines visual thinking as “that form of thought in which images are generated or recalled in the mind and are manipulated, overlaid, translated, associated with other similar forms (as with a metaphor), rotated, increased or reduced in size, distorted, or otherwise transformed from one familiar image into another” (21). West observes that the talent for visual thinking is sometimes concomitant with difficulties with other types of learning, especially perhaps the linear, word-based learning that is typical of English Studies curricula. He names many people who were on the fringes of their disciplines, not whopping successes in their contemporary mainstream professions, who had a profound effect on their field in the long term.

West argues that substantial, creative breakthroughs in physics, math, and chemistry were due to visual or spatial insights of people such as Michael Faraday, a scientist from the early 19th century, who did groundbreaking work in the field of electromagnetics. West says scientists are “ambivalent” toward Faraday, who was not a mathematician but a philosopher and scientist. Another visual thinker West names is Karl Pearson, who (with his son, E. S. Pearson) in the nineteenth century, was the first “to apply statistics systematically to biological

phenomena" (1997, 34). West suggests that sometimes those who are most successful, most invested, most entrenched in a scientific field, are the ones with the most at stake, the most to lose should they pursue a line of thinking not in strict accord with conventional wisdom in that field. As an example, he uses a nineteenth-century British physicist, William Thompson (Lord Kelvin), whose name is on the absolute zero temperature scale. Kelvin "proved" that people were incapable of flight. His calculations were correct, and he used logically the principles of physics known at that time. West suggests Kelvin's very certainty about things prevented him from having creative insights. Michael Faraday, on the other hand, was never fully accepted into the mainstream profession. But perhaps he had less to lose than Kelvin did by being unsure, by taking chances.

West's main point is that we may be wasting some of our best minds by forcing them into frameworks of thinking and communicating that slow them down. In fact, West suggests that "the conventional beliefs on which our educational system and major institutions are based may be fundamentally flawed" (40). We need the outside-the-box thinking that visual thinkers can do. They might have trouble seeing the intricacies of the part, but they can clearly see the whole. They can synthesize and analyze quickly. They seize a global vision of a system at once, manipulate it, turn it around, and look at it from different perspectives—all inside their heads. They can visualize solutions long before they can explain them easily in words to their colleagues.

The irony, and tragedy, of this kind of thinking, says West, is that sometimes the most insightful mathematicians, who relish the complex, sophisticated problems of advanced, theoretical mathematics, perform poorly in the arithmetic-based, lower levels of math. Their poor performance in the early years of school puts them on a non-academic track, making it difficult for them to ever get to the part of math or physics in which they could excel.

What if there is a parallel irony in English? What if some students who have the most difficulty with one level of writing—with surface correctness, for example—have complex, sophisticated ideas, but their "grammar" problems peg them as "basic writers," slot them in a lower academic track, and wring out of them any confidence they might have had about themselves or any enthusiasm they might have had for learning? What harm could come from having greater expectations for these students?

Critics of stories describing Faraday's early difficulties with school say, perhaps rightly so, that these famous geniuses are being romanticized.⁵ However, the many excerpts West cites of these people's letters and journals indicate that their minds worked in pictures, three-dimensional models, graphs, etc. Perhaps it is we in Composition who

romanticize other forms of symbols—alphabetic ones. Perhaps it is we who have an artificial notion that sophisticated thought can only happen in “verbal constructs.”

Not every person who has trouble reading and writing is an Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, or Michael Faraday. But dominant assumptions about language and learning in our writing programs may be greatly underestimating the intellectual potential of some groups forced to hear about “the great heuristic” (language) that just happens to cater to the talent and learning preference of the person teaching the course. If that doesn’t bother us enough to change things, we should realize that we are unquestionably wasting the brain power and the potential insights of people who can visualize things we cannot, who can grasp concepts we cannot, who can solve problems we cannot. If we don’t revolutionize learning for the sake of those foundering in a stubborn, restrictive pedagogy, we should do it for ourselves.

One woman’s unique ability to think in images has contributed greatly to reform the meat industry’s treatment of animals destined for the slaughterhouse. As Oliver Sacks explains in *An Anthropologist on Mars*, Temple Grandin has transformed the experience of beef cattle going to their deaths from a terrifying experience to one that is as humane and calming as possible under the circumstances. An autistic person who thinks in vivid pictures, Grandin uses her visual thinking to reform the cruel, stress-inducing physical path cattle take on their way through a slaughterhouse. Reasoning that euthanized animals should experience a less-stressful death than they might in the wild, Grandin designed ramps and conveyor belts so that the cattle feel no stress or pain as they go to the stun-gun-like machine that makes them unconscious as they go to their deaths. While her extreme form of visual thinking has hindered her in other areas of her life, it enables her to “see” every image each animal sees on its way through the process:

She designs the most elaborate facilities in her mind, visualizing every component of the system, juxtaposing them in different ways, viewing them from different angles, from near and far. Once the design is complete, she will “run a simulation” in her mind—that is, imagine the entire plant in operation. This simulation may show an unexpected problem, and when this happens she will pinpoint the problem, modify the design, do another simulation—several simulations, if need be—until the design is perfect. Only now, when all is clear in her mind, does she make an actual blueprint of it. (Sacks 1995, 283)

Grandin anticipates and eliminates what would be for the cattle startling images or sudden, stress-inducing movements, so that their final moments are made as quiet and dignified as possible. While Temple

Grandin's extreme form of imagistic thinking might be rare in a typical classroom, it is crucial that teachers are aware of, and know how to nourish and appreciate, the visual thinking talents of their students. Failing to do so may cause bright people to think ill of themselves or to drop courses that reward only one intellectual pathway: writing. Focusing so narrowly on only one way of knowing not only squanders the thinking power of those who flee such a system as soon as they can, but a linguistic-based pedagogy also limits the insights even conventionally "good students" (good writers) may have if challenged to think outside their intellectual comfort zones.

Rhetorical Analysis, Cultural and Literary Criticism, and Epistemological Assumptions

Through rhetorical analysis, scholars in Composition and Rhetoric have demonstrated how language used in other disciplines both reflects (and helps determine) epistemological assumptions in proofs and evidence (Myers, Bazerman, Halloran, Fahnestock, Secor). For example, as both Susan McLeod and Gerald Graff (1997) have pointed out, a simple discourse convention such as verb tense indicates disciplinary beliefs about knowledge. "Presumably, Plato speaks in the present in literary and philosophical contexts because ideas there are considered timeless; only when we move over to history does it start to matter that the writer is dead" (154).⁶ Similarly, as others have noted, Modern Language Association (MLA) and American Psychological Association (APA) differences are not just about commas and periods. APA stresses the currency of the research in question—thus they front the publication date and dispense with authors' first names. In addition, many scientific reports have a parade of collaborators. In contrast, MLA puts the date last, foregrounding instead the (usually individual) author's complete name. This is not a simple editorial difference. This MLA citation method used in English Studies reflects the humanistic tradition of foregrounding what individual human beings have written down in words. We also foreground those individuals who link thought and language. We do not have the same interest in drawing attention to those who link thought and image, or thought and emotion, or thought and movement. Our rhetorical proofs come not from a test tube, but from words about words.

If we were to do a rhetorical analysis of our own evidentiary habits of mind, we might be more aware and forthcoming about our own proclivities and vested interests. We might find that we privilege and

promote the “primacy of language” ideology through the writings of like-minded people. I think we would also find that our arguments and interpretations have a healthy sprinkling of what Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor saw in their rhetorical analysis of selected literary criticism published between 1978 and 1982: the “appearance/reality” trope, the heading they credit Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbechts-Tyteca with providing. They say this “dualism” was “the most prevalent special topos” of the literary arguments they studied (84). The argument involves

the perception of two entities: one more immediate, the other latent; one on the surface, the other deep; one obvious, the other the object of the search. We might even claim that the appearance reality topos is the fundamental assumption of criticism, since without it there would be no impetus to analyze or interpret literature. (1991, 85)

In other words, the literary criticism they analyzed (which they see not as argument at all but as epideictic rhetoric) provides a kind of tour of what lies “beneath” obvious “surface” meanings. Considering Fahnestock’s and Secor’s analysis that much literary criticism is based on a spatial metaphor of looking beneath the surface, we might say that rhetorical analysis, some kinds of composition theory, and cultural criticism are all different versions of this “beneath-the-surface” searching.

For example, we take delight in pointing out the (hidden?) assumptions of those writing in other disciplines. In the following passage, taken from Barbara Gleason’s introduction to the “Key of Science” in *Composition in Four Keys* (1996), the Composition anthology she edited with Mark Wiley and Louise Wetherbee Phelps, she points out the importance of underlying assumptions informing a research agenda. Note the underlying spatial metaphor here (see, I’m doing it, too!), the kind Fahnestock and Secor point out is part of the spatialness of literary criticism

It is in fact important for us as readers of scientific reports and arguments to be as aware of researchers’ assumptions and theories as we are of their findings and conclusions. In reading Janet Emig’s 1971 study of twelfth graders’ composing processes, for instance, **we discover** Emig not just investigating composing *but advancing the relatively new theory that writing is a process*. **Careful readings** of the other research studies in this section **will reveal** each author’s initial questions, premises, or hypotheses to be important indicators of these researchers’ theories about writing, writing development, or teaching. (italics Gleason’s, boldings mine, 257)

We also take delight in pointing out the naivete of those writing in other disciplines. Victor Villanueva, writing an introductory blurb for Section Four of *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory* (1997), also argues, implicitly, that we need to look below the surface of scientific or positivistic claims in order to see the hidden, socially constructed assumptions informing them. He has this to say about scientism: “Scientism or positivism, then is inherently flawed, since in claiming to transcend the ‘social and political,’ it fails to make explicit (or even recognize) the effects of the social in its inquiries” (391). I agree with Gleason and Villanueva and others who look for and find evidence of writers’ apparent assumptions embedded in the language structures they use. I do it, too. My point here, with which I’m sure Gleason and Villanueva would agree, is that the analyzers are analyzing others’ assumptions through their own assumption-colored haze, which is much harder to see because it is never not there.

Granted, those engaged in empirical research may not be sufficiently conscious of the ways in which what they “observe” is constructed by forces outside their laboratories. The research is then flawed, but so is the compunction in our field to discard anything that comes out of a mode of inquiry not primarily emphasizing the primacy of language and its link with the social constructedness of knowledge. The almost total rejection of empirically based research by top theorists in Composition suggests a capitulation to binarism that is surprising.

Perhaps our love of words is a larger part of our epistemological base than we are willing to acknowledge, even to ourselves. We like to interpret and reinterpret other people’s words. We interpret their interpretations, and we try to interpret our own. To use Ann E. Berthoff’s phrase—who used I. A. Richard’s—we examine the meaning of our meanings.⁷

Not only do we love to interpret whole texts; we love individual words, too—special words that we make up, or that other people have used before and reuse, re-define, or re-shape for our own purposes, running it through our own text. Patricia Bizzell has commented on our proclivity for singling out a special word or “resonant phrase” that “will become current in the disciplinary discourse precisely because it is morally ambiguous.” In her “Afterword” to *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*, she points to “critical consciousness” as such an example (1992, 231).

We also take our special words and show how they can be used in a new way. I did so in this chapter when I used Greg Myers’ definition of *ideology* to say something about Composition’s privileging of writing. In his book *Defending Access*, Tom Fox (1999) borrows Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s use of the word *contingencies* (4). John Trimbur uses Roland Barthes’ *acritic discourse* (1989, 608). Carol Berkenkotter and

Thomas Huckin, in their conclusion to a study cited in the last footnote, use Bakhtin's word, *centripetalization* (1995, 116).

We privilege those we do for their theories, their studies, or their scholarship. But we also privilege them for their turns of phrase. The leftover poet in us, the remnant of our past and/or current love of belles lettres, loves to quote Britton's "shaping at the point of utterance," Freire's "banking concept of education," Berthoff's "making of meaning," Elbow's "believing and doubting game," North's "making of knowledge," Burke's "parlor," and Bruffee's "conversation of mankind," who in turn is quoting Michael Oakeshott. And so it goes.

Although we may not acknowledge our dependence on words *as words*, on their place in our worldview and rhetorical strategies, it is clear that in Composition our way of knowing privileges written words, interpretation of words, made-up words, recovery of old words, word play, and clever word combinations. There is nothing wrong with this. But this playing in the sandbox with colorful words is not what everyone likes to do.

As feminist theory has taught us, it is much easier to see someone else's ideology than it is to see one's own. We can't step outside our own lens. But we can at least admit we have this worship of the written word and notion of writing as the most accurate indicator of learning. Examining our own investedness in the writing-as-the-great-heuristic ideology might help us realize what harm a reverence for written language might have on students who do not share our love for words and allow us to recognize alternatives to alphabetic-based ways of knowing.

It might be productively depressing to admit we are players in what Berkenkotter calls "a paradigm debate" or "a turf war" (I like special phrases, too) about whose research agendas and epistemological assumptions are the most sophisticated or radical. Such ideological disagreements can look a lot like a schoolyard fight about whose parent has the best job, a tiresome binary typical of hegemonic Western culture. Such battles, with their underlying assumptions about right and wrong, winners and losers, are really unarticulated acceptances of the Platonic view that there is a "right" or "true" way of doing things.⁸ We may have to come to terms with the possibility that as writing instructors and people whose lives revolve around written words, we may be trying (albeit with all good intentions) to foist upon our students a way of thinking that we prefer.

Writing and its role in thinking does not have to be conceived of as a binary. We can still believe in the primacy of language even as we hold it suspect. We can respect other signs of intellectual insight even as we self-consciously promote writing as our area of expertise. With our students, we can play with different instruments, juggle different tools, experiment with how different worldviews and intellectual pathways

might complicate and enrich each other. We might see different epistemologies not as hierarchical opposites but as adjacent possibilities about how people make knowledge. But if they are “contraries,” let us “embrace” them, as Peter Elbow advises, for the dialectic they provide and the rethinking they make us do.

Finding Lost Threads in Composition Theory

The problem is, with the disciplinary focus on writing as knowing, Composition allowed vital influences to disappear from its theory-base. Over and over, we quote particular theorists who have an established ethos in our field, and we cite the movements they began. However, we often foreground only that part of their theory or practice that fits what we’re trying to show about the importance of writing and its constructedness.

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement is a case in point. As David R. Russell, Nancy Martin, Robert Parker, Vera Goodkin, Dan Mahala, and others have pointed out, our *writing* across the curriculum programs were influenced by Britain’s earlier movement, which focused not on improving writing per se, but on learning. The current foundering of many WAC programs may be due to institutions’ misunderstanding of the original British model’s radical view of the role language plays in thinking—all forms of language, formal and expressive writing, classroom talk and dialogue, as well as dramatics.⁹ In the British education reform movement of the 1960s, James Britton, Nancy Martin, and others used writing as a way of promoting learning across the curriculum, but they also used children’s everyday spoken language as well as other forms of activity-as-learning. Nancy Martin especially was influenced by play and its role in intellectual development. However, when the *language* across the curriculum theories and practices Britton and Martin and others promoted in Britain came to the United States, they were reconfigured as *writing* across the curriculum programs, often promoted by reformers—and accepted by administrators—as ways to help students improve their writing—lamentations about the poor quality of which are both old and ubiquitous (see Chapter 6). Instead of understanding the whole theoretical base informing the British reform movement, and the variety of practices used in it, Composition professionals here foregrounded the intellectual work of their favorite heuristic—writing—and, with a few exceptions, let the other modes of learning fall away.¹⁰

In his 1985 essay that won the Braddock award, Peter Elbow argued that we should explore more thoroughly the intersections of

speech and writing in our teaching, that we should take advantage of both the “indelible” and “ephemeral” aspects of writing and the immediate, dramatic elements of speech, for what they can offer in support of writing pedagogy (283–303). However, Elbow is mostly cited for his promotion of freewriting and ways of responding.

Another theorist whose comprehensive work has been appropriated in ways that privilege only one part of it is Janet Emig. As I have pointed out elsewhere, in Emig’s 1978 article, “Hand, Eye, Brain,” she called for Composition to work more closely with biology departments to find out what their research might contribute to knowledge about writing development (70). However, as David R. Russell and Patricia Bizzell have shown, it was Emig’s “Writing as a Mode of Learning” that was highly influential in promoting the idea of writing as a unique mode of learning. This piece became a cornerstone of the writing-as-primary-heuristic ideological structure of the field. As is obvious, Emig’s advice to Compositionists in “Hand, Eye, Brain” to collaborate on research with biologists was left behind. What the field did carry around on its shoulders, however, was her argument in “Writing as a Mode of Learning” that *writing*—specifically writing, not speech—is a unique and powerful intellectual tool.

In that oft-quoted article, Emig opposed the use of speech mostly because it could not be easily recorded and transcribed: “Talking is creating *and* originating a verbal construct that is *not* graphically recorded (except for the circuitous routing of a transcribed tape)” (her emphasis 1977, 123). This was an objection to speech that Nancy Sommers also voiced: “The possibility of revision distinguishes the written text from speech” (1980, 379). Until very recently, there were practical reasons to work more with written language than with speech. Writing could be analyzed and revised. Speech could not, unless it were recorded and then transcribed, a painfully slow process.

However, Emig’s (1977) and Sommers’ (1980) objection to speech has been ameliorated by twenty-first-century voice-type dictation computer technologies. First there was discrete speech voice recognition: a computer could transcribe human speech, but not very accurately, and—the—words—had—to—be—separated—and—spoken—quite—mechanically—like—this. By 1997, however, natural-voice recognition programs became available, though each user had to read a fairly lengthy text to the computer in order to “train” the program to recognize the user’s individual voice and accent. At the 2000 CCCC in Minneapolis, Charles Lowe pointed out (at the only presentation I could find on voice-recognition technology, by the way) that now a mere five-minute prep time could prepare a natural-voice recognition word processor to understand a speaker (writer).

Now, twenty years after Emig's celebration of writing for its ease of being accessed and analyzed, speech-to-text technology makes "speaking" look more like "writing." As Lowe points out, speech-to-text on screen is much like freewriting on screen: both potential first-draft material that can be developed, manipulated, revised, or discarded. What Emig and Sommers objected to regarding the limits of speech is no longer true, at least for those with access to voice-recognition technology (access to technology in general being another issue related to privilege which Cynthia Selfe has addressed). But Lowe also argues that speaking may involve different intellectual processes than writing, especially for people used to creating text through their fingertips. These processes have not been studied in Composition, Lowe points out. In a recent issue of the online journal *Kairos*, Stanley Harrison (2000) is even more alarmed at Composition's lack of interest in automated speech recognition (ASR) technologies. He points out business interests have already seized upon ASR and says that Composition's failure to theorize this substantial technological breakthrough may render us powerless to affect its cultural work "in service to the dominant order." He warns,

Indeed, by the time that ASR word processing programs become an integral component of computer-assisted freshman and basic writing classes, compositionists may find it difficult to conceive of ASR except in terms of its relationship to business communication. (1)

While I don't disagree with Harrison, I submit that our failure to take up and theorize voice-to-text breakthroughs may be due to our field's privileging of, and our own proclivities toward, *writing*.

The reception in our field of Lev S. Vygotsky's work is another example of how we root around in someone else's work, pulling out for our use only what fits our epistemological frame. Fortunately, there are several notable exceptions. Informed introductions to Vygotsky outline the breadth of his work. They discuss his emphasis on tools and play in learning as well as on the role of the social. Alex Kozulin, in his introduction to his edition of *Thought and Language*, foregrounds both aspects of Vygotsky's work: "According to Vygotsky, human higher mental functions must be viewed as products of *mediated* activity. The role of mediator is played by *psychological tools* and means of interpersonal communication" (his emphasis, 1989, xxiv). Similarly, in their essay "Exploring Vygotskian Perspectives in Education," Ellice A. Forman and Courtney B. Cazden write in their first sentence: "Two important and related themes in Vygotsky's writings are the social foundations of cognition and the importance of instruction in development" (in Wertsch 1989, 323). And in their separate and comprehensive interpretations of

Vygotsky, both Myra Barrs (1988, 52) and James Zebroski (1994, 198) have argued that writing begins in movement, gesture, and play.

However, other citations of Vygotsky seem to use him primarily to support the social nature of learning. It's not that they argue with Vygotsky's emphasis on tools, play, and hands-on activity. It's that Vygotsky seems synonymous with emphasis on the social, an authority to cite to support the writer's argument for the role of the social in language and learning.

In their Afterword to *Mind in Society*, for example, Vera John-Steiner and Ellen Soubberman recognize Vygotsky's "emphasis upon an active organism" (1978, 123). They immediately follow that statement, however, with what they seem to view as his more important contribution: "While Piaget stresses biologically supported, universal stages of development, Vygotsky's emphasis is on the interaction between changing social conditions and the biological substrata of behavior" (123). John-Steiner and Soubberman give an eloquent and complete view of Vygotsky's contributions. In their concluding paragraph, they list all the areas Vygotsky influenced: "The impact of Vygotsky's work—as that of great theoreticians everywhere—is both general and specific. Cognitive psychologists as well as educators are interested in exploring the present-day implications of his notions, whether they refer to play, to the genesis of scientific concepts, or to the relation of thought and language" (133). Even they, however, whose overview of Vygotsky is one of the more balanced ones available, reveal what they view as his most important contribution:

Perhaps the most distinguishing theme of Vygotsky's writing is his emphasis on the unique qualities of our species, how as human beings we actively realize and change ourselves in the varied contexts of culture and history. (131)

Compositionists seem more interested in Vygotsky's emphasis on language and social interaction than they are in his work on the role emotions, and hands-on activity play in learning. To use a bad analogy, it's like Vygotsky was flying a number of flags, but Compositionists run only one up the pole: the emphasis on the social. Here is Mark Wiley in his introduction to the "Political Key" section of the *Composition in Four Keys* (1996) collection explaining Vygotsky's influence. Wiley foregrounds the "social materialist" aspect of Vygotsky's work. He doesn't argue with Vygotsky's related theories on tools and play; he just doesn't mention them:

The emphasis on the social nature of language led scholars to examine the material sources for our thinking. This social materialist orientation toward cognition gathered momentum through the influence

of Lev Vygotsky's theories concerning the place of "mind in society." Vygotsky postulated that all higher mental activity originates in the social sphere. The fact that Vygotsky's thinking arose within a Marxist context (whether scholars wanted to recognize this fact or not) directed attention toward the relation between individual thought and larger social and ideological systems within which our thinking is embedded. (419)

Linda Shaw Finlay and Valerie Faith explain in the introduction to their essay in *Freire for the Classroom* how they draw from both Freire and Vygotsky. They discuss Vygotsky's theories regarding inner speech and its relation to writing. But then they collapse both Freire and Vygotsky in a way that serves to emphasize only one aspect of each. Their summary of what both Freire and Vygotsky contribute is valid, but their characterization of what both "emphasize" makes it easy for future citers of Freire and Vygotsky to foreground what each said about social relations and society, and to forget what Freire said about "multiple channels" (to be discussed in the next chapter) and what Vygotsky said about active play. This perfectly fine summary is significant for what it omits:

Freire's pedagogy, which respects the connection between the critical use of language and an awareness of oneself in social relations, dovetails with Vygotsky's developmental psychology. Both emphasize the importance of the interaction between persons and cultural elements in moving from inner speech to written language. So, relying on Freire and Vygotsky, we decided to approach language teaching through our students' understanding of the relationship between language and society, between the use of words and the structure of their reality. (64)

This condensed view and selected privileging of the theories of Freire, Vygotsky, Emig, Britton, Martin, and others is typical of what we in Composition do because of our ideological beliefs about words. We sift theories for what appeals to us, and we leave behind what they did with other ways of knowing. As James Porter, Patricia Sullivan, Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey T. Grabill, and Libby Miles point out in a recent CCC article, as much as Foucault is cited in our field, "the visual and spatial aspects of his work are largely undervalued" (634). We have danced with the verbal and the social construction. We have left as wallflowers the role emotion, confidence, movement, visualization, and sometimes even oral language, play in learning.

One extended example of how Composition has promoted *writing* as an almost exclusive way of knowing is to examine Paulo Freire's reception in our field, especially how only select portions of Freire's

praxis have been privileged in our discussions of him. Our treatment of Freire's work is such an illustrative example; the next chapter is devoted to it.

Notes

1. See John S. Mayher's (1990) book *Uncommon Sense: Theoretical Practice in Language Education*, Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann, for insightful observations on how "commonsense" attitudes have prevented schools from making meaningful reforms. I address this issue further in Chapter 6.

2. Kutz and Roskelly are right that teachers should also "Consider the implications of gender, class, race, and ethnicity in making assignments, in creating classroom dynamics of groups. And consider the effect of stereotypes in deciding about abilities potential" (115). However, they do not specifically acknowledge different learning styles, talents, or intelligences.

3. As Alex Kozulin points out, Vygotsky was "an aspiring literary critic" (xiii). Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner point out in their Introduction to *Mind in Society*, that Vygotsky "made several contributions to literary criticism" (1). In their biographical sketch of his life, they note that Vygotsky taught literature as well as psychology (15).

4. *People Weekly*, June 19, 2000, p. 48.

5. See the discussion of Gerald Coles and others in Chapter 1 of my book, *Learning Re-Abled* (1995).

6. In a footnote in his anthologized essay in Buffington et al.'s *Living Languages*, Graff credits McLeod for pointing this out to him.

7. Our link with word-loving literary studies is also demonstrated in Carol Berkenkotter's and Thomas N. Huckin's analysis of a cross section of individual CCCC proposals from 1988, 1989, 1990, and 1992. In their description of the 1988 and 1989 proposals, they noted that "the field seems, in recent years, to be moving increasingly toward a more hermeneutical mode of inquiry by adopting from literary studies the activity of problematization" (107). Their 1992 sampling of high-rated proposals, however, showed more empirical studies. They explain in a footnote that since the CCCC Executive Council barred research on proposal abstracts, 1992 was the last year they were able to study. Based on the trends and changes they saw from 1988–1992, however, they conclude that the field seems to be moving toward "generic blends," which include a mix of categories: empirical, practice, and hermeneutic (114). Based on my own experience of reading proposals for the last three years and attending every CCCC conference for the last ten years, I think the trend is moving back towards the hermeneutic, but I have not investigated paper titles systematically.

8. I am indebted to Ken Lindblom for this idea regarding Platonism.

9. For a more complete discussion of this point, see my "Forgotten Elements in Writing Across the Curriculum," in *Issues in Writing* 9.1 (Fall/Winter 1998): 19–42.

10. Another reason writing, and not speaking, is emphasized in Composition Studies is explained by Diana George and John Trimbur in their account of the composition/communication split that occurred in the early days of CCCC history. They point out that the February 1960 issue of *CCC* published a report on future directions for CCCC. Besides recommending a focus on first-year writing and on composition as a discipline, the report pointed to the goal of improving “college students’ understanding and use of the English language, especially in written discourse” (George and Trimbur’s emphasis, 1990. *CCC* 50(4): [June] 691). They also point out the irony that when “the communication battle” was over, and writing had triumphed over other forms of communication, Ken Macrorie, as *CCC* editor, introduced to the 1963 issue the logo of the sunburst, using “the tools of sign-making and graphic design to consolidate the victory of the word over image” (693).