A Pedagogy Of Struggle: The Use of Cultural Dissonance

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Writing teachers are beginning to think of discourse as social and historical constructs which are neither fixed nor unified. They argue that existing, dominant conventions of any discourse are subject to change and that competing conventions exist within as well as among discourses. Such an understanding of discourse formation is leading some compositionists to explore pedagogies which will persuade our students to participate in what Patricia Bizzell calls "'normal' intellectual life"--the creation of oppositional discourses within the academy ("Arguing" 152).

In "Arguing about Literacy," Bizzell advocates a classroom where academic discourse is created anew in each class through the interaction of the oppositional views students bring from their home cultures and the academic views privileged by the academy. Yet, she anticipates some of the difficulties in enacting such a classroom (152). As she convincingly argues, inequalities in the social power held by teachers and students and by academic culture and the students' home cultures make it hard to imagine a classroom where education is "not something done to one person by another" and where the teacher's effort to teach academic discourse will not scare off the students' oppositional views (151).

In this essay, I propose a pedagogy of struggle: that is, a

pedagogy which foregrounds the active role students can play in both their education and in the formation of oppositional discourse within the academy. I use samples from papers written by a student, Mary, to explore how we might enact such a pedagogy when teaching revision. I agree with Bizzell that we need to recognize the difficulty which the hegemonic power and function of education poses for any pedagogy concerned with involving students in the creation of oppositional discourse within the academy. However, such a pedagogy is conceivable if we abandon notions of cultural hegemony which portray our students as totally passive and powerless receptacles of the meanings and conventions privileged in the academy. Adopting Raymond Williams's view of hegemony as a process of resistance as well as domination can help us to explore ways of helping students to uncover their lived antagonistic experiences and to recognize the use of cultural dissonance when learning academic discourse. In doing so, we can help students locate personal and social reasons to become more active, critical and creative learners.

The following is a paper written by a student, Mary, in response to an assignment which asked her to write about what puzzled her in Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*. The assignment encouraged students to emulate the kind of academic "objectivity" exemplified by Rodriguez's reading of Hoggart on the "scholarship boy" in Chapter Two of *Hunger of Memory*:

Mary's Original Paper

In Chapter Five of *Hunger of Memory*, Rodriguez discusses his profession along with affirmative action. Since Rodriguez was a minority, he knew it would be easier for him to find a good position. However, what puzzled me most was why he should fear that his success in finding a position would be because he was a minority. It doesn't seem realistic that anyone would turn down a chance like that. I could not understand how he could refuse all those offers from all those universities.

I am sure that Rodriguez did have a slight advantage over others in finding a job. However, he seemed to place too much emphasis on being a minority. Perhaps, this

> obsession encouraged him to strive for academic success. I almost felt that he would not have worked so hard if he had not been a minority. He proved to himself and to others that academic success could be reached regardless of race or color. However, when affirmative action became a major issue in society, he began to fear the success which he was so determined to achieve.
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> As I read about the teaching positions offered to him, I thought about how hard he had worked to attain his goal to teach. His dream had finally become a reality. I became somewhat annoyed with him when he refused those offers because he believed they were offered to him based on his racial background. Success is achieved through a person's hard work and determination. I really do not feel that it is influenced by race, color or religion. If Rodriguez felt he was offered the job only because of his social position, he should have seized the opportunity as a challenge to prove himself worthy as an educated individual rather than a disadvantaged minority member.

We might say that Mary's paper reveals an obvious difficulty adopting the kind of "academic" stance Shaughnessy characterizes as evincing "fairness, objectivity, and formal courtesy" ("Some Needed Research" 319)--a stance to which I had exposed my students when discussing the ways in which Rodriguez conducts arguments, such as qualifying Hoggart's descriptions of the "scholarship boy" in Chapter Two of *Hunger of Memory*. For example, one of the arguments Mary makes is that Rodriguez should not refuse all the teaching positions offered to him. She bases this argument on two lines of reasoning, neither of which would be considered academically "objective." Her first line of reasoning seems swayed by emotion: she, Mary, is "somewhat annoyed with" Rodriguez for refusing those offers. Her second line of reasoning relies on the rhetorical mode of "that is so, . . . because I'm telling you" (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 269). Mary states what she believes: "Success is achieved through a person's hard work and determination. I really do not feel that it is influenced by race, color or religion." And she uses these beliefs as the basis for concluding that

Rodriguez was wrong to have rejected these offers. Both lines of argument fail to be "academic," for they rely on not only the authority of emotion and personal beliefs but also the emotions and beliefs of someone "fresh" to the academy.

The ways in which Mary uses the "however" structure best characterize her "non-academic" voice. In the first paragraph, she begins by stating that Rodriguez believes that since he is a minority, it would be easier to find a good position. Then she uses a "however" to introduce two rhetorical questions: Why should he fear that his success in finding a position would be because he was a minority, and how could he refuse all the offers from those universities. Thus she elevates her inability to "understand" Rodriguez's reasoning to the level of universal and transparent truths. In the second paragraph, the word "however" becomes a way of setting up the opposition between Rodriguez and the speaker. Again Mary cleverly lets the speaker get the last word without earning it through "objectively" reflecting upon and comparing her ideas with those of Rodriguez. Instead, she uses the "however" structures to make the speaking voice sound like what David Bartholomae calls the voice of the teacher or parents giving a lesson to establish authority ("Inventing the University" 136).

Part of Mary's "difficulty" in writing an "academic" argument is obviously caused by the structure of the assignment, which specifically asks her to write about what puzzled her about *Hunger of Memory*. By explicitly acknowledging the place of "personal" views in one's attempts to conduct an "objective" argument, the assignment aims to invite the kind of "interaction" between academic and non-academic views that Bizzell advocates. For the same reason and for other purposes I will discuss later in this essay, the first thing I did when teaching revision was to ask Mary to write about her life.[1] Specifically, I asked her to write about her home, her work, her previous education, and her recreational, religious or neighborhood activities. I also asked her to explore, when writing, the relationship between the beliefs which surface as unchallengeable absolutes in her paper and these areas of life. For example, I asked Mary why she believed success is achieved through a person's determination and hard work and why she was so annoyed at Rodriguez for rejecting his job offers. Mary

wrote about her experiences as a first-generation college student: she had a parochial Catholic high school education which did not seem to have sufficiently prepared her for college-level work, and she was working two part-time jobs to pay her own way though college. She expected her determination and hard work to get her through the difficulties she was encountering as a freshman. Mary was glad to see such a belief confirmed by part of *Hunger of Memory*, which as another student put it, told a "zero to hero" story. For the same reason, she was "annoyed" by the job-hunting episode. She just could not understand why Rodriguez would give up a personal dream, a dream for which he had worked so hard and had come so close to realizing, just like that. Since the assignment asked her to write about something which puzzled her, she decided to voice her annoyance. Mary's account suggests that both her insistence that "success is achieved through a person's hard work and determination" and her annoyance at Rodriguez's decision to reject the jobs offered him are related to her concern with whether and how someone like herself would be able to realize her dream of achieving academic success. This concern dictates her reading of *Hunger of Memory* and her effort to enact more "objective" voice in her writing.

When asking Mary to write about her life, I also called her attention to the way she used the "however" structure to establish authority of her emotions and beliefs, and I asked her why she did that. Mary wrote that she found part of Rodriguez's story convincing because it resembled her educational experiences and that of other kids like her in her neighborhood. For example, when Rodriguez discussed the distance between life at home and at school, Mary felt he was speaking for students like herself. At the same time, she knew for sure that most of her neighbors, including both those who had finished college and those like herself who were struggling to stay in college, would be more concerned with seizing any opportunity to prove themselves worthy as educated individuals than with the basis on which they were offered jobs. Therefore, she felt Rodriguez's decision was highly unrealistic. Coming from a neighborhood in which most of the families had lived for generations, Mary was used to accepting the authority

of experiences, beliefs and concerns common to those around her. Mary's account suggests that part of her "difficulty" in enacting an "objective" argument was related to the voice of authority--the authority of primary and immediately verifiable experiences--privileged in her neighborhood. Mary's account also suggests that in order to be "objective" towards Rodriguez's decision (which runs counter to what most of her neighbors would do), Mary would have had to work against her identification with the kinds of experiences, interests, and goals which she felt were common to students from her neighborhood.

Mary also mentioned that when she wrote, she was used to summarizing what she understood of a book. She had never before been asked to write about what in a book puzzled or confused her. She liked the assignment because it made her feel she could say what she felt. So she took the occasion to voice her annoyance with Rodriguez. This suggests that part of Mary's difficulty in enacting an "objective" argument is related to both the kind of voice made available to her from her previous education and from her neighborhood activities. Her previous schooling had taught her to take a passive stance towards the authority of the words of an author. It had not provided an academic model for voicing one's disagreement with the author. At the same time, the only mode of authority made available to her was the primary and verifiable experiences and the voice of a teacher, parent, or a priest giving a lesson. And this voice and mode of establishing authority were activated by the assignment's invitation for her to write about her opinions.

Mary's account suggests that her original paper bears evidence of a complex of dissonances between the discourse she is learning and other discourses she has used prior to and outside of college. If teachers like me are more interested in involving Mary in the creation of oppositional discourses within the academy. we need to formulate a pedagogy which will help her learn the ideal-typical academic way of conducting an argument without letting it subsume the forms and meanings she brings to the classroom because of the specific conditions of her life beyond the academy. For some compositionists engaged in discourse analysis, such a

pedagogy is hard to imagine because of their conception of the nature of hegemony. They recognize the power of discourse to "subsume" the student's consciousness. To use an Althusserian term, academic discourse "interpellates" students like Mary, officially sanctioning for her a specific world view or constituting for her a sense of herself, the world and her relationship with the world (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 170). These compositionists also recognize the power relationship between the "master practitioners" and "newcomers" and its effect on the student's learning. These recognitions often lead teachers to assume that the domination of the hegemonic over society, the classroom, and Mary's consciousness is stark, complete and seamless. That is, as a "newcomer," Mary has little possibility of resisting the words and methods privileged by the "master practitioners," such as the teacher--me--and Rodriguez--the author of a text. And we are automatically risking the Althuserrian interpretation when we teach Mary the ideal typical academic way of conducting an argument.

However, I would argue that Raymond Williams's definition of hegemony as "lived" and as "always in process" can help us rethink the role of "newcomers" like Mary in their own education (*Marxism and Literature* 112-13). Williams argues that a lived hegemony is never uniform, complete and abstract but has continually to be "renewed, recreated, defended and modified" because it is continually being "resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own" (Williams 112.) Therefore hegemony is best understood antagonistically, as a process embodying contestation as well as domination. "At any time," Williams explains, "forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in the society" (113). Thus, "the hegemonic has to be seen as more than the simple transmission of an (unchanging) dominance. . . . [A]ny hegemonic process must be especially alert and responsive to the alternatives and oppositions which question or threaten its dominance. The reality of cultural process must then always include the efforts and contributions of those who are in one way or another outside or at the edge of the terms of the specific hegemony" (Williams 113). Such a conception of the hegemonic process requires that we

recognize "the importance of works and ideas which--while early affected by hegemonic limits and pressures and neutralized, reduced or incorporated in part-- are also in part significant breaks beyond them" (Williams 114).[2]

How might such a notion of the hegemonic process help us re-think ways of teaching Mary to revise her original paper? The initial assignment and the first revision assignment have already helped Mary locate alternative and oppositional voices and views which the "hegemonic," the kind of "objective" argument privileged by my classroom, "has in practice had to work to control" (Williams 113). If we understand hegemony antagonistically, Mary's so-called difficulty with conducting an "objective" argument when writing the initial paper might be seen as something which carries the power of resistance and bears potential for breaking the limits set by the method of reading privileged in my classroom, rather than as something merely waiting to be invalidated or diffused in the hegemonic process. To put it another way, her difficulty uncovers an arena of contestation where the hegemonic might have to be modified or limited rather than simply reproduced. Therefore, if we could help Mary reflect on the reasons for her difficulty in conducting an "objective" argument, and if we could find ways of validating these reasons, Mary might have a better chance of actively and critically transforming the very method of responding to a text I teach.

When teaching revision, one of the ways of helping Mary to uncover a need to contest and change the convention of objective argument I teach would be to situate Mary's writing in the context of her whole life or all of her "lives." That is, we could help Mary envision her life as a conjunction of interrelated but often conflicting lives--such as her family, work, gender, religious and recreational lives as well as her educational and future professional lives. As I mentioned earlier in this essay, the first thing I did when teaching Mary to revise her Rodriguez paper was to ask her to write about her activities outside of and previous to her new college life and to explore why the cultures and histories she brought from these activities to school might make enacting an "objective" argument difficult for her. My purpose in doing so was not merely to find out the assumptions she brought to school but also to help her reflect

on the lived effect which mastering the convention of "objective" argument might have not just on her academic life or her future professional life but also on how she lives her other lives. In doing so I intended to help Mary uncover some personal and social needs for resisting and changing the very "objectivity" she was learning to enact.

I believe this type of autobiographical exercise could help Mary become a more active, critical learner, for this type of autobiographical exercise reminds Mary that "objective" argument is not merely a discursive form which, if mastered, might "advance" her academic life. It is also a social stance which might invalidate or suppress some of the concerns and practices which are immediately important to her at this point in her life, such as her concern with the education of first generation college students like herself who have to work two jobs to pay their way through college and whose parochial Catholic high school education does not seem to have sufficiently prepared them for college-level work. This type of exercise officially foregrounds the interrelatedness as well as dissonance between Mary's "academic" and "non-academic" activities. In doing so, it counters the way dominant culture convinces her that it is to her social, economic, and emotional benefit to believe and act as if her educational life, or by extension, her future professional life is the only life which is worth living and which she lives. At the same time, in insisting on the need to recognize the complexity of and innate contradictions within and between her lives, it situates Mary at the friction points of these lives. And it helps Mary self-consciously to uncover, at the level of the immediacy of her daily existence, her need to contest and change rather than merely to submit to and reproduce the "objective" stance she is learning to enact. It is a pedagogy of struggle because it does not focus on the social "reasons" for conforming to existing conventions of academic discourse; rather it calls attention to the social difficulties involved in reproducing these conventions.

When I asked Mary to write about the concerns immediate to her "non-academic" lives, I deliberately situated them in a range of cultural sites--family, workplace, neighborhood, or church and recreational, peer or gender groups. Thus she was learning in social terms. The social character of her need

would, I hoped, back Mary's effort to become a more critical learner with the power of the collective. Geoffrey Chase's ethnographic study of the oppositional writing behavior of three college senior shows the importance of bringing out the "social" aspects of personal needs for resistance and change. Only one of the three students Chase describes, Karen, is able to sustain her resistance towards and actively mediate the "objective" stance she was advised to take as an historian. And that is because Karen was able to find a "social" site or a collective voice--the suppressed lives of working-class women--to sustain her oppositional stance (Chase 18-19,21). Helping Mary to find a collective or social rationale for resistance is important precisely because the specific social arrangement of current-day America is likely to appease the force of resistance Mary might be said to carry with her by continuously forcing on Mary the social power of the hegemonic. Struggle against the pervasive dominance of the hegemonic requires a sense of the social and historical dimension of one's immediate and seemingly idiosyncratic concerns.

Of course, our attempts to help Mary become a more active, critical and creative learner must also be sustained by our willingness to affirm not just those writings which Bartholomae describes as taking place "within and against competing discourses" but all those which he describes as committing "violent accommodations" of academic conventions ("Inventing the University" 158,147). For I think one of the reasons why academic discourse has been so successful in "subsuming" the actions of our students is that we tend to treat students' "difficulties" in reproducing the kind of writings privileged in the classroom as learning impediments. Because the traditional goal of teaching is to help students write comfortably "within" academic discourse, we tend to treat their experiences of the dissonance yielded by the range of activities important to their daily existence--such as their academic, family, gender, work, religious, or recreational lives--as "negative" and "unfortunate" experiences. And we focus our attention on helping students "forget" their activities "outside" the academy when writing "within" the classroom. If, on the other hand, the goal of our teaching is to encourage students to become more active and critical learners, then we need self-consciously to foreground

the interrelatedness and innate dissonances between the range of activities open to our students. We need to depict the students' "difficulties" in reproducing the conventions we teach as a source of critical and creative energy to be deliberately sought and cultivated in the process of writing.

Having asked Mary to write about her lives outside school and to locate some concerns which are important to her at this point in her life and which made it difficult for her to enact an "objective" stance towards Rodriguez's argument, I then asked her to do a revision in which I hoped she would perform a "violent accommodation" of the kind of "objective" argument I was teaching. Specifically, I asked her to treat her two "why" and "how" questions as real questions and to imagine a different way of using the "however" structure. I suggested that she reconsider what part of the initial assignment asks her to do: use the section in Chapter Two where Rodriguez conducts a conversation with Hoggart's piece on the scholarship boy as a model for how she could try to argue "objectively" with Rodriguez. The following are three paragraphs from Mary's revisions:

Sections from Mary's Revisions

> A minority group is usually defined as a part of the population differing from others in some characteristic that is often subjected to differential treatment. We usually think of the words 'race' when discussing a particular minority. Put here, in *Hunger of Memory*, the word minority had more than one level of meaning. Most people think of a minority student as a student of a different race who usually doesn't receive a good education. His parents' race usually results in their lower-class status. And because of their position in society, the kid does not have any opportunity to attend good schools. But in Rodriguez's case, a minority student was given a chance to go to a good school. He became a different kind of "minority student." He became a minority among the ordinary minority students because, unlike most minority students, he was able to obtain a good education and, thus, social recognition.

Rodriguez possessed the physical characteristics of a minority, such as having dark skin and speaking a foreign language. However, once he began his college education, he could no longer consider himself a minority student in the sense most people think of a minority student. During that time, affirmative action was a major issue in society. Rodriguez's racial status would put him in the category of minority students, but his intellectual and social status could no longer be fit in such a category. Since he was racially a minority student in the eyes of society, he knew that it would be easier for him to find a good teaching position. But he did not want his good fortune in finding a good position to result purely from his racial background. As I read about the teaching positions offered him, I thought about how hard he had worked to attain his goal to teach. His dream had finally become a reality. At first, I was somewhat annoyed with him for refusing those offers just because he thought that they were offered to him on the basis of his racial background. It doesn't seem realistic that anyone would turn down the chance for success. Then I thought about Rodriguez's situation and tried to put myself in his place. I realized that Rodriguez had to refuse those offers because he did not consider himself a minority student the way others did. His understanding of the word 'minority' is more complex than those people who were offering him positions. As an educated individual, he wanted to wait until he was offered a job as such and not because he is socially and educationally disadvantaged.

As Rodriguez himself pointed out, his earlier obsession over his complexion and his family background seemed to have encouraged him to strive for success. Perhaps he would not have worked so hard if he had not originally been a minority. He had proved to himself and to others that academic success could be reached regardless of race if the kid had the advantage of good schooling. However, it is this very education which had changed Rodriguez and turned him from being a typical minority student. Rodriguez's story is not the story of a typical

disadvantaged student. Most of us don't have the advantage of good schooling his parents worked so hard to give him. His story proves that success could be achieved by disadvantaged students if they were given the equal opportunity to a good education. It also points out the importance of equal opportunity to good education for socially disadvantaged kids. Although I now understand why Rodriguez turned down these offers, I find his decision too passive. He could still seize the opportunity to show the world that disadvantaged kids can achieve success through hard work and determination.

In exploring the two questions she raised in her original paper, Mary begins to see the difference between how she originally understood the word "minority" and how Rodriguez uses the word. As she explains, she used to think of "minority" in purely racial terms. Rodriguez's story brings out other dimensions of one's "minority" position, such as one's social and education disadvantages. I especially like the way Mary uses the pronoun "we." The plural suggests that she feels she is not alone in her old understanding of the word "minority" but that she, the "I" of the revision, has now moved away from that customary usage. We might say that in acknowledging Rodriguez's reasoning, Mary confronts some of her inherited ways of thinking about and using the word "minority." According to our ideal-typical definition of objective and sound reasoning, Mary demonstrates an ability to be "objective" about her preconceptions. She rejects one of the absolutes, her customary understanding of a "minority," through reflecting on and comparing the assumptions behind her and Rodriguez's usage of the word.

Yet I also think that Mary's usage of the objective voice taught in my classroom is critical and creative. That is, in learning to ground her authority in the realm of analysis, Mary also deploys that authority to voice and validate some of her concerns which, she felt, were overlooked in Rodriguez's story. For instance, the cluster around the "however" in the third paragraph shows Mary using Rodriguez's use of the word minority to voice her concern with the education of students like herself. It enables her to argue for the importance of equal

opportunity to "good education" for racially advantaged but socially and educationally disadvantaged kids like herself. I like to think that Mary's ability to argue that Rodriguez's story cannot speak for the interests of disadvantaged students like herself is related to the way the autobiographical exercise validates her concern with her lack of "good schooling" and her need to work two jobs to pay her way through college. We might argue that in writing about her family, previous education, and neighborhood, Mary begins to locate the distance between Rodriguez's story and her own and to feel the need to speak for the concerns of the educationally disadvantaged and financially insecure students like herself. This moment in Mary's revision suggests that she is resisting the pressure to take an "objective" stance if that stance suppresses her "subjective" interests towards issues in Rodriguez's text. Rather, Mary seems to insist on the need and right to judge from the perspective of the interests of students with family and educational backgrounds similar to hers. At the same time, Mary is still at a point in her revision where she is unable to see intersection between the position she is forming and some of Rodriguez's own towards the educationally disadvantaged.

What I like most about the final paragraph is Mary's insistence that Rodriguez's decision was too passive, although she seems to have difficulty grounding her criticism in the realm of analysis through reflecting upon and comparing the assumptions behind Rodriguez's decision and her notion of what he should have done. I suspect that Mary's effort to critique the passivity of Rodriguez's decision is a much more complicated and ambitious project than her effort to argue for the importance of equal educational opportunity. Mary's criticism articulates two beliefs: "disadvantaged students" should seize all opportunities to "show the world" that they can achieve success, and success can be achieved through "hard work and determination." Mary's second belief in a way feeds into two hegemonic values in American culture--the work ethic and the belief in absolute "individual free will"--which deny the way existing social conditions confine and frustrate the interests of the "disadvantaged" to "show the world" their potential. Rodriguez's narrative, however, challenges such a belief by reminding Mary that the issue is much more complex than she

has been led to think. For example, it suggests that social factors such as affirmative action might indeed affect how the "disadvantaged students" realize their dreams. Because Mary seems yet unable to reflect on the limitation of her second belief, she could not further her "subjective" interest in exploring how the "disadvantaged students" might more actively "seize the opportunity to show the world" that they can achieve success. Yet, in not being afraid to claim that Rodriguez's actions were "too passive," Mary indicates her determination to read Rodriguez's action from the interested and situated point of view of an educationally and socially "disadvantaged student" concerned with *showing the world* the academic potential of the "disadvantaged." And I view this moment in her writing as an opening for more occasions to contest actively the objective stance privileged in the academy. If there had been a chance for another revision, that would have been the moment in the paper where I would push Mary.

I will end my narrative by mapping some of the issues with which I am still grappling. In asking my students to think and write about their immediate concerns, feelings, and thoughts, I find a majority of their responses heavily dominated by two beliefs that have hegemonic power in current day America: "individual uniqueness" and "pluralism." My students tend to see their immediate concerns, feelings, and thoughts as uniquely theirs. As a result, they are often reluctant to recognize that these seemingly idiosyncratic and personal beliefs and feelings are historically and socially constructed, one of the central operating assumptions in my pedagogy. They also tend to interpret my support for plurality as an invitation to settle into stagnant laissez-faire pluralism. The belief that every American is entitled to his or her own opinion often diffuses the process of conflict and struggle which I try to activate.

Another difficulty is helping students resolve the conflict between academic and home cultures in the direction of the counter-hegemonic. As both Henry Giroux and Frank Lentricchia have cautioned us, not all oppositional acts challenge the domination of the hegemonic (Giroux 107-11; Lentricchia 14-15). That is, many of the meanings and values privileged in our students' home cultures, including minority cultures, feed into rather than conflict with the interests of the

hegemonic cultures, such as Mary's belief that "hard work and determination" alone could advance the interests of the disadvantaged students. Some of the meanings and values privileged in academic culture are, on the other hand, oppositional, such as the convention of reflecting on and comparing the assumptions behind different beliefs and ways of using words, which in a way helped Mary formulate her attitude towards the education of disadvantaged students. Finding ways of helping students develop a critical attitude towards the hegemonic meanings and values which govern both their home cultures and academic culture is not always simple and easy, as Mary's inability to confront her belief in the absolute power of "hard work and determination" at the end of the revision suggests.

Another difficulty I encounter is, ironically, related to my own concern to situate students' personal feelings and beliefs along class, race, and gender lines. I often find my interpretation of my students' "difficulties" in learning academic discourse dominated by my preconceptions with the ways of thinking and living specific to "the suburban student," the "black student," the "athlete," or the "Catholic working-class student." I need constantly to fight back my urge to reify the student's conditions of life, thus taking away from the student her right to work through conflicts which seem more urgent and immediate to her at this particular point in her life. For example, my theoretical commitment to post-structuralist understandings and my personal experience as a female and a native of the People's Republic of China teaching in an American college intersect to project a gender reading of Mary's "difficulties." I suspect that her seemingly defensive way of stating her thoughts might have something to do with the degree of authority granted to a young female in an Italian, Catholic, blue-collar neighborhood. While conducting an "objective" argument requires assuming and speaking from a position of privilege in relation to the world and one's audience (Bartholomae, "Inventing the University" 139-40, 156), for Mary to assume such a position might conflict with the way she has been taught to act in her family, church, and neighborhood. So in our conferences and in my comments, I kept on asking Mary to talk and write about how she relates to the male members of her

family. Many of the things Mary said and wrote seemed to "prove" that my speculation was correct. But Mary herself never made any explicit connection between the gender issue and her "difficulties" in practicing the conventions of persuasive argument. It was not easy for me to hold back and give her room to focus her revision along the class and race lines which she had chosen. Later in the term, in response to an assignment which asked her to tell and reflect on a personal relationship which had gone through a process of change, Mary wrote a paper about her relationship with her grandfather. In talking about why her relationship with her grandfather became more and more strained as she grew older even though she still loved him and cherished her memory of having been "Grandpa's little girl," Mary did connect her feelings towards her grandfather with the conflict between an "educated" and a "family" way of behaving toward a male elder. The Grandpa paper made me feel that I was right in not letting my reading of her "difficulty" subsume how she was reading it when we were working on the Rodriguez paper. However, looking back, I think what I could have done but didn't do after Mary had written the Grandpa paper was to ask Mary to make connections between the Rodriguez paper and the Grandpa paper so that she could then expand the focus she had chosen earlier.

In sharing how I tried to teach Mary to become a more critical learner of the "objective" voice I teach and in mapping some of the challenges I encountered during the process, I have been arguing that encouraging a student to write in relation to the specific, complex and changing conditions of her life can enact a pedagogy of struggle and make the composition classroom a space where alternative concerns and practices are validated and even cultivated. Such a pedagogy teaches students to see education not only as something done to them but also in terms of what they do and can do to themselves and the academy. It not only acknowledges the social power of the "master practitioners" and of existing conventions of academic discourse but also insists that alternative ways of thinking can have power in the classroom and in society. But these alternative ways of thinking can have power only if decisions about our discourse practices are made in relation to all the

social and personal conditions of our existence. Self-conscious attention to the dissonance between the range of practices important to our daily existence can motivate students to be more active, critical and creative learners.

NOTES

[1]I became interested in using autobiographical writing to teach revision when doing my graduate work at the University of Pittsburgh. For a detailed discussion of the way the University of Pittsburgh's composition program uses autobiographical writing, see Bartholomae and Petrosky, *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts.*

[2]Using Kenneth Burke's work as an example, Frank Lentricchia argues in *Criticism and Social Change* that such significant breaks can and do exist even within the literary intellectual community. As I discuss later in this paper, Geoffrey Chase observes instances of such breaks in the works of college students doing senior projects.

[3]I would like to thank Patricia Bizzell, Joseph Harris and my colleagues at Drake University for their comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this essay. I want to acknowledge particularly Bruce Horner's contributions to the conception and revision of this essay.

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