

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Education

“IMAGINING THE MOON”:

**CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, DISCOURSE TENSIONS,
AND THE ADULT BASIC WRITING CLASSROOM**

A Dissertation in

Adult Education

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

December 2012

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to explore how critical pedagogy can foster writing competency and critical consciousness among adult basic writing students in a community college writing classroom. To this end, critical pedagogy and related critical discourses were used to theoretically frame this study. These theories attempt to uncover systemic issues of power and oppression, while trying to teach for greater emancipation. The study was grounded in a critical action research methodology, and made use of an ongoing cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting while collecting and analyzing data as the course and study unfolded.

This study identified a number of critical findings to enact critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom, re-imagine the ways in which basic writing classrooms are oriented, and to encourage adult basic writing students to dwell within the tension of the various discourses they are embedded in—indeed, imaging the moon—with the goal of coming to a better understanding of their own position within the writing process. Key findings revolve around the engagement of students in: democratizing the classroom experience through ongoing dialogue and by involving students in course planning, implementing writing groups where students listen to and critique each others' work, and exposing the tensions among the discourses of the English language—especially between the students' home language and “standard” English. Through the engagement of critical discourses in writing and dialogue in the classroom, participants began rejecting a formulaic writing pedagogy, searching for their liberation, and dwelling within the tension of the multiple discourses in which they are embedded. The dissertation concludes by highlighting implications for theory, practice, and further research.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study and the process of completing it could not have happened without many people walking the road with me.

To Kristin, Lena, and Adam: thanks for the love, support, and encouragement, and allowing me to spend hours in class, or hunkered down in my office writing. Thanks for listening to my hopes and frustrations, rants and moments of discovery, and for sharing in the excitement of this process. Thanks for letting me go missing and allowing me to be subsumed in this work. And thanks for welcoming me back.

To my parents: thanks for the always-present support and encouragement, interest and questions, and for cultivating interest and support of my research and study among your friends (the Moffitts, Ohanians, Childs, HARRISES). You raised me to be curious and to not stop until I understand something fully. You taught me to be focused and diligent, responsible and hopeful. You taught me to be loving and caring. All of this is embedded in this work and my practice in general.

To Albert and Doreen: thanks for being interested in my research and study, even if it bored you at times. As the youngest sibling, I look up to you both as models of discipline and drive, two things I have leaned heavily on during this process. Thanks for your friendship and words of encouragement throughout this process.

To Dr. Libby Tisdell: you came highly recommended and have indeed transformed my understanding of the purpose and role of education and have inspired me to walk the road toward critical awareness in life and practice. You have offered me immeasurable support and guidance from that first class of Spirituality and Culture

through the production of this dissertation. I cannot thank you enough for the mentoring you have given me, and I look forward to its continuation.

To Dr. Robin Redmon Wright: your support and enthusiasm for my research interests and this study are contagious. You've been on my side from day one with this study and have offered me valuable insight and support. I am glad to have you on my committee and you continue to inspire me to live a life of critique and wonder.

To Dr. Ilhan Kucukaydin: thank you for your quiet, critical feedback on my work. You make living a critical life look normal and easy. Thank you for that inspiration and for helping me to come to a better understanding of critique in daily life.

To Dr. Peter Kareithi: on the final night of my first Master's course with you, *Power and the Story*, as we were saying goodbye, you looked me in the eye and said, "I am not done with you yet." And you weren't. Thanks for encouraging me to pursue this program and study, thanks for encouraging me to think and live critically. Thanks for your genuine interest and care in my career and study. Thanks for not being done with me, and thanks for seeing me to this end.

To Dr. Julie Kearney: your instruction and guidance over the years has immeasurably impacted my perspective, pedagogy, and practice of writing instruction. Thanks for the constant encouragement and instilling a sense of confidence in my own ability to complete this journey and to teach writing.

To Lucas and Daniel: thanks for the seemingly unrelated discussions. They are indeed related to this study and my own theoretical understanding of education and critique. Thanks for allowing me to test out ideas, and work out thoughts before using

them in class or putting them on paper. Thanks for your direct feedback, your genuine interest in my area of research, and your valuable friendships.

To my colleagues: thanks for the support and interest and for allowing me to explore new methods of basic writing instruction. Thanks for the investment and the encouragement to continue, and apply my study and research to my daily classroom experience. I hope to live up to this expectation.

To my fellow cohort members: thanks for being part of the journey and for your feedback, critiques, and advice. You all helped me refine my thought process and research interest.

And finally, **to my students** who participated in this study, my current student, and to my students whom I have not yet met: thank you for inspiring me with your lives and determination. Thank you for reminding me that the whole purpose of the educational environment is about your growth. Thank you for joining me on this journey of critique and wonder.

To you all I dedicate this study and the work it took to produce it.

PART I
INTRODUCTION, REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE, AND STUDY
METHODOLOGY

This critical action research study is divided into three major parts. Part one, in Chapters One through Three, will set up the study by giving an introduction and rationale, along with the primary research questions, review the pertinent literature in the relevant fields of the study as well as discuss the methodology of the study.

Part two, in Chapters Four through Six, will contain a representation of the action research cycle and study findings. Part three will conclude this dissertation with a discussion of the findings in light of theory and practice.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“It’s bullshit,” she said, quickly putting her hand to her mouth as if in a vain attempt to grab the words that just escaped her lips. The discussion of basic writing pedagogy was clearly putting her on edge. She was a faculty colleague who had recently observed one of my English classes. After the class, we had a long discussion about what it means to remediate students’ writing, and we began to question how the institution places students in remediation. She warned that she has distanced some other colleagues with this “kind of talk”—the type that challenged the existing structures of writing assessment and instruction—and went on to describe, what she felt was, a failed system of assessing incoming students through a standardized writing exam on a computer.

“It’s bullshit,” she repeated, connecting the questionable assessment to an increase in students needing remediation. Basic writing issues, she claimed, should be covered in English 101. The “remedial” courses should be reserved for non-native speakers of English, as well as those who use “black” dialects. Concerned about who is benefitting from increased remediation for some time, her comments resonated with me and caused me to once again begin to question the writing assessment process as well as the challenge I face with my students when presenting them with the rules and techniques of “standard English.” Her comment about “black” dialects, however, caused me to cringe at its apparent insensitivity, reminding me of a question a student asked me a few weeks ago that seemed to highlight the tension inherent in basic writing courses.

“Do you speak another language?” one of my adult students asked me halfway through a lesson on verb tenses. After giving the students a reading quiz and working

through a chart on verb tenses, I began to feel the students in the class pulling back on me. It was more than not participating; there was a very real sense of oppression in the room and the students were resisting, in their own way, a language being forced upon them. I stopped the lesson and asked the students what was bothering them.

After a few minutes of the standard responses of hating grammar, not seeing any need for it, one student asked if I spoke another language, drawing a comparison between learning standard, academic English. The difference was not between two languages; rather, a difference between a home dialect and standard, academic English. The tension between the two “languages” was, and still is, real for her. If she speaks her “home English” in the classroom, she fears the instructor will not understand her and she will not be taken seriously as a student, let alone pass the basic writing course. If she speaks “standard English” at home, her family and friends will look at her as if she is from a foreign land, speaking a language they have heard of, but rarely use with each other, and question whether or not she has betrayed her cultural background.

The struggles of the two women above are indicative of the larger struggle of teaching standard English to adult basic writing students at a community college. Charged with remediating basic writers, I struggle daily with whether or not I am merely replicating ideology and disguising hegemony rather than challenging and exposing. I struggle with the overwhelming feeling that the students I am tasked with remediating in writing have been unfairly deemed deficient and that, even if they truly need remediation, I am somehow colonizing their language and culture by attempting to remediate them. Adult basic writing students need a guide: a moon perched high above as they navigate the waters between these discourses.

This chapter will discuss the rationale for a study, exploring basic writing at community colleges, which is a major venue of adult education today. It will also discuss critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework for the study, as guided by the central research questions, and will provide a basic overview of the research methodology, and the significance of the study to the fields of adult education, basic writing, and critical pedagogy. It will conclude with definitions of core constructs of the study and a discussion of the study's assumptions, limitations, and strengths.

Contextualizing the Problem

Adult education happens in many contexts, and community colleges are one major arena of adult education in the United States (Kasworm, 2005). With recent economic uncertainty, there is an increase in community college enrollment by adult students, many returning to the classroom after a number of years. Nationally, full-time community college enrollment has increased by 24% between fall 2007 and fall 2009, with adult populations nearly doubling (Worth & Stephens, 2011). As they return to the community college classroom, many adults are testing into basic writing courses after taking a timed, computer-assessed writing exam. Basic writing, meant to bring struggling writers up to college-level writing, is often taught from a behaviorist orientation that emphasizes attention to grammar, sentence structure, mechanics, and the overall structure of writing in order to “remediate” the highest number of students the fastest (Shor, 2009). Ignored in the discussion is the potential for basic writing classrooms to colonize the cultures of the students and perpetuate an ideology of production and dominance (Nembhard, 1983; Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2002; MacKinnon & Manathunga, 2003).

While some compositionists are teaching from a critical perspective, there is very little room, historically, in the basic writing classroom to engage students in issues of ideology and dominance, which are part of the tension between learning the language of the dominant culture and becoming competent writers (Bartholomae, 2003). If basic writers need to be remediated in order to succeed academically and personally, and there is very little pedagogical room for basic writers to critique the language and ideology of the dominant culture, then an alternative pedagogical approach must be taken in basic writing classrooms that allows learners to question, uncover, and critique systems of ideology bound in traditional schooling (Hardin, 2001; Shor, 1992). The potentially oppressive nature of basic writing classrooms exists in the tension between dominant and marginalized discourses and the assumed assimilation of the dominant at the risk of abandoning the marginalized. Critical pedagogy is one such alternative approach that attempts to foster a sense of critical consciousness in learners through the use of problem posing and questioning widely held assumptions in the classroom (Brookfield, 2005; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008), with the end goal of creating an education of wonder and emancipation (Freire, 1974).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how critical pedagogy can foster writing competency and critical consciousness among adult basic writing students in the community college setting. The potential of both writing competency and critical consciousness is a possible solution to the tension of discourses present in the basic writing classroom that can engage students in an education of wonder and critique, to help them imagine the moon and build one discourse off of another. Basic writing in community colleges serves as a gatekeeper, essentially acting as the manifestation of

open access. If a student is not “skilled enough” to enter the higher education classroom, the basic writing classroom will remediate him or her to be compliant with standard, academic discourse (Gleason, 2001). It is the unchallenged ideology of the academic discourse that teaching basic writing from a critical pedagogical perspective can help resist.

Basic Writing at Community Colleges

The movement toward basic writing education, as it is now understood, came on the heels of the radical social and political changes that took place in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Mina Shaughnessy’s assumption that “basic writers are indeed educable” (Mutnick, 2001, p. 185) changed the landscape of higher education by proposing that student errors were logical rather than a cognitive deficiency, refocusing remedial education on the student as a situated, social learner, and rejecting past pedagogical trends. Research into the basic writer and the field turned further away from a cognitive perspective and began to embrace a social perspective to understand the basic writer (Rose, 1988, 1989; Shor, 2009). This perspective allowed for research “on cultural difference as well as persistent tensions between dominant and subordinate discourses” (Mutnick, p.189). Rather than suffering from a learning disability, basic writers were in fact often negotiating two different worlds—two different cultures and identities—as they entered and performed in the college setting. While most basic writing classrooms reject approaching instruction on the basis of “skills-driven exercises” meant to shed the lesser culture and adopt the dominant culture, this tension is very much alive today (Mutnick, p. 191).

Basic writing programs have consistently been heralded as an avenue of student access. However, Soliday (2001) argues “the power of a basic writing program to enhance access depends upon how it is embedded within a particular ideology of access” (p. 56). In other words, the efficacy of basic writing depends on the larger academic climate in which it resides and the success students may enjoy. Institutional politics and ideology deeply impact students in basic writing classrooms. A response to this concern has been to shift basic writing away from an “initiatory” role (p. 61) and integrating it into a larger curriculum that serves all students, rather than a segmented sub-population. By immersing the process of student writing throughout academic discourses, the authority of student writing was given back to the students themselves.

Process pedagogy, popularized by Janet Emig’s (1971) assessment of secondary level writers, assumes that there is an inherent sequence to writing that can be followed at any level and by any writer. Emphasizing the writer’s contextuality, process pedagogy challenged the role of educators. Elbow (1973) presented writing as an act that students could do on their own, giving them the authority as writers from day one. Creating universally applicable approaches such as free-writing and rejecting the hypersensitivity to lower order concerns (grammar, punctuation), process pedagogy handed the authority of writing to the student rather than the instructor. Within each student was the potential to become a powerful, personal writer through the use of prewriting, writing, and rewriting. Writing was no longer viewed as a product, but a process to be followed (Murray, 2003). Process pedagogy revolutionized the field and rejected a production-based pedagogical approach that focused on lower-order concerns. Other theorists modified process pedagogy to pay attention to the cognitive choices made during the

process (Flower & Hayes, 2003), while some rejected it entirely to focus on the cognitive development of writers, specifically basic writers (Lunsford, 2003).

With basic writing's connection to student success and student access, based on Shaughnessy's work in the 1970s, many pedagogical approaches have tried to make their mark on the field, such as placement testing, which has its effectiveness as taking a snapshot of a moment in time in a student's writing process and accuracy questioned by conflicting studies (Brunk-Chavez, 2008; Sternglass, 1997), adaptive methods due to budget constraints that seek to offer solutions to institutions looking to cut remedial programs (Huse, Wright, Clark, & Hacker, 2005), and the effort to mainstream basic writers into the traditional college curriculum by offering pre-college courses to ramp up student writing skills by moving "away from heavy emphasis on correction of students' mechanical errors" and allow focus on students' writing process as well as producing research essays (p. 35). Moving away from a pedagogy of correction and toward a pedagogy of success and applicability benefits the adult basic writing student in the long-term (Gleason, 2001).

Making use of a relevant, student-focused pedagogy brings a unique type of learning to the classroom as well as instills a sense of power to an often-stymied writer who is unfamiliar with success. That feeling of academic inadequacy leads to a "difficulty moving from personal and anecdotal written responses to those that offer more abstract and general analyses" (Coles & Wall, 1987, p. 303). While personal and individual, the writing of these students had an isolating effect on students. Furthermore, institutionalizing "'academic discourse' to basic readers and writers as if it were a unified body of literacy conventions and procedures to be mastered is to mystify what our

students most need to have demystified: how work gets done in the university” (p. 313). Rather than view the basic writing students as traveling from non-academic discourse into academic discourse, adult basic writing students are in fact living between two worlds—constantly shifting back and forth—as they navigate the higher education experience (Coles & Wall, 1987).

Why Critical Pedagogy?

Despite various pedagogical attempts to mainstream the basic writing student, there are tensions that need to be addressed, that may potentially be addressed by employing a critical pedagogical approach. First, what is the role of the basic writing instructor in terms of educating for critical awareness (Castagno, 2009)? Second, what are the educational benefits of adult basic writers resisting and critiquing dominant ideologies in the classroom? Third, how is writing competence defined and determined and how best do basic writers become competent in their writing?

Nationally, there is an increase in community college enrollment as well as an increase in adult students in basic writing courses (Rochford, 2004; Center, 2007; Callahan & Chumney, 2009). Basic writing courses are predominantly taught from a behaviorist perspective, emphasizing either the memorization of grammar and punctuation rules, or rigid structures of writing (Seo, 2007; Smith, 2006), ignoring the positionality of the adult basic writer as well as the ideological domination taking place within writing conventions of the dominant culture. While process pedagogy—the emphasis on each student’s process of writing over the product—has shifted basic writing pedagogy’s emphasis to the unique personal writing process of each writer (Emig, 1973; Elbow, 1978; Murray, 2003), it still leaves very little room for the basic writing student to

critique and resist while becoming competent in writing. This is precisely what critical pedagogy in this setting attempts to do.

Within the field of adult education, critical pedagogy has the ability to create a dialogic classroom that can foster collaboration and critique through dialogue, which leads to the potential for new knowledge (Kaufmann, 2010) and a democratic classroom environment that sets the stage for critical consciousness (Freire, 1974). Resisting a market-driven approach to basic writing pedagogy that focuses on the production of remediation (Shor, 2009), critical pedagogy offers basic writing instructors and students the chance to identify, critique, and resist dominant ideologies (Brookfield, 2005; Hardin, 2001) through an examination of the tension between writing within a home dialect and writing within the academic discourse (Bartholomae, 2003). Through writing for resistance, adult basic writing students will come to a deeper understanding of themselves as situated beings within systems of power as well as writers with authority and power (Elbow, 1973, 1998).

There are many studies within the field of basic writing pedagogy that explore factors for success (Burley, Butner, & Ceida, 2001; Callahan & Chumney, 2009; Collins & Bissell, 2004; Crews & Aragon, 2004; Hoyt, 1999; Southard & Clay, 2004; Perin, Keselman, & Monopoli, 2003; Rochford, 2003) and there are some studies in adult education that examine the role of dialogue in promoting a critical classroom (Kaufmann, 2010), but there are no studies that explore the role of critical pedagogy specifically in adult basic writing classrooms in community college settings. And it is this void in the literature that this study aims to fill.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

In light of the lack of relevant data-based studies on critical pedagogy in the basic writing classroom, the purpose of this qualitative critical action research study is to explore how critical pedagogy affects writing competency and critical consciousness among adult basic writing students in a community college classroom.

Since this study is concerned with fostering critical consciousness and writing competency in adult basic writers through the use of critical pedagogy and a problem-posing, dialogic classroom this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the role of critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom and what are ways it can be developed?
2. How can teaching a basic writing course from a critical pedagogical perspective foster writing competency and critical consciousness?

Theoretical Framework

The theory used to frame this study is critical pedagogy, which assumes that all education is political and proposes a new pedagogy of liberation that is a “struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations” (Giroux, 1985, xiii) found in educational institutions and classrooms and promote emancipation through healing and wholeness (hooks, 2003). Within the classroom, the fundamental relationship between teacher and student is flawed—a relationship of goods and services. Freire (1970) emphasizes an education that promotes a flattened classroom hierarchy that fosters *conscientização*. Central to critical pedagogy’s liberation efforts, conscientization is the attempt to bring reflection and action together to put an end to ideological reproduction (Brookfield, 2005), which, as Freire (1974) describes, starts with a core belief in the role of humans in

the world as one of engagement (hooks, 2003). Within the basic writing classroom, the broken system of education manifests itself in the teaching of grammar drills and sentence diagramming, isolating the learner and the language from the larger environment in which they are embedded.

Engaging in relations with the learner's environment, as opposed to imposing on reality, is an act of critical consciousness and is necessary for a truly democratic setting (Freire, 1974). In order to engage in relations with the world, Freire makes a distinction between dialogue, a flattened hierarchical relationship nourished by "love, humility, hope, faith, and trust" (p. 40), and anti-dialogue, which lacks love and is therefore a-critical, vertical, and "issues communiqués" rather than communicates (p. 41). Central to Freire's act of critical consciousness is an unwavering hope and love in the existence and purpose of human beings in the world through dialogue. This dialogue within the basic writing classroom begins with an open environment to the multiple discourses or dialogues, as described above. When one's worldview stems from the dialogic, a democratic-friendly climate is created that opens the door to the potential for critical consciousness. It is in these relationships that instructors and students may find liberation through dialogue (Kaufmann, 2010) and problem-posing, which emphasizes the role of the learner as an active part in the democratization of the classroom. Moving toward liberation—toward a critical consciousness—is an act of resistance that centers the education experience on the learner rather than the educational institution. In essence, the power of true liberation is in the hands of the learner. Within the basic writing classroom, writing is power (Elbow, 1998) and therefore has the potential to liberate students through use.

Extending this solution to the purpose of this study, once adult basic writing students come to an understanding of their education as an act of assimilation to dominant cultures and language conventions, they will be able to make a change. By questioning learned behaviors and power relations, the learner is able to uncover the power that produces social forms (hooks, 1994; Giroux, 1985), and privileges certain meanings, experiences, and forms of knowledge (Giroux, 1990) by questioning previously unquestioned assumptions.

In this curiosity—this questioning—students have the chance to achieve *conscientization* that is indeed beneficial for their intellectual future, which is one free from institutional constraints. It is the purpose of this study to turn away from the mechanical process of teaching basic writing with the goal of increasing a critical consciousness that will enable students to continue to self-educate once they move out of the basic writing course and into the mainstream. In essence, a lifelong learning function that moves beyond the content of what is taught and toward a holistic critical consciousness:

I wish to emphasize that in educating adults, to avoid a rote, mechanical process one must make it possible for them to achieve critical consciousness so that they can teach themselves to read and write. (Freire, 1974, p. 48)

Overview of Research Design

This study is a qualitative critical action research study, designed to explore how critical pedagogy can foster both writing competency and critical consciousness among adult basic writing students. Since the study is interested in the potential educational and social impact critical consciousness can have on basic writing students, a qualitative

research methodology is most appropriate in order to allow for articulation of the experiences within a research study (Greenwood & Levin, 2008). Rather than a focus on applying findings universally and sterilizing the researcher from the findings, qualitative research methods assumes that the creation of new knowledge is bound to the “the socially constructed nature of reality” of the participant and the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14). Participant meaning-making is central to any qualitative research study (Creswell, 2009).

Within the qualitative paradigm, there are many specific methods of research that can be used to highlight the socially constructed reality of participant meaning making. For the purpose of this study, action research—specifically critical action research—is used. In search for a solution to a practice-related problem, action research goes through a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting that allows for the use of relevant procedures to try to solve the problem (Stringer, 2007). The details of each step of the cycle will be discussed in greater length in Chapter Three.

Critical action research makes use of the democratization of the creation of knowledge inherent in action research and looks specifically at ways of resisting dominant ideologies and/or narratives that may be presented within the local practice-based problem. Through resistance, the hegemony bound within institutions comes under scrutiny, and subverts a hierarchical approach to education and administration (Greenwood & Levin, 2008). When approaching the basic writing classroom—an educational environment overweighed with dominant ideologies and tensions, as well as institutional hegemony, as described above—a critical action research approach is appropriate as the researcher and participants not only search for a locally aware solution

to the tension of remediating adult basic writing students, but also aim to resist and dismantle systemic power and oppression within the field of basic writing and community colleges as a whole.

This action research study was conducted in a 15-week semester long basic writing course at a community college in the Northeast. The 21 students in the course came to the course one of two ways: by taking the writing placement test and testing straight into that level of basic writing, or by successfully completing other prerequisite courses. In order to progress to college composition, students need to earn a grade of a “C” or better. While students paid for the three-credit course, the credits are not applied toward their degree, diploma, or transfer transcript. Since the study takes place in a community college setting, participants are diverse in background. Participants’ motivation for enrolling also varied from new/second career pursuit, continuing credits for job promotion, or with the ultimate goal of transferring on to a four-year institution. Further discussion of participant goals will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Through the use of writing assignments, reading and in-class journaling, critical incident questionnaires (CIQs), and group discussion and projects, this study fostered a critical consciousness in participants while increasing writing competency. Methods of instruction and student feedback were taken into account and course content was adapted, as needed and articulated by the students, throughout the semester.

Significance of the Study

This study aims to add significance to the fields of adult education, basic writing, and critical pedagogy and also has personal and professional significance to me as the researcher. Adults are returning to college as the landscape of the American workplace is

shifting toward the requirement of degree-completed workers (Kasworm 2003, 2005). With the emphasis on returning adults to the classroom from all sectors of America, spurred on by President Obama's Completion Agenda, two-year schools are overwhelmed with increased enrollment, driven in part by an influx of adult learners (Dervarics, 2009). Educators, therefore, must look at the adult education field for techniques and answers to how to educate the influx of adults.

Already a small research area in adult education but with significant growth in recent years (Worth & Stephenson, 2011), adult basic writing research has the potential to lift countless adults out from under the weight of remediation as well as countless instructors out from under the weight of delivering remediation as a transactional item. Rather than see basic writing as a one-stop solution, researching the effect remediation has on adult learners will equip adult educators with knowledge about how basic writing can impact the transition to, during, and out of the community college classroom (Kasworm, 2003, 2005), not merely as competent writers, but critically competent thinkers capable of resisting dominant ideologies (Brookfield, 2005).

This study also has significance to the field of basic writing exploring how to approach ideology critique with the goal of enabling students to see themselves as authors of a text—a text they can interact with similar to the canonical texts they analyze in literature courses (Hardin, 2001). Giving students an authority over their written text will make the academic discourse in which they write, often seen as unapproachable by students, accessible and applicable to students' everyday needs (Bartholomae, 2003). Enabling authority happens through a focus on student writing as well as de-centering the classroom power, such as incorporating students into the core decision-making of courses

can de-center classroom power. The critical basic writing classroom can now empower students through enabling their textual authority as well as de-centering classroom power by offering them a voice in the course content and planning, thus leading to potential success (Duffelmeyer, 2002; Shor, 2009). Adult basic writers will also be able to situate themselves within a larger social context and make use of their writing as a tool for liberation and resistance.

Basic writing success is at its core an issue of educational access. Students most likely to be required to enroll in basic writing classrooms are coming from high schools that have left them unprepared for college-level writing (Collins & Bissell, 2004). Enrolling in a community college is often an economic choice due to open enrollment and lower tuition costs. Failure to provide successful remediation in the writing classroom perpetuates the cycle of educational *in*access and a potential failure to the mission of community colleges in general.

Moving away from transactional views of basic writing allows students to engage wholly within the classroom—not sit passively and wait for the “right” answers to be given to them. Writing is an active process, not a skill to be learned. Some students may master the mechanics of writing, they may be able to accurately diagram a sentence or know all the parts of speech and still be in need of basic writing as they may not be able to write critically or critically engage the dominant culture in which they reside.

This study also offers significance for critical pedagogy. A common critique of critical pedagogy is that it relies heavily on rational ways of thinking and marginalizes diverse voices (Ellsworth, 1989). By situating critical pedagogy in a potentially diverse classroom (age, race, ethnicity, gender, class), and making use of student expressions and

experiences including descriptive written assignments and non-rational ways of creating knowledge within a final portfolio and group presentations, the findings of the study will fill a void in the critical pedagogy literature. The application of critical pedagogy to the basic writing classroom may also add new and relevant insight into critical pedagogy as an applicable theoretical framework in the basic writing field, as well as one that takes into account more than issues of class and economics.

Finally, it is also important to note the personal significance this study has. Since this study took an action research methodology, one that is designed to be an act of democracy and allow stakeholders, those invested in a solution—teachers and students, to pursue a new way of creating knowledge based on their own experiences and needs (Herr & Anderson, 2005), it must be clear that as a stakeholder, I am interested in the best possible way to teach basic writing to historically underserved adult populations that will both increase their writing competency and their critical consciousness. The formation of a critical consciousness, as mentioned above, is vital to the lifelong educative process of the adult student. Additionally, exploring new ways to approach basic writing pedagogy has the potential to shift the national and local dialogue away from production and toward a critical process that extends outside of the classroom walls.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Strengths

There are a number of assumptions embedded within this study, as well as limitations and strengths that must be clarified here.

Assumptions

Similar to any research study, this critical action research study is embedded in a series of assumptions. They guide and inform the study, and are as follows:

1. This study assumes that basic writing students are located within systems of power that emphasize assimilation to the dominant writing conventions of the academy (Bartholomae, 2003; Curry, 2006).
2. These systems of power, therefore, put the basic writing student in a position of often receiving education rather than creating it—a position of inherent oppression (Freire, 1970).
3. Teaching writing from a critical perspective can foster both critical consciousness and writing competency in basic writing students (Carter, 2008).
4. It is also assumed that basic writing students will be able to articulate their experience of gaining critical consciousness through their own writing process.
5. The process of gaining critical consciousness creates an environment that fosters writing competency through reflective, personal writing (Murray, 2003).

Limitations and Strengths

Research is partial and researcher subjectivity is unavoidable, particularly in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Therefore, it is important to outline particular limitations of this study.

1. As a basic writing instructor, the seemingly authoritative role that I hold within a classroom environment, despite efforts to create a democratic classroom, may restrict participants from providing accurate and honest feedback. In fact, there are very real power relations ongoing in the basic writing classroom. The great irony of this study is that as the instructor I am “allowing” students to become liberated and critically conscious. This irony is unavoidable in any

- institutionalized setting and my role as the instructor is to create an environment where critical consciousness is possible (Freire, 1974).
2. As will be discussed below in the definition of terms section, “basic writing” is a term for a discipline within writing composition that emphasizes preparation for college-level writing. The term, however, is a contested one as it reveals an ideological bias that positions the student at a lower level than “traditional” or “mainstream” students. This term has the potential to become a limitation as it may impact how participants view themselves throughout the study.
 3. This action research took place over one semester, which puts a timeframe on students’ writing and learning process. The course schedule, therefore, may impact the participants’ perception of their own critical consciousness and writing competency, as it may not offer enough time for reflection.
 4. The findings of this study may not be generalizable outside of this action research study.

This study is not without its strengths, however. As a critical action research, this study first understood the practice-based problem by having students engage in a writing assignment designed to assess their understanding and articulation of the specifics of the problem at hand. The study, therefore, is rooted in a problem that is important and relevant to participants, thus increasing their investment in an ongoing solution. Because of the setting of the study and the specific time and dates chosen as the course for the study, participants were of diverse social, economic, and racial and ethnic backgrounds. These perspectives are important to include and are strengths of the study in that they may offer typically under-heard perspectives that highlight the framing positionality has

on knowledge and experience (Brookfield, 2003). The study was also undertaken over an entire 15-week semester offering credibility through prolonged engagement, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The setting and field of the study are both emerging, important areas of research within educational communities. Due to the economic climate and increased national attention on community colleges, this study is both relevant and timely in that it adds new insight into emerging areas of research.

Definition of Terms

There are a number of terms that need to be defined in relationship to this study. These are important to note as they will serve as the language and framing of the study in the remaining chapters.

Action research, the research methodology specifically used in this study, pursues a new way of creating knowledge based on the experiences of the stakeholders—teachers, researchers, participants—own experiences and needs (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Basic writing is a term that refers to a writing course that is considered “remedial” or “developmental.” While a discipline within traditional composition studies, basic writing courses are designed for students who have been deemed underprepared for college level writing. For the purpose of this study, “basic” is used in place of “developmental” or “remedial” to emphasize the field of study that relates directly to writing composition in the tradition of Mina Shaughnessy and Mike Rose, rather than developmental education. While synonyms, for the purpose of this study “basic writing” will be used exclusively.

Central to critical pedagogy's liberation efforts is Freire's concept of *conscientization*. Conscientization is the attempt to bring reflection and action together to help put an end to ideological reproduction. The use of the term in this study refers to the process of becoming critically conscious.

Critical consciousness is becoming aware of the social and political powers that reside in daily life, being able to articulate them, and, eventually and in some form, take action against the oppressive powers resulting in greater personal liberation. Critical consciousness is generally fostered through problem-posing and discussion, as well as reflective and personal writing. Its end goal, however, is not to solely critique. Critical consciousness offers learners the opportunity and ability to *recreate* a learning experience that is situated within their own frame of reference and possibly in opposition to larger institutionalized forces. There is a creative act necessary to critical consciousness that can take many forms, such as works of art and other alternative ways of knowledge creation.

Critical pedagogy, therefore, is a method of teaching that involves the use of fostering critical consciousness in the classroom through critique of dominant ideologies and systems of power that are embedded within the classroom or institution and restrict or repress education.

Ideology is a central issue of critique throughout this study. The term ideology, central to much of social theory, is a difficult one to define, which, according to McLaren (1989), is embedded with its own assumptions about knowledge and truth. Radical philosophy and theorists resist a "straightjacketing" of the term in order to fully make use of critical potential. In practice, ideology can be understood within its critical potential as positive and negative frameworks of thought that are used to give meaning to the world

(p. 187). Extending this definition, ideology “can be linked not only to the discursive formations and the social relations they structure, but also to the interests that they further” (p. 189). Taken from this perspective, an oftentimes contentious term like ideology has the ability to uncover the way the dominant culture impacts students within and without the classroom through the use of power. By uncovering the ways the dominating class uses their power to produce ideology, the radical philosophy of education finds meaning and application to practice. Relatedly, ideology critique is the process of exposing and uncovering ideology with the intent of resistance and change (Brookfield, 2005)

Writing competency is also another problematic term that is used in this study. It is the goal of basic writing courses to bring writers up to the level of college writing. In essence, prepare them to write at the college level. Competency in writing, therefore, is oftentimes understood as the ability for students to write within the conventions of the academy. However, since basic writing has been historically intertwined with student access and retention, writing competency may also be understood as the ability for students to write within the academy in order to persist and succeed. As part of his administration’s efforts to reenergize the American economy, President Obama introduced a completion agenda that outlined goals for graduating community college students within a certain time frame. There is a tension, therefore, between two different definitions of writing competency: the first that emphasizes getting students through the remedial process so that they may move on to their vocational or career-specific courses, and the second that emphasizes a holistic understanding of writing as a process which students come to learn and use throughout their lives (Elbow, 1973).

Chapter Summary

This opening chapter laid out the foundation of the study, contextualizing the problem of adult basic writing students in community colleges. This chapter also discussed the study purpose and two major research questions guiding the study. After an overview of critical pedagogy as the theoretical framework for the study, this chapter gave an overview of the study methodology and significance of the study to the various fields it intersects with. This chapter ended with a discussion of the assumptions, limitations, and strengths of the study, as well as an outline of the significant terms to this study with their definitions.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this critical action study is to explore how critical pedagogy can increase writing competency and critical consciousness among adult basic writing students. By opening the door to ideology critique to learners, critical pedagogy may be able to not only increase writing competency of adult basic writing students but also prepare them for lifelong education outside of the classroom, returning them to the workplace as active, critical thinkers (Freire, 1974).

This study is guided by two research questions, which are:

1. What is the role of critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom and what are ways it can be developed?
2. How can teaching a basic writing course from a critical pedagogical perspective foster writing competency and critical consciousness?

There have been a number of studies within adult education that focus on critical pedagogy's applications, as social change in various educational settings, or an analysis of power relations in educational settings (Grace & Wells, 2007; Kaufmann, 2010; Lange, 2004; Tisdell, 1993). There have also been studies that focus on adult identity development (Kasworm, 2003, 2005), and success (Callahan & Chumney, 2009; Collins & Bissell, 2004; Crews & Aragon, 2004) in community college settings. There is a gap in the literature, however, that discusses the intersection of critical pedagogy and the adult basic writing classroom in the community college setting. It is the intent of this study to explore the role critical consciousness can play in writing competency and ideology critique in the basic writing classroom.

This chapter offers an in-depth exploration of the relevant areas of literature to the study and is divided into four main parts. The first section basically sets the context and provides a rationale for the study. The second section will first contextualize critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework, including an exploration of critical pedagogy's assumptions, goals, and common critiques. The third section will discuss the philosophical perspectives on basic writing in community colleges and the role of basic writing at community colleges historically. The final section will review literature related to pedagogy in basic writing related in light of current philosophical issues and concerns. This section will also specifically review critical approaches to teaching basic writing in light of the purpose of this study. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of the gap the study addresses and the potential for new areas of knowledge in basic writing and critical pedagogy.

Setting the Context

Within the field of adult education, the community college experience of adults is a major area of research. Since the recent economic downturn, more adults are returning to higher education settings, specifically community colleges (Worth & Stephens, 2011), to pursue second careers, complete degrees, or receive training for career advancement (Kasworm, 2003, 2005).

Despite some empirical and conceptual pieces that consider the placement test inappropriate for working adults returning to the community college classroom (Gleason, 2001; Sternglass, 1997), the majority of returning adults will in fact take a standard placement test before registering for courses. These placement tests, most popularly administered by the College Board through a test called Accuplacer, are meant to

categorize and sort students into appropriate course tracks, determining if any basic-level courses are needed. Due to the increase in adults at community colleges, there has also been an increase in adults testing into basic writing courses (Callahan & Chumney, 2009; Rochford, 2004).

Basic writing courses have generally been taught from a behaviorist perspective with the goal of bringing adults into the discourse of the academy (Bartholomae, 2003; Curry, 2006). Adult basic writers are, however, caught within the tension of a home dialect and the academic discourse (Coles & Wall, 1987). Traditionally, within basic writing pedagogy, there is very little room, and even resistance (Hairston, 2003), to critical approaches that discuss the potential for basic writing classrooms to colonize the cultures of the students and perpetuate an ideology of production and dominance (Nembhard, 1983; Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2002; MacKinnon & Manathunga, 2003).

The basic writing classroom in community colleges is a microcosm of the larger educational environment—it boils down the major issues in education and multicultural education to one classroom. Many educators suggest that the role of education is to promote “healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life” (hooks, 2003, p. 43). Likewise, students arrive at the community college in search of access to liberation and empowerment (either personally or economically), but are met with challenges (requirements) that stifle full advantage of the potential benefit. It is upon close inspection of the challenges where we begin to see issues of ideology and hegemony, residing still and quiet, but altogether a powerful force the adult basic writing student must face.

A potential ideological pitfall is that by instructing students in the language of academic discourse (standard English) basic writing courses run the risk of merely imposing a system of beliefs and values that in turn reproduces existing social structures. “Standard English,” if forced to pinpoint a definition, is white English—the English of the dominant group in power, and the type of English expected and required within structures of higher education. By instructing adult students in standard English, basic writing courses run the risk of merely reproducing the social structure of “white being right,” and, in effect, lowering the language capital of the adult students’ native dialect. MacKinnon and Manathunga (2003) note “by canceling all but the dominant literacy from the university curriculum, a student’s capacity to contribute to the class from their own cultural experience is greatly diminished, as are their learning opportunities” (p. 131).

The historic relationship between some adult student’s “home dialect” and “academic discourse” can often be one of two separate worlds. In order to succeed and be taken seriously in higher education and the workplace, basic writing students are asked to abandon their culturally situated home dialect and adopt a predominantly white English that not only does not reflect them as individuals but has oftentimes been used to oppress them (Kaufmann, 2010). This goes far beyond identifying the “weaknesses of culture” to improve upon them (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 134); rather, it positions the culture of the “other” as something to *flee* from, rather than *learn* from and it perpetuates the myth that being illiterate in the dominant culture is equivalent to being cognitively deficient (MacKinnon & Manathunga, 2003).

Throughout the literature, a tension arises between wanting basic writing students to succeed by learning standard, academic English, and fostering critical, independent, and creative thinking. Shor (2001) articulates the dilemma as an economic one: “Literacy and schooling are officially promoted as ladders to learning and success but are unequally delivered as roads to very different lives depending on a student’s race, gender, and social class” (p. 31). In other words, there is a cultural capital embedded in the acquisition of standard English for the basic writing student that without, he/she cannot move out of remediation, into successful, credit-bearing courses, and take full advantage of educational opportunities.

Basic writing courses have been, as noted by Ritchie (1989), based on “drill and imitation” (p. 153) leaving no room for anything but the dominant culture in the classroom. However, in reality, “writers and speakers are continually acting upon and transforming the language they assimilate, trying to resolve the dissonance among the voices they hear in the social network, and attempting to construct their own evolving voice” (p. 154). Simply put, whether educators want to address it or not, the tension between perpetuating a dominating culture and creating a climate for critique of that culture exists and students are constantly navigating the waters between the two. The navigation is a process of socialization and identity development, one that manifests itself in classroom performance.

Certainly, “literacies are not neutral” and any instruction in writing and language comes bound with the dominant ideology (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2002). This dominant ideology has the potential to colonize the students’ own, native dialect and, therefore, culture. Issues of language, both written and oral, are tied to culture and social

context. However, to lay blame on the cultural context and neglect potential errors in the students is dangerous (Coles & Wall, 1987).

In fact, the attempt to avoid cultural colonization in the basic writing classroom is not about blame at all. Rather, it is an attempt on the educator's part to "learn their way into the student cultures" (Dean, 1989, p. 23). Rather than promote an ambiguous biculturalism that is turned on and off as student enter and exit the college classroom, Dean (1989) outlines the goal as creating cultural transitions, where the student is empowered to "integrate her world view with the academic world view" or not (p. 36).

Although writing in a context nearly 30 years ago specifically about speakers of American black dialect, Nembhard (1983) identifies this potential for cultural domination and rejects calls for eradication of the students' own dialect or even superimposing a new dialect, side-by-side. He goes on to pinpoint what is needed:

Rather, the aim of teaching composition to black speakers should be to provide them with effective communication skills and to help them recognize that the individual who harbors any hope of ever being in a position to help influence change or correct social injustices must be able to make himself or herself understood to the educated people in the society. In addition, they must be made aware that limited language skills limit possibilities. Today's automated society does not have room for the man or woman who lacks skill in the language of education. (p. 78)

Perhaps a bit too simplistic by claiming that society does not have room for a man or woman who does not speak the language of education, Nembhard does introduce us to the idea that students need to be able to function within the dominant culture; thus, their

need for remediation. It is within the dominant culture, however, that students can enact change and give his/her own cultural history a proper seat.

In discussing how American students tend to critique literature written by American authors of color, Stockton (1995) confirms that the false objectivity by white, dominant culture exists, allowing “whiteness associates itself with the universal, the natural, the normal, and the clear-sighted” (p. 173). Likewise, allowing standard English to become the natural or the normal will perpetuate the dominant culture’s ideology and will, as a result, create a student who lacks critical literacy awareness and a weak sense of how to use the right language and in what contexts.

With this as a background, the intent of this study to explore the role critical consciousness can play in writing competency and ideology critique in the basic writing classroom. The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in the literature on critical pedagogy and its related areas. This is discussed next.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Pedagogy and Its Related Discourses

The theoretical framework for the study is primarily based in the critical pedagogy as influenced by the seminal work of Paulo Freire (1970), and scholars who draw on his work. However, some wider influences in critical social theory are present within current discussions of critical pedagogy. These various traditions mixed with critical pedagogy create a theoretical framework that has influences from other traditions and time periods, such as the Frankfurt School of critical theory in Germany, and later in the United States (Brookfield, 2005), and feminist and antiracist discourses in education (Ellsworth, 1989; hooks, 1994, 2003). These discourses, concerns, and ideas have come to influence one another and cannot be discussed in a vacuum. Therefore, this section will

begin with a discussion of core critical theory concepts that are relevant to critical pedagogy as a framework for this study as they relate to the adult basic writing classroom, followed by a discussion of critical pedagogy. In response to a prevalent critique of critical pedagogy, a discussion of critical multiculturalism will conclude the section.

Critical Context

Critical theory is generally concerned with the “potential alienation of man” in the context of capitalism throughout society (Hansen, 1993, p. 5). Throughout the history of critical theory, no issue has been more central to all forms of the theory as ideology. Indeed, ideology critique is at the heart of critical theory (Brookfield, 2005) and is central to this study. The alienation of man, as expressed by Marx, was dealt at the hands of capitalism but power and oppression lay in the center. Hansen (1993) explains that the social inequities that were being pointed out were “the result of power relationships” originally between the oppressed and those in power. Those in power oppress laborers to reinforce their own power.

Education, as a state apparatus (Althusser, 1971), becomes a vital part of political socialization and indoctrination. The learner becomes an indoctrinated agent of the representative authority. Traditionally, those in power use that power to create a form of truth, albeit truth that reinforces the oppressor’s reality. Specific to the adult basic writing classroom, the supremacy of academic discourse is offered as a universal truth—a universally accepted language that merely reinforces the discourse of the dominant. However, critical education seeks to uncover and resist these forms of indoctrination and oppression. Adult basic writing students, who make use of more than on discourse, find

themselves at an inherent disadvantage as they attempt to dwell within a society that believes their discourse is a deviation from the norm.

Ideology and the adult basic writer. The term ideology, central to much of social theory, is a difficult one to define, which, according to McLaren (1989), is embedded with its own assumptions about knowledge and truth. Radical philosophy and theorists resist a “straightjacketing” of the term in order to fully make use of critical potential. In practice, ideology can be understood within its critical potential as positive and negative frameworks of thought that are used to give meaning to the world (p. 187). Extending this definition, ideology “can be linked not only to the discursive formations and the social relations they structure, but also to the interests that they further” (p. 189). Taken from this perspective, an oftentimes-contentious term like ideology has the ability to uncover the way the dominant culture impacts students within and without the classroom through the use of power. But ideology is not static; rather, it is continually produced as repression, which stabilizes a “particular form of power and domination” (Hall, 1996, p. 27). The creation of ideology, with the intent of dominating, is usually dealt by the hands of those in power.

While Marxist writers and thinkers embedded ideology in economic terms, and some, such as Hall (1996), extended ideology into the cultural sphere, it is important to translate ideology and power to educational terms. When discussing ideology and power in the classroom, one thinks of a top-down system that has the oppressors and the oppressed. Popularized by Paulo Freire (1970), the banking model of education pitted the learner against the educator. The educator holds the power and merely deposits education into the learner. The learner, being inherently powerless, takes the instruction. Freire’s

critique of this model of education was one that advocated for a student-teacher, teacher-student model to education that attempted to neutralize issues of power in the classroom. The locus of control becomes the learner, struggling to regain power—for his/her voice to be heard—from the educator.

The adult basic writer, therefore, is essentially being oppressed at the hands of the dominant academic discourse that devalues alternate discourse and idiolects. This devaluation of the adult basic writing students' discourse also threatens to devalue the adult basic writing students themselves. Without assimilation to the academic discourse and an effort to minimize the impact of their own home culture and language, adult basic writing students are at an economic and social disadvantage. As evidenced later in the study, many of the participants linked their educational goals to larger economic goals. Students were enrolled at the College in order to get a degree or training to find a better career or advance in their current career. The only way to achieve this economic hope is to assimilate to the dominant academic English discourse.

In contrast to this, many adult educators strive to create a learning environment that allows the learner to “take primary initiative for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 110). Meant to liberate students by giving them ownership and authority over course content and assessment, this potentially repressive ideology reproduces the assumptions of one instructor. Within the basic writing classroom, the recreation of repressive ideologies, or the replacement of one ideology for another, is a danger and will be discussed later.

Hegemony and the domination of discourse. Additionally, out of the Marxist tradition grew the thoughts and writings of Antonio Gramsci. Found primarily in his *Prison Notebooks* (1971), Gramsci outlined a key term within the radical and critical thought: hegemony. Simply put, hegemony is the intellectual, moral, social, and economic influence by a dominant group over subordinate groups. This influence, however, Gramsci notes, comes from the consent spontaneously given by groups of people to those who have higher prestige (p. 12). And it is important to note the unconscious nature of hegemony that grows out of the ideology of the dominant. While adult basic writers are in search of a new beginning—a liberation from a lower economic or educational context—they are in a hegemonic trap. Their only path to freedom is to accept and assimilate to the dominant academic discourse. However, in doing so, they are devaluing their own dialect and culture. The dominant discourse does exactly that: it dominates all other discourses.

There are ways to uncover ways learners unconsciously endorse a system that harms them. It is necessary, therefore, to identify and learn about popular hegemonic identities within the formal and non-formal educational settings (Sandlin, 2005; Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2011). It is through interrogation and dialogue (Kaufmann, 2010) that hegemony can be identified and resisted. Specifically to this study, identification and resistance came in the form imagining the moon; that is, learning what the dominant academic discourse is and, rather than fully assimilate to it, use it to enhance the multiple discourses and come to a greater understanding of self.

Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy

Rising from the ground of his literacy work among the poor and illiterate in Brazil in the 1940s and 1950s, key concepts of critical pedagogy are rooted in Freire's radical Christian faith and civic duty. Freire's literacy work was bound to his understanding of liberation theology—a theology that focused on the lived experiences of the oppressed within society. In order to vote in national elections, citizens of Brazil were required to be literate. By teaching citizens to read, Freire was increasing the voting population and upsetting the dominant political structures within Brazil.

Despite his success, Freire was imprisoned and later exiled. As his ideas began to be read in a Western context, other critical theorists latched on to his pedagogy. The term “critical pedagogy” is never seen in any of Freire's writings; American theorist Henry Giroux coined the term. Focusing on the potential to liberate learners through a process of problem-posing and critique of dominant structures within education, politics, and society, critical pedagogy carries a few core assumptions about educators, learners, and the traditional classroom environment.

Assumptions of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is concerned with a new way of education that involves the use of critical consciousness in the classroom to critique dominant ideologies and systems of power. Its starting point, therefore, is itself a critique of past pedagogies and classroom trends. In order to better understand critical pedagogy, it is important to discuss the assumptions of critical pedagogy.

First, critical pedagogy assumes that all education is political (Tisdell, 1993, 1998). From a critical educator's perspective, this new way of education is a “struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations” (Giroux, 1985, xiii) that, when manifested

through the coupling of critical reflection and action, not only results in a change that counters oppression where it is found, but also “develops a deep and abiding faith in the struggle to humanize life itself” (Giroux, 1985, xiv). Since all education is political, there are embedded ideologies in educational institutions and classrooms that exercise power over education and the process of learning (Tisdell, 1993).

In defining ideology, Giroux (1983) makes a distinction between ideology and the materiality of culture, claiming that ideology should not be reduced to “material embodiments of lived experience” (p. 15), such as a school or an institution. Rather, ideology “refers to the production, consumption, and representation of ideas and behavior, all of which can either distort or illuminate the nature of reality” (p.16) and when seen in light of struggle, critique, and creation becomes a powerful critical tool itself (Marcuse, 1964). With the power of critique, ideology must shift from merely a discourse to include a concern for the lived, daily experiences of humans, taking into account forces of domination and offering emancipatory and transformative solutions.

Not only is education political and therefore never ideologically neutral (Giroux, 1998, 2006), but public schooling is also incapable of offering objective knowledge. Radical critics continually challenge claims of neutrality in schools by pointing out “the transmission and reproduction of a dominant culture in schools” (1989, p. 129) that benefit students from that culture. Critical pedagogy “set itself the task of uncovering how the logic of domination and oppression was reproduced within the various mechanisms of schooling” (Giroux, 1989, p. 128). By exposing and challenging ideology, critical pedagogy aims to liberate students through that knowledge. Further, action is needed to fully put an end to ideological oppression (Kaufmann, 2010), a concept which

will be discussed later in the chapter within the framework of the basic writing classroom.

A second major assumption of critical pedagogy is that the fundamental relationship between teacher and student in a traditional classroom is flawed (Freire, 1970; Tisdell, 1993). Rather than be a relationship centered on learning and mutual respect, traditional classroom environments create a relationship of goods and services. Freire (1970) describes two types of education. The first, the banking system, is one where the instructor deposits information into the student and “resists dialogue” (p. 83). Freire likens the banking system teacher-student relationship to that of an oppressor-oppressed relationship as “it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power” (p. 77).

In essence, the banking system of education is a form of oppression as it does not allow the student to claim the education for him/herself. Rather, the banking system of education *informs* the student what he/she should take as education and leaves no room for discussion, argument, or dialogue. By not allowing the student to question “why?” the banking system of education quickly becomes one of tyranny. Further, Giroux (1985) targets the location of traditional education, school systems, as structures to be interrogated as they perpetuate a hierarchical educational relationship between learners and instructors, learners and administrators, and instructors and administrators. Tisdell (1993) also identifies various ways in which the “structured power relations” (p. 210) within adult education classrooms can lead to both resistance and reproduction of the power, specifically in terms of a curricular emphasis on males, for example.

An education of “I wonder”. The goal of critical pedagogy is to become “an education of ‘I wonder,’ instead of merely, ‘I do’” (Freire, 1974, p. 32), allowing learners to question, uncover, and critique systems of ideology bound in traditional schooling. Additionally, recent research has shown critical pedagogy’s place in critiquing issues of race, gender, and sexuality (Grace & Wells, 2007), in response to a common critique of critical pedagogy. By rejecting a broken model of education as discussed above, critical pedagogy aims to “regard dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 83). Dialogue facilitates the inclusion of outside knowledge—lived and/or experiential knowledge of the learner (Lange, 2004)—in the educational setting (Kaufmann, 2010). These other forms of knowledge, gained through dismantling the power structures present in the classroom, lead to new knowledge and a critical reflection (Kaufmann, 2010).

From business to literacy to writing classrooms, critical pedagogy offers liberation from a market-driven system of education in favor of a democratic classroom that allows students to question and be part of the learning process, rather than vessels to merely collect and carry information. Therefore, there is a radical revision to the teacher-student relationship, one that puts the two as learners and as teachers concurrently. Since “a critical teacher earns the right to propose only if students exercise the right to dispose” (Shor, 2009, p. 21), the success of the instructor is bound with the success of the students as a whole.

Central to critical pedagogy’s liberation efforts is Freire’s concept of conscientization. Translated from the Portuguese *conscientização*, and literally meaning critical consciousness, conscientization is the attempt to bring reflection and action

together (Kaufmann, 2010) to help put an end to ideological reproduction. Throughout adult education, there has been an emphasis on fostering critical reflection in order to enact social (Choules, 2007; Grace & Wells, 2007) or personal (Kucukaydin, 2010) change. Conscientization, as Freire (1974) describes, and similar to hooks' (1994) notion of engaged pedagogy, starts with a core belief in the role of humans in the world:

We began with the conviction that the role of man was not only to be in the world, but to engage in relations with the world—that through acts of creation and re-creation, man makes cultural reality and thereby adds to the natural world. (Freire, 1974, p. 39)

Engaging in relations with the world, as opposed to imposing on reality, is an act of critical consciousness and is necessary for a truly democratic setting (Freire, 1974). In order to engage in relations with the world, Freire makes a distinction between dialogue, a flattened hierarchical relationship nourished by “love, humility, hope, faith, and trust” (p. 40), and anti-dialogue, which lacks love and is therefore a-critical, vertical, and “issues communiqués” rather than communicates (p. 41). Central to Freire’s act of critical consciousness is an unwavering hope and love in the existence and purpose of human beings in the world through dialogue (Kaufmann, 2010).

Beginning with the dialogic relationship, Freire outlines a clear path to a democratic classroom as well as a level of critical consciousness. Since the dialogic relationship requires a back and forth between two or more parties, a type of integration is required, which he calls “the behavior characteristic of flexibly democratic regimes” (p. 21). This level of democratization itself “requires a maximum capacity for critical thought” (p. 21). Therefore, when one’s worldview stems from the dialogic, a

democratic-friendly climate is created that opens the door to the potential for critical consciousness (hooks, 1994; Kaufmann, 2010). It is in these relationships that instructors and students may find liberation through problem-posing.

In practice, critical pedagogy is concerned with giving students the space to 1) openly discuss the political nature of education and, 2) learn to question answers they have been given. Shor (1993) emphasizes that from a critical perspective, everything in education is political in nature. All decisions made when putting a course together—course readings in the syllabus, classroom policies, assignments and projects—are made from a specific ideological perspective that can be examined and questioned by students. Every classroom is inherently political and is privileging an ideological perspective. Therefore, students must learn to question answers and “experience education as something they do, not as something done to them” (p. 26). It is through this dialogic relationship that liberation is possible (Grace & Wells, 2007; Kaufmann, 2010; Lange, 2004).

A problem-posing approach emphasizes the role of the learner as it is an active part in the democratization of the classroom. This process oftentimes includes a desocialization, which “refers to the questioning the social behaviors and experiences in school and daily life that make us into the people we are” (Shor, 1993, p. 114). The desocialization that Shor discusses is done in order to liberate learners from dominant ideologies that are imbedded in many educational settings. Moving toward liberation—toward a critical consciousness—is an act of resistance that centers the education experience on the learner rather than the educational institution. In doing so, critical

pedagogy resists the oppressor/oppressed model of education that Freire critiqued and gives the power to the learner:

The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only the power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. (Freire, 1970, p. 44)

And this conclusion is an understandable one. Freire rhetorically asks, “Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society?” (p. 45). It is because of their understanding of the scope and strength of oppression that the oppressed are able to cognitively stand up and resist: “They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it” (p. 45).

Extending this solution to education, Freire would rightfully argue that only students, once they come to an understanding of their education as oppression, are able to make a change. By questioning learned behaviors and power relations, the learner is able to uncover the power that produces “social forms” (Giroux, 1985, p. 23), and privileges certain meanings, experiences, and forms of knowledge (Giroux, 1990). Writing specifically about critical English instructors, Giroux (1990) highlights the benefits of teaching from a critical pedagogical perspective:

By challenging the commonsense assumptions that are inscribed in the dominant ideology of discourse and power, it becomes possible for teachers of English to reconstruct their own theoretical frameworks by adding new categories of

analyses and by rethinking what the actual purpose of their teaching might be. (p. 85)

While Giroux emphasizes the potential benefit for pedagogical change in instructors, critical pedagogy is truly concerned about the situation of the learner. When attempting to give students a seat at that table of education, a tenet vital to critical pedagogy, or what Freire labels as when students "are challenged to increase and improve their understanding of how reality is becoming" (Olson, 1992), Freire advocates for a general respect of the student's subjectivity. Giving students authority, however, does not lead to the destruction of the role of the teacher. "Dialogue and respect for students and their contexts do not mean that the teacher has to disappear;" rather, it means that the teacher must be careful how he or she uses the inherent authority found in being a teacher (Olson, 1992). The students possess a fragile freedom and authority and any use of teacher authority to undermine this must be resisted, according to Freire.

More specifically, careful use of teacher authority leads adult educators to question the instruments that stem from ideological rigid structures of the institution. For example, Freire specifically critiques the use of standardized tests, calling them "guessing games" (Olson, 1992), and in turn seeks ways to increase student curiosity. In this curiosity—this questioning—students have the chance to achieve conscientization that is indeed beneficial for their intellectual future, which is one free from institutions. In essence: liberation:

I wish to emphasize that in educating adults, to avoid a rote, mechanical process one must make it possible for them to achieve critical consciousness so that they can teach themselves to read and write. (Freire, 1974, p. 48)

Common Critiques of Critical Pedagogy

Although critical pedagogy has been used in many educational settings, there are a number of prevailing critiques. The often-cited feminist critique highlights Freire's male-dominated language and the lack of diverse voices in the field. Another common critique is that putting critical pedagogy into practice runs the risk of a recreation of ideology, which is not emancipatory or empowering for learners.

The feminist critique. Perhaps the most significant critique of Freirean critical pedagogy comes from the feminist perspective. While feminist educators agree that emancipatory and feminist education share common approaches and goals (Weiler, 1991; hooks, 1993), there is a clear critique of Freire's work's application to diverse, non-rational educational settings. Feminist critics specifically have critiqued Freire's work for its assumption that all types of oppression are identical. Additionally, according to Weiler (1991), his reliance on the male referent undermines his essential argument by falling back on the model of oppression he critiques and "constructing a phallogocentric paradigm of liberation" (hooks, 1993, p. 148). Since feminist theory highlights and validates difference while promoting social change, Freire's major theoretical conceptions run the risk of becoming abstractions, void of any clear, applicable meaning.

Freire's conception of humanization (1970), fails to include diverse perspectives on what it means to be human as well as what types of oppression different populations are exposed to (Weiler, 1991). This extension of two key concepts in Freirean thought does not do justice to certain contexts in which learners are exposed to multiple forms of oppression, or have overlapping experiences. The assumption embedded in Freire's thought, according to Weiler (1991), is that everyone who is oppressed is mired in the

same type of oppression and the form of emancipation needed is universal. Taking this to the extreme, the critique of Freire's approach seemingly ignores the unique forms of oppression and needs for emancipation, and distancing theory from practical application. How the dialogic turned to democracy is unclear in Freire's work. An unquestioned dialogue is problematic for critical feminists (Kaufmann, 2010).

For bell hooks (1994), however, this shortcoming does not negate Freire's life work or undermine critical pedagogy as a whole. Using Freire's model of critical interrogation, hooks challenges the writings of Freire but does not dismiss the work due to his shortcoming: "because you are thirsty you are not too proud to extract the dirt and be nourished by the water" (p. 149). Indeed, hooks (1994) adopts many of Freire's ideas in her own pedagogical theories, though she also takes critical pedagogy to task for not dealing with gender and race, and refers to engaged pedagogy drawing on both the critical and feminist pedagogy literature. Engaged pedagogy takes many of the tenets of critical pedagogy and highlights the importance of holistic care for students (hooks, 1994). By taking critical reflection and action by the student and adding the critical reflection and action of the instructor, while attending to gender, race, and class issues, hooks emphasizes the role of the instructor in the emancipatory process.

Equally, Weiler (1991) critiques Freire's concept of conscientization—the act of coming to a critical consciousness—as it assumes critical teachers and students are unified, fighting against oppression together. What is not addressed by Freire is the possibility that the instructor is part of the oppression, despite his/her efforts to act as liberator. There is a real danger, in a critical classroom, of recreating, replicating, and replacing one ideology for another.

Critical pedagogy has been critiqued for being overly rational, failing to take into consideration different ways learning takes place and the role of relationships and social context plays in the learning environment (Ellsworth, 1989). While recent discussions have focused critical discourse on not only critique, but also creativity (Daley, 2001; Greene, 1995; Tavin, 2003), Freire's original work is based in liberation from economic and class oppression; therefore, critical pedagogy has historically focused on issues of class and ignored other dimensions of positionality, i.e., race, gender (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Tisdell, 1998), sexual orientation (Grace & Wells, 2007), ability. Within the adult education literature on critical and multicultural pedagogy, there have been some discussions of different versions of feminist pedagogy and their relationship to critical pedagogy as summarized by Tisdell (1998). She notes that some versions of feminist pedagogy or discussion of women learners have become considerations of a "generic woman," still ignoring race and ethnicity (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Tisdell, 1998), but poses that critical and poststructural feminist pedagogies and some critical multicultural approaches more adequately address some of the limitations of critical pedagogy. Critical feminist perspectives have problematized both instructor and student positionality of gender, race, and cultures as well as class as issues that impact the learning environment that were traditionally ignored by discussions in critical pedagogy with their emphasis on class as the self constructs knowledge in relation to others (Tisdell, 1998). It is the connection between learners and instructors, learners and other learners, and learners and the social context in which they reside that critical pedagogy fails to highlight, but is necessary for continued inclusive emancipation.

The ideological critique. The role and authority of the teacher in a critical classroom is another source of critique in the literature. Throughout Freire's (1970, 1974) work, there is an assumption that the critical teacher is united with the oppressed against the larger forces of the oppressors. There is a danger in this assumption in that the critical instructor who is challenging ideology in the classroom may be merely replacing one ideology for another. Writing specifically about critical instructors in the writing composition classroom, Hairston (2003) delivers a blistering critique of pedagogy she saw as putting "dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student" (p. 698). Critical pedagogy, she argues, threatens to silence students and undermine the low-risk student centered classroom environment that compositionists have been trying hard to create.

Interestingly, Hairston placed blame for the critical shift on the housing of writing programs in English Departments in colleges and universities. She claimed English Departments have become a breeding ground for various critical literary theories, such as deconstruction, post-structuralism, and Marxist critical theory, and it was only a matter of time before such theories "trickled down to the lower floors of English departments where freshman English dwells" (p. 702). Extending Freire's banking and oppressor/oppressed models, there is a reductionist danger: "one can say that because standard English is the dialect of the dominant class, writing instruction that tries to help students master that dialect merely reinforces the status quo and serves the interest of the dominant class" (p. 703). This type of critique, then, causes courses to become more about the instructor's politics and less about the instruction of writing: "with a huge

captive enrollment of largely unsophisticated students, what a fertile field to cultivate to bring about political and social change” (p. 704). Her critique is a prime example of the tension adult basic writers find themselves in. In order to succeed academically (and, in turn, economically), adult basic writers must reject any pedagogy that encourages critique and assimilate to the dominant discourse.

The role of faculty is to help students learn to write in order for them “to learn, to explore, to communicate, to gain control over their lives” (p. 705). Cultivating a low-risk classroom environment, Hairston argues, is the best way to accomplish this goal. When critical approaches are brought into the classroom, student involvement and voice may be silenced as faculty run the risk of merely re-reinforcing ideology—the ideology of opposition to the dominant culture. Since faculty inherently have the power in a classroom setting, using such power to resist the dominant culture may in fact recreate their own repressive ideology, rather than enable students to truly critique and resist ideology.

Faculty should avoid infusing specific multicultural or diverse content into classrooms, Hairston argues. Doing so creates an artificial environment that keeps the instructor in control and shifts the focus away from student writing and toward faculty ideology. The focus in a writing course should be the students and their writing. It is the role of writing faculty to “help students articulate and understand [their] experience, but we also have the important job of helping every writer to understand that each of us sees the world through our own particular lens, one shaped by unique experiences” (p. 710). A faculty imposed perspective defeats this goal. Interestingly, Hairston claims that the intent to diversify colleges and universities as well as writing courses is a positive

development, however “real diversity emerges from the students themselves and flourishes in a collaborative classroom in which they work together to develop their idea and test them out on each other” (p. 711). The center of the course should be the students and their experiences, not the agenda of the instructor. Hairston’s warnings are important for this study in that many of her critiques were part of the theory and planning of this study. It was the goal of this study to show that when given the chance to critique in a classroom environment, adult basic writing students do not experience lower standards of writing; rather, the adult basic writers are given an opportunity to dwell within the tension of the discourses and imagine the moon without neglecting their idiolect.

Ellsworth (1989) echoes this critique and potential danger of critical pedagogy. Attempting to create a critical and democratic classroom, or empower students, “give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact” (p. 306). In fact, Ellsworth lays blame to critical pedagogy’s failures on the very language it uses. Assuming that emancipation is a goal of critical pedagogy “implies the potential for an emancipated teacher,” who must be able to “bring subjugated knowledges to light” (p. 307). However, if critical pedagogy is right in assuming that learners and teachers are bound by their own learned behaviors and ideology, helping to emancipate learners proves impossible for an equally bound teacher. Another problematic term used often by critical instructors is dialogue, which assumes there is equal opportunity for every learner to express his or her opinions (p. 314), seemingly ignoring the impact a physical classroom, student personalities, and student perception of teacher authority has on the potential for dialogue. These contradictions undermine critical pedagogy’s ultimate goal and, according to Ellsworth, create a

repressive myth that cannot truly be emancipatory or critical. Despite her best efforts to create a democratic setting that encouraged learners to discuss issues of race and power, she found that even as she attempted to remove all oppressive power, there still existed forces of oppression that went unspoken.

Likewise, Collard (1995) notes that the “critical turn” in adult education has led to a “deprofessionalizing” of the field (p. 63) that privileges a rejection of hierarchy in the classroom. However, a hierarchy is ironically inherent in the critique of hierarchy: “For while egalitarian in terms of its own adherents the new class is by its CCD [careful and critical discourse] hierarchically related to those outside its boundaries” (p. 67). In essence, attempting to create a democratic setting in turn replaces one ideology for another, echoing Ellsworth (1989) and Hairston (2003) above.

Ellsworth continues her criticism of critical pedagogy by noting that the pedagogy’s dependence on rationalistic assumptions, such “the teaching of analytic and critical skills for judging truth and merit of propositions” (p. 303) merely reinforce a dominant repressive ideology that excludes other ways of knowing and knowledge. Simply, critical pedagogy’s rational epistemological orientation produces an incomplete, partial view on knowledge and experience that has the potential to exclude voices from students of color and women. Within the basic writing classroom at community colleges, it is vital to make room for, and understand, the voices of the typically marginalized as they are part of the classroom environment and, most notably, caught in the midst of the ongoing pedagogical tension of the basic writing classroom.

Critical Multiculturalism and Critical Pedagogy

In order to make this room in the classroom environment, and in response to some of the feminist critiques of critical pedagogy mentioned above, some adult educators have turned to a critical multiculturalism that takes critical pedagogy's call to critique and applies it to issues of race, ethnicity, culture, and sexual orientation. By foregrounding learner and instructor positionality, critical multiculturalism strives to create a more inclusive emancipatory effort (Guy, 1999; Tisdell, 1998).

Education is a "contextual and situational process" that must take into account learner's cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2000, p. 21). While this is implied in discussions of critical pedagogy, it is often not discussed directly. By ignoring learner's cultural backgrounds, educators are implicitly reproducing the repressive ideology that privileges a Eurocentric conception of education and language as the academic standard. This is exactly the issue within the basic writing classroom. In remediating students in writing, educators are in essence educating for assimilation (Castagno, 2009) rather than critical awareness. Educating for assimilation assumes that the learner is already at a disadvantage due to his/her cultural background and influence. The goal of education for assimilation is to attempt to "mainstream" students by increasing "cultural compatibility between [the student's] home and school cultures" and normalize students to the "White, middle class standard" (Castagno, 2009, p. 44). Essentially, assimilation is an attempt to perpetuate hegemony and downplay difference in the classroom.

Part of being critically aware is the ability to look specifically at how knowledge is created, including how "biases, perspectives, experiences, and power all contribute to the way knowledge is constructed and legitimated" (Castagno, 2009, p. 46). With the end

goal of encouraging “maintenance of one’s cultural competence while also acquiring competence in the culture of power,” (p. 47) educating for critical awareness offers the basic writing student the ability to critically analyze the language being presented in the course and determine whether or not it is compatible, from a power perspective, to the student’s home language. Becoming critically aware allows the student to use the language of the dominating culture to move within the system, while holding on to his/her own cultural background (Ukpokudo, 2010) and positionality. Creating such an environment is an important step towards, what hooks (2003) called, the ability to “share knowledge in a manner that does not reinforce exiting structure of domination” (p. 45). The adult basic writing student should not be viewed as being present in the classroom to “serve the will of the professor” (p. 91); rather, the instructor should strive to become sensitive to the context of students (Horton & Freire, 1990) and encourage them to question canonical truths (Sealey-Ruiz, 2010).

Paying attention to the culture of the learner also includes the current context in which they learn. Within adult education, renewed interest in critical multicultural approaches to education have led to positioning critical media literacy and popular culture (Guy, 2007; Tisdell, 2008; Wright & Sandlin, 2009) as legitimate environments for learning and cultural critique that can be included as part of a critical pedagogy approach. By continuing to research the adult learner as being contextually and culturally situated, and deeply affected by media and popular culture, current critical educators are examining the ways that learners are affected by not only issues of positionality in the classroom itself, but by the mutual influences of culture that affect how they continue to construct their identity (Guy, 2007) and how learning happens in the classroom. This

broader focus shifts Freire's and Giroux's foundational work away from solely economic-focused and toward the positionality of learners in the classroom, rather than leaving Eurocentrism as unproblematicized (Brookfield, 2003).

In response to a call for a more race-centric approach to critical theory in adult education for example, Brookfield (2003) admits that a racialized perspective, one that understands that one's positionality frames life and education, is needed. The field of adult education is void of any non-Eurocentric racialism in research and writing. In order to bring to light issues of race within critical theory, Brookfield (2003) advocates for a criticality viewed through "the prism of African Americans' experience of racism," for example (p. 156). There is a lack of attention given to race as a separate dimension of oppression in traditional critical theory literature.

Critical multiculturalism, as outlined by McLaren (1995) goes beyond merely seeing diversity, or inclusion of underrepresented voices, as the end goal: "Critical multiculturalism interrogates the construction of difference and identity in relation to a radical politics" (p. 43). In other words, the purpose of critique is to advocate for a form of social justice and educational access. Through putting race and racism as a central topic in her adult education English classes, Sealey-Ruiz (2010) was able to offer learners a space to "examine their social, historical, and political realities" (p. 47). Recent publications in adult education, such as Sheared, Johnson-Bailey, Colin, Peterson, Brookfield, & Cunningham's *The Handbook of Race in Adult Education* (2010) volume, devotes significant writing to articulating a critical multiculturalism that emphasizes the role of race and ethnicity in the learning process. Additionally, critical approaches outside the field of adult education have been integrated into the field to add an emphasis on

positionality. Despite its origination in the field of law studies, critical race theory offers counterstorying to any research field in an attempt to “contrast, the majoritarian, race-neutral, and liberal meta-story” (Closson, 2010, p. 176).

In sum then, the work of numerous adult educators who have discussed the significance of gender, race, class and sexual orientation and positionality in teaching and learning (Closson, 2010; Guy, 1999; Tisdell, 1993, 1998) has brought the language and critique inherent in critical pedagogy to contexts previously ignored in the class focused and overly rational discussions of critical pedagogy. By including feminist and critical race perspectives in the critical pedagogy literature, researchers in adult education are counterstorying the various limitations and critiques of critical pedagogy. Additionally within the field, public pedagogy has taken central tenets of critical pedagogy and intersected it with popular culture and other informal cultural institutions (Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2011) as areas of major learning and identity development.

Pedagogical Perspectives of Basic Writing in Community Colleges

Community colleges and preparatory education oftentimes go hand in hand. The groundbreaking work by Shaughnessy at CUNY in the 1970s revolutionized how all students, no matter their academic performance up to that point, accessed education. There is, however, tension within community colleges as to the purpose and role of basic, or developmental, writing and reading courses. This section will first discuss the writing directive of community colleges as well as the difference between the terms “developmental” and “basic” writing. It will then consider what has been successful in basic writing classes. Third will be a consideration of problematic issues in basic

writing, and then finally a consideration of issues in a critical pedagogy approach to writing.

The Writing Directive and the Politics of Naming

The movement toward basic writing education, as it is now understood (historically, composition courses were designed to bring students up to speed on academic writing), was borne on the heels of the radical social and political changes that were happening in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s, by Mina Shaughnessy's assumption that "basic writers are indeed educable" (Mutnick, 2001, p. 185). Her seemingly obvious conclusion, however, changed the landscape of higher education. In her seminal text, *Errors and Expectations*, Shaughnessy posits that student errors were logical, revealing an effort to write correctly, rather than a cognitive deficiency (186), an idea later echoed by Mike Rose and Brenda Greene who "refutes descriptions of basic writers as 'egocentric'" (p. 189).

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, cuts were made to basic writing programs, which were seen as "temporary, marginal, [and] expendable skills course[s]," as colleges and universities sought to trim budgets (p. 194). However, research into the basic writer and the field turned further away from a cognitive perspective and began to embrace a social perspective to understanding the basic writer. This perspective allowed for research "on cultural difference as well as persistent tensions between dominant and subordinate discourses" (p. 189). Rather than being afflicted with a learning disability, basic writers were in fact negotiating two different worlds—two different cultures and identities—as they entered and performed in the college setting. Throughout the 1980s there was an internal debate over the merits of abandoning one culture to take on the more dominant

one. While most basic writing classrooms reject approaching instruction on the basis of “skills-driven exercises” meant to shed the lesser culture and adopt the greater culture, this tension is very much alive today (p. 191).

Within the field of pre-college writing, a number of terms are used for the basic writing classroom: developmental, remedial, and basic. While colleges and universities will often use the terms interchangeably, there is a difference within the fields of developmental education and writing that must be noted here.

Traditionally, these types of writing courses were commonly understood as designed for students who had many things wrong with them, including the way they learn and process writing (Shaughnessy, 1976). However, basic writers are unique in that they are not navigating a sliding scale of educational development; rather, they are navigating two (or more) distinct dialects of English (Bizzel, 1986). And that is the real focus of basic writing courses and the purpose of this study.

Due to the original work of Shaughnessy at CUNY in the 1960s and 1970s, basic writing success has consistently been entangled with issues of access and persistence. The original intent of basic writing programs was to offer educational access to students who, despite not having any learning deficiency, were deemed unprepared for a college education. A radical approach, many institutions weighed the success of open access on the outcome: increase in student persistence and completion. Even today, the current U.S. President has increased national attention on community colleges by mandating higher completion rates (Dervarics, 2009). Therefore, in order to set the context for various pedagogical approaches to basic writing, it is necessary to first understand the literature on student success within the basic writing system.

Success in Basic Writing Programs

The literature is clear about what leads to success in the basic writing classroom. This is an important area of literature to investigate as recent budget constraints on colleges and universities have led to many shutting down pre-college programs. Without clear empirical research that connects student success and persistence to the basic writing classroom, remedial programs are in danger. The empirical literature is clear, however, of the efficacy of basic writing programs.

Inviting students in. There is a misperception in education that students in remediation tend to continue in their remediation cycle with no end in sight (Shults, 2000). The research literature, however, refutes this fact and proves that on the whole, remediation, done well—an issue that will later be discussed—is quite successful. In basic writing courses that emphasized a more holistic understanding of writing and the learner, pass rates rose as well as credit hours completed after the course by 13% (Crews & Aragon, 2007). These findings were confirmed in two studies (Crews & Aragon, 2004; Southard & Clay, 2004) that found those students who participated in remediation recorded higher grade point averages than those who do not, higher retention rates, in a short amount of time (Shults, 2000; Southard & Clay, 2004).

In contrast to remedial classrooms use of behaviorist methods to “fix” students’ inability to write, holistic basic writing encourages the learner to make use of his or her lived experience and academic interests in the remediation process and may be employed by a number of pedagogical approaches. Coles and Wall (1987) describe this use of personal history as vital to understanding the student and his or her motivation for entering the college classroom. In contrast, the literature shows that attempts to remediate

students' writing through, what Curry (2006) calls, a "skills based curriculum" will be met with abject failure. While some students may indeed pass the course, on the whole students are unable to write in various settings, a large number drop the course, and many leave the institution. This limited approach to writing instruction caused students to believe that writing, as a practice, was unrelated to their academic pursuits.

While remedial writing courses have proven to be successful (Shults, 2000; Crews & Aragon, 2004, 2007) remediation that is performed with a limited outcome in mind (skills acquisition) needs to be avoided. The findings of the studies clearly show that in order for basic writing courses to continue to be successful, instructors need to understand their students from a socio-cultural perspective that seeks to invite students into the academic discourse (Bartholomae, 2003; Curry, 2006) rather than focus merely on the mechanics of writing. Language is powerful, especially in a writing classroom, and it conveys general feelings of inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the institution (Roy, 1995).

Access to learning assistance. Simply put, access to learning assistance matters. Callahan and Chumney (2009) and Perin (2004) agree that access to learning assistance, such as tutoring, increases both classroom success and overall educational persistence. In taking a look at how two- and four-year institutions provide writing remediation, Callahan and Chumney (2009) observed that while remedial writing courses were remarkably identical in student population in terms of race/ethnicity, high school location, and percent of first-generation in higher education, the well-funded four-year institution saw a 100% pass rate of the remedial writing course, while the less-funded two-year institution saw a 22% pass rate. The study concludes that institutions that have

significant funding for learning assistance do a better job at remediating and retaining students. Therefore, “it does indeed make a huge difference where one chooses to matriculate to college” as “institutional resources serve as critical capital to remedial students” (pp. 1660-1661). Grade point averages reach one full point higher in students who made six or more visits in comparison to those students who visited the tutoring center less (Perin, 2004).

The learning assistance responsibility, however, does not reside solely with tutors and tutoring centers. Learning assistance also includes instructor assistance outside of the classroom, learning communities and writing partners in the classroom. In the face of continued student failure despite significant tutoring services, Darabi (2006) outlines a pilot program that made use of handpicked faculty to teach in learning communities outside of the classroom. The results were so drastic across the academic board that Darabi could claim, “the quantitative evidence seems to suggest that the basic writing course functioned better in an LC [learning community] than outside” (p. 61).

Exposure to the higher education culture. The higher education setting has an impact on adult student identity development, no matter the type of courses taken (Kasworm, 2005). Requiring enrollment in a basic writing classroom may put the student at odds with the college administration and the basic writing instructor. Coming into the semester with an already-strained relationship has negative effects on the other students in the classroom as well as the potential success of remediation throughout the semester. The findings of the studies (Collins & Bissell, 2004; Burley, Butner, & Ceida, 2001; Perin, Keselman, & Monopoli, 2003; Hoyt, 1999; Rochford, 2003) show that early exposure to the higher education culture, continued course enrollment, appropriate

academic preparation at the high school level, and intentional student involvement in course particulars all have the potential to increase success in the remedial classroom and create a potentially remedial environment that is conducive to learning and success.

Perin, Keselman, and Monopoli (2003) noted that students who were able to link their writing assignments to prior knowledge, or prior exposure to the culture of higher education, performed better on essay exams. Similarly, Hoyt (1999), in looking at students enrolled at a community college in Utah, surmised that students who had parents with college degrees had higher retention rates than those who did not. The argument here is that exposure to a higher education environment increases student motivation and ownership of learning.

Persistence in college is an indicator of, if not academic success, social and transitional success. It is therefore important to capture any issues of persistence as potentially issues of academic success. Students who are fully invested in the culture of higher education had higher retention rates than those students who worked more hours and attended school only part time (Hoyt, 1999). Likewise, students who enjoyed higher academic performance their first semester also tended to return to the college classroom at a greater rate than those with lower grades. Getting basic writing students invested in the college community and using their critical thinking skills is the foundation for continued success (Davi, 2006).

Current Problematic Approaches to Basic Writing

The literature is clear that basic writing programs work when they are holistic, are connected to out-of-classroom learning assistance, and allow students to connect to previous knowledge and experiences. Now that a clear picture has emerged concerning

basic writing student success with elements in and out of the classroom, it is necessary to look at various pedagogical approaches to basic writing.

Within the literature, the term first-year writing refers to both college composition and basic writing courses. Under the umbrella of first year writing, there are various pedagogical approaches including, but not limited to, process pedagogy and, more recently, critical pedagogies of writing.

Popularized by Janet Emig's (1971) assessment of secondary level writers, process pedagogy assumes that there is an inherent sequence to writing that can be followed at any level and by any writer. Emphasizing the writer's contextuality, process pedagogy challenged the role of educators. Elbow (1973) presented writing as an act that students can do on their own, giving them the authority as writers from day one. Creating universally applicable approaches such as free-writing and rejecting the hypersensitivity to lower order concerns (grammar, punctuation), process pedagogy handed the authority of writing to the student rather than the instructor. Within each student was the potential to become a powerful, personal writer through the use of prewriting, writing, and rewriting (Murray, 2003, p. 4). Writing was no longer viewed as a product, but a process to be followed (Murray, 2003). Process pedagogy revolutionized the field and rejected a production-based pedagogical approach that focused on lower-order concerns. Other theorists modified process pedagogy to pay attention to the cognitive choices made during the process (Flower & Hayes, 2003), while some rejected it entirely to focus on the cognitive development of writers, specifically basic writers (Lunsford, 2003).

The majority of pedagogical positioning in first-year writing is focused on the college composition classroom while basic writing pedagogy sprung out of democratic

educational theories. With basic writing's connection to student success and student access, many pedagogical approaches have tried and failed to make their mark on the field.

Writing placement testing. Historically, basic writing courses have been used to “mainstream” students, oftentimes without regard to the students’ cultural or societal histories, as expressed by Rose (1989). Therefore, writing competency has often been seen as the ability of students to adopt the writing conventions of the dominant culture and employ them in writing tasks.

It is necessary, however, to define writing competency in the larger context in which the student resides. One such definition of success takes into account the rate at which basic writing students pass their courses and are retained by the institution. Brunk-Chavez and Fredericksen (2008) takes a critical look at retention and pass rates as compared with placement tests. Within their study, they take into account placement test through Accuplacer. The placement test examines five aspects of writing and determines whether or not a student is prepared for college composition or is in need of remediation.

While the study is not designed to change the placement test system, it does take a specific look at how basic writing and traditional composition courses serve those in need, especially students from underrepresented backgrounds. Throughout their study, Brunk-Chavez and Fredericksen find that placement tests and early-semester diagnostic essays are strong predictors of student success. Together, “low scores on these two indicators can serve as an early-warning system” and provide instructors the opportunity to intervene or assist (p. 89). The study proposes “intervention” as a learning community that meets on a regular basis for one-on-one work with an instructor. Interestingly, the

study notes that, in general, students are better suited to learn about their learning process and the role of education in their lives. Brunk-Chavez and Fredericksen argue that doing so can take place in a laboratory setting and will enhance students' chances of long-term success and retention.

There are, however, pedagogical issues with the use of diagnostic (timed, impromptu) and placement testing. In her longitudinal study of writing and learning at the college level, Sternglass (1997) expresses concern with institutional testing as it gives a snapshot of a moment in time in a student's writing, but restricts the writing process and may produce an artificial or inaccurate writing sample, which ignores the writer's purpose and quality of expressed ideas. In fact, her study shows that students decreased their "surface errors" and were able to offer higher-level thinking and ideas when submitting out of class written work (p. 158), making use of a true process. These findings prove an unclear understanding of placement testing as a pedagogical method in the basic writing classroom as it seemingly contradicts the findings of Brunk-Chavez.

Adaptive pedagogical methods. With states and educational systems under pressure to relieve some of the budget pressure at institutions, many have set their sights on reversing the open-access policy of community colleges and doing away with basic education as a whole at four-year institutions. English and developmental education departments have been forced to adapt to both serve the students in need and bow to institutional pressure.

A variation of Elbow's competence-based studio, where students would work until they produced a passing portfolio, the "studio model," developed by Grego and Thompson (1996) offered students an alternative classroom environment that allowed for

one-on-one and group work. The “studio model” made use of creative and emotive components to the writing process and an experienced professor led students through various composition assignments and facilitated a group writing process (action/reflection/action).

Further isolating the basic writing population can be problematic, however. Alternatively, Soliday and Gleason’s project set out to integrate basic writers by including them in traditional composition courses concurrent with a two-semester course focused on language diversity and sociocultural differences (Mutnick, 2001, p. 197). By collapsing basic and composition courses, Soliday and Gleason were able to adapt to the budget needs of the institution and serve the basic writing population, to some success.

Merely removing basic writing courses does not mean students’ needs will be removed (Huse, Wright, Clark, & Hacker, 2005, p. 29). The University of Tennessee at Martin was determined to put together a basic writing program that would identify underprepared students before they entered the traditional semester. Rather than offer traditional semester basic writing courses, the study by Heidi Huse, et al., took the opportunity of state-mandated budget cuts to offer a pre-college course, taught by full-time faculty, many with terminal degrees, that would “move away from heavy emphasis on correction of students’ mechanical errors” and allow focus on students’ writing process as well as producing research essays (p. 35). Moving away from a pedagogy of correction and toward a pedagogy of success benefits the basic writing student in the long-term.

Mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is defined as the attempt to transition basic writing students into the traditional full-credit college course sequence. To be able to

mainstream, however, students must be aware of the academic discourse they are embedded in. In his well-read essay, “Inventing the University,” critical compositionist David Bartholomae (2003) describes a writing classroom that forces students to assume a unique discourse and put it to use. Oftentimes, Bartholomae argues, this attempt at using the academic discourse results in students writing for a specific instructor. Lost in the discourse of their readers, students will imitate rather than be involved in invention and discovery.

Imitation, in the composition classroom, stems from the lack of scholarly assignments and writing at the basic writing level. Basic writers are not engaged in scholarly writing; rather, they are asked to reproduce knowledge on tests and reports, both of which leave the writer outside of the academic discourse. This manufactured writing resides outside of the academic discourse and only perpetuates the existing tension between academic and non-academic discourse, according to Bartholomae.

In fact, the efficacy of traditional basic writing programs for working adults (a growing segment of developmental students) has been questioned. Advocating a curriculum that meets the needs of adult students, Gleason (2001) endorses “the position that remediation is inappropriate for adults who are returning to college” after a long hiatus from academic discourse (p. 121). Specifically, Gleason proposes a series of assignments that emphasize collaboration, cultural critique, and critical reasoning. Through writing a literacy and language autobiography, students are able to share, with other students in the class, their history with writing and language development. By giving the students authority to investigate their own language background, Gleason’s approach offers students immediate engagement with assignments that will eventually

lead to self-discovery, expansion of students' own literacies, and potentially the ability to mainstream.

A study of working adults in a basic writing class centered around the theme of the workplace by Coles and Wall (1987) also supports the need to be attentive to students' histories and immediate needs in the basic writing classroom. Privileging histories brings a unique type of learning to the classroom as well as instills a sense of power to an often-stymied writer who is unfamiliar with success.

That feeling of academic inadequacy leads to a "difficulty moving from personal and anecdotal written responses to those that offer more abstract and general analyses" (Coles & Wall, 1987, p. 303). While personal and individual, the writing of these students had an isolating affect on students. Furthermore, institutionalizing "'academic discourse' to basic readers and writers as if it were a unified body of literacy conventions and procedures to be mastered is to mystify what our students most need to have demystified: how work gets done in the university" (p. 313). Rather than view basic writing students as traveling from non-academic discourse into academic discourse, Coles and Wall advocate that these students are in fact living between two worlds—constantly shifting back and forth—as they navigate the higher education experience.

Critical Approaches to Basic Writing

The tension as to the role of the composition classroom is apparent throughout the literature. The literature is clear, however, that basic writing students are inherently in-between and are in need of pedagogy that addresses their unique position. Often highlighted are two primary areas: key issues in facilitating critical reflection, and the issue of the collaboration of students and teachers.

Issues in critical reflection and pedagogy. Hardin (2001) discusses the tension and makes a compelling case for the use of critical pedagogy in the writing classroom as writing itself is oftentimes understood as an act of critical reflection (Stevens, Gerber, & Hendra, 2010).

Ideally, compositionists want to make use of writing as a critical activity through teaching resistance. Hardin defines teaching resistance as promoting “resistance to the unconscious reification of ideological values as they are encountered in text,” and emphasizing the connection between “linguistic and textual representation and power” (p. 5). Furthermore, compositionists “have taken the idea that the academy is an acculturative institution and proposed that ideological reproduction can and should be revealed and critiqued” (p. 47). Simply stated, compositionists are simultaneously aware of the danger of propagating their own ideology and see the value in dominant ideology critique in the writing classroom.

The English classroom should approach ideology critique with the goal of enabling students to see themselves as authors of a text—a text they can interact with similar to the canonical texts they analyze in literature courses. Giving students an authority over their written text will make the academic discourse in which they write, often seen as unapproachable by students, accessible and applicable to students’ everyday needs. Enabling authority happens through a focus on student writing as well as de-centering the classroom power, such as incorporating students into the core decision-making of courses. The critical composition classroom can now empower students through enabling their textual authority as well as de-centering classroom power by offering them a voice in the course content and planning.

The tension between teaching the language of the academy and encouraging students' exploration and discovery of their own writing voice is found throughout the literature. Ritchie (1989) explores the negotiation between empowering students and satisfying institutional requirements. Inherently an issue of socialization (writers are always transforming language and trying to resolve dissonance among the voices they encounter in their own social networks), denying access to academic language is, in essence, denying students access to success.

Instructing the academic discourse should not be an end itself; rather, it should “focus on the heuristic function of language and its role in creating meaning” (Ritchie, 1989, p.153). There are multiple points of tension that prevent writing students from becoming empowered and creating meaning through their writing. Students have been socialized to write a certain way, and carry assumptions about what academic writing looks like and how academic writing is to be delivered in the classroom. Workshop-style classrooms, which often cultivate a collaborative environment, are unsettling to students who are expecting a top-down approach to the writing classroom. It is the workshop-style classroom, however, that holds the most potential in creating a critical environment for writing students as it both encourages the students to appreciate the perspectives of others and pushes the instructor to “go beyond reductive descriptions of writing,” as well as the one-dimensional descriptions of the role of teacher (p. 171).

Another interesting approach to critical pedagogy in the composition classroom positions the use of technology in the center of the critique. By providing “an occasion for students to reflect on and articulate their relationship to digital technology” (Duffelmeyer, 2002, p. 358), Duffelmeyer's action research with her first-year writing

classroom attempted to reveal cultural myths about technology and the writer's relationship to technology. Throughout the semester, students were asked to write a personal narrative, which allowed them "to become more conscious of their formation by cultural forces" (p. 362), analyze written texts, which asked students to "engage in sustained thinking and writing about multiple and often unfamiliar views on these topics" (p. 365), and finally, reflect on "the degree to which they developed new habits of mind during the semester" (p. 366). Through these assignments, Duffelmeyer was able to create an environment that makes use of relational thinking—an approach that emphasizes the "connections between the microconditions of one's experiences and the cultural macroconditions that affect them" (p. 360). In short: ideology critique.

Using critical pedagogy in the writing classroom offers the chance for student writers to see themselves in relation to a larger environment. In fact, the role of the critical compositionist is vital to not only the development of critical students, but also the development of critical instructors:

If part of our responsibility is to encourage students to explore and become critically conscious of the histories and ideologies which structure their lives, and if we encourage students to defy boundaries of thought and language, then we have to relinquish some of our control and learn to trust that the processes we set in motion and the values we model will themselves carry students along, even though we are unable to predict where those processes will lead students.

(Duffelmeyer, 2002, p.172)

At the root of compositionists arguing for the inclusion of critical pedagogy in the classroom is a belief that composition is about developing skills, but also about a

“metaawareness about language, a way to assess its various deployments, including one’s own” (Gilyard, 2008, p. 3). A metaawareness of language reveals that “one’s response to language is never neutral, innocent, or obvious—nor is that language” (p. 36). By positioning language as socially constructed (George, 2001), a critical composition classroom has the ability to change not the political position of students, but the rhetorical and hermeneutical skills. Being open about the existence of ideologies and the socially constructed nature of language, Gilyard (2008) argues that a depoliticized classroom is possible and allows multiple, differing ideologies to be examined openly. There is a danger of schools *re*creating ideology and therefore offering no escape for students or teachers who become trapped by “an oppressive ideology they will not even recognize because it seems as natural, as unquestionable, as air” (George, 2001, p. 96). This is a danger to students and instructors. Given that language and literacies are not neutral and always informed by an ideology (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2001), what then is the role of the instructor in a critical pedagogy-based classroom? How can instructors promote resistance to dominant ideology as well as instruct students in writing?

Teacher and student as collaborators. Gilyard (2008) connects the theoretical ideas of Cornel West to the writing classroom. In West’s work exists three methods to creating a deep democracy: the Socratic commitment (an examination of dominant ideology by “restlessly interrogat[ing] received and conventional wisdom (p. 8)), prophetic witness (a concern for social justice), and tragicomic hope (an enduring sense of carrying on, as represented in blues and jazz). These three spheres intersect with composition in that they become central to a liberal arts education, according to West. Extending West’s ideas, Gilyard argues that the composition classroom allows for these

spheres of democracy to be acted upon, thus transforming a liberal education into a public good. Composition studies, therefore, is a search for a more perfect democracy, not just training students to be technically good writers.

With such a description, the composition instructor, therefore, can be seen as a curator of democracy through dialogue (Kaufmann, 2010). Rejecting the notion of being completely in control of the classroom, Gilyard (2008) positions the composition instructor in a place of caretaker:

We should wish such a life of engagement, without the tragic consequences, for all of our students. We should lead them to engage in critical reception and production of language rather than lethargically to reproduce the status quo. In some sense, we should agree that only perilously can the idea of a productive life in the polis be separated from ongoing scrutiny of the imperfections—whatever our take on these blemishes—of the American political and educational order. (p. 3)

Control of the classroom is a central issue that critical compositionists must deal with in order to fully create a democratic and problem-solving classroom. Critical pedagogy, in fact, “reinvents the roles of teachers and students in the classroom and the kind of activities they engage in” (George, 2001, p. 93) and unlocks the ability for students to define, analyze, and problematize the economic, political and cultural forces that shape the lives they live.

While the 1980s suffered an educational crisis that attempted to undo many of the radical reforms forged in the 1970s, compositionists continue to innovate ways to avoid the dangers of a “bully pulpit.” George (2001) describes different ways to empower

students, resist dominant ideology, and resist imposing their own ideology on students: “this, then, is the aim of critical pedagogy—to enable students to envision alternatives, to inspire them to assume the responsibility for collectively recreating society” (p. 97). In short, critical pedagogy fosters a democratic public discourse that allows room for canonical and non-canonical literature, the connection of writing to students’ private domains, and gives students a rhetorical authority to challenge the ideology of the instructor. To alleviate the potential power tension found in critical composition classrooms, George advocates, in the line of Gilyard’s thoughts of being open and honest about ideological impositions, the teaching within a paradox. Critical composition should create, in students, a desire to question, uncover, and resist. Critical compositionists should be able to navigate the waters of academic discourse and native language in collaboration with their students (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2002). Ideally, critical compositionists should “train and problematize; create freedom with authority; teach resistance and hope for cooperation” (George, 2008, p. 109), in order to help students unlearn approaches to writing instruction.

Chapter Summary

Since the purpose of this study is to explore how critical pedagogy can foster both writing competency and critical consciousness in adult basic writing students, the study adds significant new knowledge in the fields of basic writing, adult education, and critical pedagogy. This chapter reviewed literature around critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism, as well as philosophical and pedagogical approaches and understandings to basic writing. The literature shows the inherent tension within the basic writing classroom from a purpose and placement perspective, as well as how the adult

basic writer is viewed within the educational system. Bound with student access and success, basic writing courses and programs must not only provide writing instruction and remediation, but also student persistence and completion. However, the growing tension within the field of basic writing shows that basic writing students are constantly navigating between two or more discourses, forced to abandon their home dialect in order to assimilate to the standard English of the dominant culture. Missing in basic writing instruction is a critical approach that is sensitive to learners' histories and identities and allows for a critique of the dominant ideology within basic writing curriculum. Chapter Three will discuss the methodology used in this study to explore the impact critical pedagogy can have on adult basic writers.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this critical action study is to explore how critical pedagogy can increase writing competency and critical consciousness among adult basic writing students. By opening the door to ideology critique to learners, critical pedagogy may be able to not only increase writing competency of adult basic writing students but also prepare them for lifelong education outside of the classroom, returning them to the workplace as active, critical thinkers (Freire, 1974).

This study is guided by two research questions, which are:

1. What is the role of critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom and what are ways it can be developed?
2. How can teaching a basic writing course from a critical pedagogical perspective foster writing competency and critical consciousness?

This chapter will discuss the research methodology, critical action research, of the study within the larger qualitative research context. Participant selection and the setting of the study will also be discussed, followed by a description of the types of data collected and how they will be analyzed. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of the trustworthiness of the study.

Critical Action Research as Qualitative Research

This is a qualitative critical action research study. As such, it is important to begin by outlining the overall goals and assumptions of qualitative research, followed by a specific look at action research and, in turn, critical action research.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is concerned with how individuals “interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). This perspective adds a multi-dimensionality and complexity to inquiry that offers a deep understanding of a specific phenomenon (Mason, 2002). Qualitative research and researchers stress “the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14), re-centering research around the participant and the interpretation of his/her experiences by the researcher. By redefining positioning the researcher as the instrument of data collection in search of how individuals make meaning and understand their own lives in light of a phenomenon, qualitative research gives emphasis to process oriented questions that allow for deeper, complex descriptions of “the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4).

Within qualitative research, there are different approaches; i.e., basic interpretive studies that get at people’s perspectives, those that are informed by phenomenology that try to get at the essence of experience, narrative studies that focus on the process and content of how participants tell their stories, case studies where there is a naturally bounded system such as a classroom, or an organization, and ethnographic studies that focus on culture (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). No matter the specific methodology chosen within qualitative research, the core assumption that individuals make meaning through their experiences and therefore multiple realities exist, and that they are able to articulate the experiences, remain the same.

To some extent, some qualitative research approaches inquiry of a phenomenon from a social perspective and, rather than rely on a positivistic framework in search for a universally, standard truth (Greenwood & Levin, 2008), generally allows for an examination of the context and setting in which a phenomenon is taking place. This social examination becomes important in the interpretation of data by allowing for flexibility in research. Knowledge, therefore, is inductive rather than deductive in qualitative research assuming that patterns, themes and potential theories begin with the socially-bound context of the participants of the study (Creswell, 2009).

Within qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of data collection and analysis in that it is the researcher who conducts the interviews, observations, and collects and analyzes documents. The research design is typically emergent and flexible. For example, most qualitative researchers will conduct semi-structured interviews, and will ask follow up questions in light of what comes up in the interview itself. Hence the research design is often flexible and requires the researcher to be reflexive during the research (Mason, 2002). Given that the researcher is the instrument of data collection, qualitative researchers discuss issues of their subjectivity, and ways of dealing with it within the research study. Research, they would argue, is subjective in that a researcher can never be entirely neutral, or out of the way of the research. Qualitative researchers are open about their subjectivity and typically incorporate their own personal interests within the study in terms of the selection of a research topic and site, identifying appropriate methodologies, and analyzing data. By using different data types, such as interviews, observations, and documents and artifacts (Patton, 2002), qualitative researchers are able to “take stock of their actions and their role in the research process,”

as well as the role of their data (Mason, 2002, p. 7) in the study. By seeking to make meaning of lived experience, this study specifically allowed myself as the researcher to be the primary instrument of data collection. My subjectivity and background informs this study and will be discussed later in the chapter.

Finally, data analysis in qualitative research requires that the researcher be immersed in the data, doing narrative analysis, or generating themes and categories, depending on the type of study that it is, but always that are reflective of the participants' expressed experience (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is interpretive in nature—that is, it is in search of understanding the why and how a phenomenon happens and/or is perceived by individuals—and should approach data collection and analysis specific to the context of the study. The purpose of qualitative studies is to foreground participant voices within the natural setting of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Critical Action Research and Qualitative Research

Action research studies that make use of only qualitative data collection methods are generally considered qualitative action research studies, and the purpose of action research studies is to address a problem in practice (Stringer, 2007). As this study is designed to address a local problem in the practice of teaching basic writing to adult students in my own classroom, an action research methodology is the one of choice because it has the potential to offer solutions that are beneficial to both the participants and to me as the instructor and researcher as we try to develop together an appropriate writing pedagogy, as well as open the door to a possible critical inquiry perspective.

Since the study is theoretically grounded in critical theory and pedagogy, the methodology chosen must be one that can account for the positionality of participants.

Patton (2002) notes that qualitative research examines people's perceptions and how they make meaning of a phenomenon. From a social constructivist perspective, all meaning is made through a lens or worldview specific to the individual in a social context which is inextricably linked to the positionality (race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, social class, etc.) of the participants and the researcher. This is extremely important in critical forms of research. Various methods within qualitative research take a critical perspective on research, including critical action research, critical ethnographies (Foley & Valenzuela, 2008) and the application of feminist theory (Olesen, 2008), critical theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008), and critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008).

While some action research makes use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, it is fair to say that action research in general allows for the pursuit of a relevant solution to a locally-bound problem of practice, and most action research studies make use only of qualitative data collection methods. Given that this is a qualitative critical action research study, it's important to now consider how some of the assumptions of action research, and critical action research, which is the methodology chosen, inform this study.

Assumptions and purposes of action research. The purpose of action research is to solve a practical problem, or to improve practice; typically by initiating a process of finding out how participants view a particular reality, and then developing and implementing strategies to improve that reality and to study how the process unfolds (Kuhne & Quigley, 1997). At its core, action research strives to come closer to the reality of people's experiences of that process in order to find a local solution to a problem within a practice (Merriam, 2009). By rejecting standardized practices and

emphasizing “contextually relevant procedures” (Stringer, 2007, p. 3), action research allows the researcher to continually adapt during the study. This spiraling—planning, acting, observing, reflecting—is inherent to any action research study and “provides a process or a context through which people can collectively clarify their problems and formulate new ways of envisioning their situations” (p. 204). A detailed description of the initial planning stage and brief summaries of the acting, observing, and reflecting phases will take place later in the chapter.

Most action research makes use of only qualitative methods and privileges “collaboratively constructed descriptions and interpretations of events” (Stringer, 2007, p. 189) that allow participants to solve problems locally. Action research is in search of a practical solution to a local problem through the interactions of all invested parties. Since this study is interested in finding a better way to foster writing competency with adult basic writers in the community college setting, action research allows the students to co-construct activities and assignments within group and individual settings that can meet their needs.

The researcher’s role in action research is to start the spiral with, what Kuhne and Quigley (1997) refer to as, an itch that “originates from something we do, something we experience, something we become aware of that we just cannot seem to make ‘work,’ yet we know it *should* work” (p. 27). This practice-based problem is a challenge and the envisioning of possible solutions starts the action research process. Also within the planning stage, the researcher must determine the timing of the action and the measurability of a change. Once a problem is determined and all aspects are identified, the action phase is an attempt at solving the problem. The specific actions taken to

attempt to solve the problem are observed and evaluated from the data types collected. This spiral or cycle can continue until the problem is resolved.

Not all action research is critical in its orientation, or about examining and challenging power relations. Action research can be used simply to improve any type of educational or organizational practice. An action research study could be done on improving student learning of basic mathematics, for example. But those forms of action research that are specifically interested in challenging power relations, as this study is, are generally considered critical action research studies.

Critical action research. Critical action research is action research that focuses on challenging power relations in the research setting itself. In the context of this classroom critical action research project, the issues of power and ideology critique within the classroom and institutional context are at the core of the study. Central to the radical philosophy of education is the democratization of knowledge and the resistance to grand narratives and ideologies (Shor, 2009). Likewise, critical action research allows participants to have a role in the shaping of the research project in order to learn from each other (Sullivan, Bhuyan, Senturia, Shiu-Thornton, & Ciske, 2005). This democratization of inquiry lends itself to finding solutions that resist dominant ideologies and/or narratives and addresses power imbalances within institutions. And it is for this reason that critical action research is the methodology of choice for the proposed research study. Basic writing instruction oftentimes perpetuates dominant forms of language and ideology, forcing students to choose between a home dialect and an academic discourse dialect. A critical action research study gives participants the venue to critique and question, through writing and group work, ideologies of basic writing instruction.

Due to the inherently radical epistemological position critical action research takes, it is the most appropriate methodology for the research study at hand as it allows learner involvement, attempts to propose a solution to a problem in practice, and merges teaching and research to challenge institutional rigidity. Paired with a critical theoretical framework, critical action research has the potential to cultivate critical consciousness by privileging the perceptions and experiences of participants. This will be discussed—in light of the action research cycle of plan, act, observe, and reflect—later in this chapter.

As community colleges deal with increased enrollment, they must also deal with an increase in developmental writing students. As adults return to the classroom to pursue a second career or gain skills for continued employment, many are finding themselves shuffled, much to their disbelief, into developmental writing courses. It is necessary, then, to find a solution based on the research that will allow for student and institutional success.

Critical action research is an act of democracy and allows stakeholders, those invested in a solution—teachers and students, to pursue a new way of creating knowledge based on their own experiences and needs (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Gone are the days of separating teaching and researching (Levin & Greenwood, 2008). If institutions desire to succeed financially, they must account for the growing number of basic writing students who fail to pass the course or who cannot integrate back into the workforce.

However, applying critical action research as an alternative way of inquiry in the current structures of community colleges will be met with obstacles, as any challenge of institutional structures will. In challenging the dominant structures and giving voice to a localized problem such as basic writing success, critical action research may be able to

create a critical consciousness that will both empower participants (learners) and motivate administrators to make that needed change. Given that the researcher has a crucial role in critical action research, it is important to consider my own background and stance as the researcher in this study.

Background of Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection in qualitative studies. As such, it requires the researcher to become invested in, and take ownership of the research process, though in critical action research projects this role is shared with participants. Nevertheless the researcher needs to be responsible for how the study unfolds, including the participant selection, data collection and analysis processes, as well as the discussion of findings. This study, to a large extent reflects my own interests. It is true that as a researcher, I am invested in the research study at hand as it is a search for a new way—a middle ground, or a borderland—in which basic writing instruction can both increase writing competency and be respectful and encouraging of a students' own, personal culture, and way of speaking, acting, and making meaning.

Basic writing is taught in the extremes: grammar drill and kill rooted in behaviorist and/or cognitive theories that strive to fix a broken student, or creative, process driven pedagogies that rely entirely on the writing process as the sole method to remediating struggling students. These extremes tend to ignore the students themselves. They may “allow” for students to write narratives or research areas interesting to them, but what is lost is the process adult basic writing students go through to become proficient in an academic discourse when they may have a local discourse that seems in conflict. These students are in fact part of a complicated navigation process, constantly

shifting back and forth, between the two or more discourses (Coles & Wall, 1987). It is the goal of this study to outline an alternative approach to basic writing instruction, one that allows students to imagine the moon; that is, establish an understanding of the academic discourse on the foundation of their home discourse.

In an often-quoted passage, Du Bois (1989) introduces an idea of double-consciousness as being a primary force in the life of post-Civil War African Americans. This double-consciousness exists in anyone who has been exploited by the oppressor-oppressed hierarchy and it is an outcry of the oppression inflicted *upon* the African American *by* white America, that Du Bois described life for the freed slave as consisting of “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (p. 5).

There is, however, a sense of hope in Du Bois’ understanding of the two warring souls in African Americans: “One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (p. 5). Equally significant is the fact that the two warring souls are not permitted to tear the whole of the individual apart because of the individual’s strength. There is a hope that the two warring souls will, unlike other ideas of double-consciousness or biculturalism, eventually make peace with each other and learn to live together in one body. This coexistence does not imply a conquering of one over the other; rather, it is a reconciliation that allows for a navigation between two souls, two worlds.

It is to these tensions that I am attracted as a researcher. Growing up in the United States as a first-generation Middle Eastern American, I have consistently been

faced with dual-realities. These experiences have led me to understand students and education as ideally a location of reconciliation and empowerment, rather than one of domination and suppression. Adult basic writing students, however, are typically not finding liberation in their remediation. And it is at this point this researcher enters.

Within the study specifically, the positionality of myself as the researcher played a role. As a critique of critical pedagogical methods is the lack of emphasis on the positionality of both the learner and the instructor (Closson, 2010; Guy, 1999; Tisdell, 1993, 1998), this study sought to make use of the my positionality to create an environment conducive to using positionality as a starting point for students. Due to the critique of the unproblematized instructor positionality of earlier critical pedagogy discourses, throughout the semester of this study, as the instructor and researcher, I shared aspects of my own positionality openly. As someone from Middle Eastern descent who also struggled with dwelling within the tension between cultures and languages, I used my own experiences and stories as examples throughout the semester, and this may have had an impact on participants' comfort in sharing their own positions in life.

Participant Selection

In order to explore the efficacy of critical pedagogy to foster both writing competency and critical consciousness in basic writing students, this critical action research created an inquiry that led to the overall benefit of the students as writers and citizens as well as the instructor, and focused on the writing experiences of my students by employing a critical pedagogy of writing through the action research cycle, of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, that involves them in the process. Hundreds of students register and take basic writing courses each semester; therefore, this

qualitative critical action research study used a purposeful sample, what Patton (2002) regards as a group that can offer “useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 40), of community college students placed into a basic writing course. Qualitative research typically makes use of a purposeful sample of participants, selected according to specific criteria. For this study, I was limited to the students that register for the course, which typically included adult students and former English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The specific section studied was selected due to its meeting days and times, which have a better chance of attracting working and second-career adult students. On the first day of class, there were a total of 21 students registered.

This critical action research takes place in a large community college in Northeastern United States. The community college consists of multiple campuses and serves a large geographic location, which includes multiple urban areas, and attracts a diverse student body in search of degree completion, workforce development, and educational accreditation. The semester prior to the study, the college enrolled nearly 23,000 students.

As an open-admission institution, the college requires every student to take a computerized placement, via Accuplacer, test consisting of three parts: math, reading, and writing. Students may decline any portion of the test, but doing so requires them to start at the lowest remedial level of the skipped section available. Students are permitted to retake the test for an additional fee.

Participants in this study may have entered the course through three different methods, as illustrated in Table 1 below. First, students may test directly into the level of basic writing based on their Accuplacer test score. Second, students may progress onto

the level of basic writing after successfully completing a lower level of writing instruction. Third, ESL students may enter the course after successfully completing the college's ESL-specific sequence of courses. Successful completion, in this context, is defined as earning a letter grade of a C or better in the course. While the method of entrance into the basic writing course does not impact the research and is not significant to the study, it is helpful to have an overview of the basic writing program at the college.

Table 1

Writing Course Sequencing

Placement Test Route 1	Placement Test Route 2	Placement Test Route 3	Self-Identified ESL
College Composition	Basic Writing Level 2	Basic Writing Level 1	Four-level ESL sequence
	College Composition	Basic Writing Level 2	Basic Writing Level 2
		College Composition	College Composition

The basic writing program at the research site consists of two courses that students may need to successfully complete, depending on their initial placement, before entering college composition. This critical action research was conducted in the highest level of basic writing course. Students who successfully complete this course will be eligible for college composition (English 101).

Because of the admission requirements of the college, participants have been confirmed to be at least 18 years of age, have a high school diploma or GED, and be English speaking. Specifically, the participants of this study were all adults ranging in ages from mid-20s to early 50s. A detailed description of the participants will take place in Chapter Four.

Data Collection Methods in the Action Research Cycle

Data collection in action research is designed to allow stakeholders who are actively engaged in the practice-related problem to have an opportunity to make sense of their experiences (Stringer, 2007). This section will briefly discuss the action research cycle followed by a discussion of relevant data collection methods to be used throughout the study.

The Action Research Cycle

This study combined basic writing pedagogy with critical pedagogy to foster a critical consciousness among adult basic writing students in order to analyze and critique systems of institutional and academic power and privilege. Adult basic writing students are caught in a tension between two worlds—a home dialect and the academic discourse (Coles & Wall, 1987)—and it is in this tension where critical consciousness can provide insight to participants of the study.

An action research study includes a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Stringer, 2007). This cycle can be ongoing until the practice-based problem is resolved or results are suitable. The action (the implementation of an intervention based on an early-semester writing assignment), observation (field notes, taken either while one is in the field or immediately afterwards before one leaves the research site (Patton,

2002), daily student journals, and critical incident questionnaires), and reflection (the evaluation of data from the written assignments and observations to determine if a suitable solution has been formed) phases took place throughout the study in light of the various stages of data collection. Qualitative action research studies typically make use of three types of data collection methods: interviews, observations, and analysis of documents and artifacts (Merriam, 2009). Because a major and initial data collection method in this study is the creation and analysis of documents, I'll begin by discussing the initial planning phase of the study as well as the documents to be generated and analyzed.

Initial Planning Phase and Documents as Data

The planning stage in action research requires the researcher to identify and understand a practice-based problem as well as identify methods of data collection, time period of the action study, and a measurement of success (Kuhn & Quigley, 1997). After deciding on which section of basic writing to include in the study based on meeting times and days that have a higher potential to attract adult learners, I began to plan out some general goals and assignments for the course, and to generate the documents as forms of data that were used in the study. The first of these is a preliminary syllabus (Appendix F) that outlined the stated general goals and assignments, as per the learning outcomes for the course. The initial syllabus also made clear that student involvement is necessary for the planning of future assignments. Set in stone, however, was the first writing assignment, the personal educational narrative, designed to aid in the planning of the remainder of the course. As the semester went on, I observed and recorded student reactions and discussion and adapted the course to meet the needs of the students.

Through writing assignment analysis, CIQs, observations, and direct discussions with students, I was able to later put together writing assignment two, three, and four, based on the students' needs and my observations. Observation, analysis, and generation of documents and artifacts, therefore, took place throughout the study. In addition to the personal educational narrative, a few other items were set in stone early on in the syllabus: biweekly CIQs (administered online through the college's course management system), critical reading and response pieces, midterm individual conferences with me, and writing groups/writing workshops.

Written assignments. Participants turned in a number of graded written assignments throughout the semester (in keeping with the college's learning outcomes for the course) designed to both develop a process of writing (Emig, 1971; Murray, 2003) as well as investigate issues of power and ideology as discussed in class. A variety of essay types (Appendix G) were assigned including the personal educational narrative, which asked for the students' story of good and bad experiences with writing and how they believe they ended up in this specific basic writing course; a compare and contrast essay examining the roles of the various English discourses; a research project on a topic of the students' choice; and finally, a persuasive essay that allowed students to take a position and argue for a change to an institutional policy they have described and researched. The culminating writing project of the semester was a creative portfolio, which was a culmination of the semester and includes student written reading response and other journals, a reflective piece of the transition of the students' feelings and perspectives on writing, and a letter of advice to a hypothetical new, incoming basic writing student. These assignments were developed with the students over the semester based on my

observations and their expressed needs. Students were given the ability to write the rubric for the culminating final portfolio.

Readings as documents. The students were also given select readings throughout the semester from diverse writers that focus on issues of the various discourses of language and culture. These readings were generally used as discussion starters and students had the opportunity to reflect on the readings in assignment two, their journals, and final portfolios. The readings, chosen to guide classroom discussion on issues central to critical pedagogy, will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Critical incident questionnaires. Since action research requires a constant cycle of planning, action, and reflection (Stringer, 2007), and the goal of this study is to create a democratic classroom to explore the benefit of critical pedagogy, participants completed a Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) (Appendix B) biweekly that is designed to understand when and how students were most invested and any topics that should be revisited. This data was part of the observing and reflecting stages in action research and helped to guide future sessions (details below). Additions and/or changes to the course calendar, readings, and/or assignments based on student interest did take place and the semester calendar was revised five times throughout the semester to reflect data collected from the CIQs.

Writing groups and writing workshops. Students were placed into writing groups early in the semester with a twofold purpose: 1) writing groups were responsible to select, research, and present a “writing topic” to the class twice throughout the semester (topics discussed in Chapter Four), and 2) writing groups were responsible to

perform writing workshops on each rough draft of each writing assignment (discussed in detail in Chapter Four).

Acting, Observing, and Reflecting: Observations and Field Notes as Data

Given that classes are ongoing, the second phase after the initial planning is going into each class session and facilitating it, observing how it goes, and reflecting on it with students and as the teacher to plan the next session. Observational field notes are a primary source of data collection (Merriam, 2009) in qualitative action research studies, and as each class unfolds, I took detailed observational field notes about what went on in the class as well as my own observations and ongoing analysis of each class period. Oftentimes, pictures were taken on relevant student charts or writings on the whiteboard and inserted into the field notes for convenient referencing later on.

Since this is a critical action research and I am interested in fostering both writing competency and critical consciousness through the use of critical pedagogy in the classroom, it is necessary to address issues of class environment when applying critical pedagogy in a classroom. I did this in an ongoing way throughout the course, taking steps to observe and reflect on how each session unfolded and writing about it. Classroom observations and analysis will be presented in detail in Chapter Four.

Before any emancipatory or liberating instruction can take place, the teacher/student hierarchical relationship must be addressed (Freire, 1970). Therefore, as a general framework for the course, I used various methods to create a democratic classroom to combat the inherent hierarchical nature of traditional classrooms. First, as discussed in the writing groups and workshop section above, throughout the semester, students worked in groups to discuss readings and review rough drafts of written

assignments. Second, groups were responsible to lead class discussions twice during the semester and had direct input to their group facilitation grade. And third, students were given freedom of choice when it came to specific writing topics, areas of research, and facilitation topics.

As discussed above, the data collection was performed over an entire 15-week semester and included my observations and notes of classroom discussion as well as written assignments. The assignments outlined for the course included writing assignments (personal narrative, compare and contrast, research, persuasion, and final portfolio) as well as reading-response journals. Participants were also required to submit biweekly CIQs and participate in a 45-minute exit interview.

I described the study verbally to the class and gave each student a study information sheet. A colleague distributed the informed consent form on the first class meeting to all students in the specific section. All informed consent forms (Appendix C) were delivered in a sealed envelope to my advisor and held until final semester grades were submitted to the college. A student's decision to be part of the research study did not affect their access to instruction or grades throughout the semester. The study information sheet (Appendix D) was also provided to my colleague in order to answer any questions students might have. I briefed my colleague on the purpose, method, and potential areas of new insight of the study prior to her engaging with the class.

In addition to the call for participants on the first day of class, a second call for participants took place in the last three weeks of the class. Since the information provided regarding the study may not have made much sense to a student on the first day of class (and, commonly, first day in college), a second call for participants was made with a brief

explanation of the process of the data collection and exit interview. This second call for participants was made in order to potentially increase the participant pool by gaining some participants who may have been intimidated or reluctant to consent early in the semester.

Exit Interview

The culmination of the study is the exit interviews, which took place after final grades were submitted to the college, and during finals week. It was determined that in order to accommodate to the busy work, school, and home schedules of the students, interviewing during finals week was ideal as it would not increase the burden on students. Interviews are a primary data collection method in qualitative research studies and are typically defined as a conversation with a purpose (Merriam, 2009). Interviews in qualitative research are designed to get at individual's perspectives on how they make meaning of a particular phenomenon. Since the researcher is limited to what he/she can observe, interviews are able to shed light on a new perspective (Patton, 2002). The perspectives of the participants are valuable and able to be expressed and understood (Patton, 2002).

Patton (2002) outlines four different types of interviews ranging from the informal conversational interview that are built from observations and within the natural course of the study, to the closed, fixed-response interview that has categories and questions pre-determined. For the purpose of this study, I made use of semi-structured exit interviews following the completion of the semester. The interview questions were determined over the course of the semester based on research observations of the study. Guiding interview questions can be found in Appendix E.

Since action research can come “closer to the reality of other people’s experience and, in the process, increase the potential for creating truly effective services and programs that will enhance the lives of the people we serve” (Stringer, 2007, p. 204), the participants in this study took part in these semi-structured exit interviews to allow them to clarify and reflect upon experiences during the semester. By asking them questions about their perceptions of themselves and writing, their perceptions and understanding of themselves within a social framework, and their experience being part of a democratic classroom environment, the goal of the interviews was to determine how participants express and discuss being in a tension between home and academic discourses. By offering participants tools of critique throughout the semester, the data from the interviews were able to determine if the critical pedagogical approaches have helped participants understand themselves within the tension and begin to navigate toward a personal, process-orientated solution.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The goal of an action research study is to provide local, practice-based solutions to specific problems that will be suitable for all invested constituents (Stringer, 2007). In order to maintain the trustworthiness of the study, this section will discuss four measures that add up to transparency and trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

In order to maintain credibility in the study, a number of factors can be discussed. The study was conducted over an entire, college semester (15 weeks) and therefore the prolonged engagement and persistent observation of participants twice a week, one and a

half hours each session offers considerable credibility to the study (Newman, Newman, & Newman, 2011).

Additionally, consistent with the multiple forms of data collected (written assignments, observation, reflexive journals, exit interview), the data was analyzed using triangulation. Through the various types of data, and because the different types of data solicited overlapping information, consistent themes were recognized and confirmed. As the researcher, I also kept a reflexive journal of observation and participant discussion and interactions throughout the study (Newman, Newman, & Newman, 2011).

Transferability

The issue of transferability is concerned with if the study can be applied to another context and whether or not similar results can be expected. Confirming transferability within action research is difficult as the invested constituents and setting of the study are integral to the action research. Therefore, the specific relationships and interactions between participants, the setting (day, time, semester, season), and the participant written assignments may not be replicated in another setting.

The study's goals and actions within the action research, however, can be replicated in other basic writing courses. Part of the purpose of this study is to offer a new way to understand and approach basic writing instruction in a community college setting. The general projects and intent can be replicated in another setting. The written assignments, selected readings, and classroom structure can be replicated and it is my hope as the researcher that the findings of this study can cause other basic writing instructors to examine the potential benefit of this type of instruction on adult basic writing students.

Dependability

In order to maintain dependability of the study, the researcher must document transparency of process of the action research (Newman, Newman, & Newman, 2011). This transparency is evident through my detailed journal, the recordings and transcriptions of interviews, written feedback from participants, and the written assignments from participants. These will allow an external researcher to follow a detailed audit trail and offer significant dependability to the study (Stringer, 2007).

Confirmability

Confirmability within a qualitative research study is difficult to address in that qualitative research values and allows for the subjectivity of the researcher to be part of the study. Specifically, action research allows the researcher to be one of the invested stakeholders in pursuit of a new way of creating knowledge (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

This study is not entirely objective, therefore, and it is the vested interest of the myself as the researcher, as described in Chapter One, that situates this study within the action research methodology. In an attempt to transparently reflect the experience of participants, an audit trail of research and my reflexive journal is available. Additionally, through the help of the doctoral research committee and advisor, the findings were accurately and honestly represented in a manner consistent with empirical doctoral research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology chosen for the study with an outline of the core assumptions of qualitative research, action research, and more specifically critical action research. After discussing the background of myself as the researcher the

participant selection criteria was discussed. The preliminary planning stage within the action research cycle was outlined with a discussion of relevant areas of data collection. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the participant exit interview and issues of trustworthiness of the summary.

Part one of this dissertation put forward the introduction and rationale of the study along with the major research questions. It also reviewed relevant literature in Chapter Two, and discussed the study methodology in Chapter Three. Part two of the study will present a detailed look at the participants and initial planning, a presentation of the action research cycle as it unfolded during the semester of the study, and a presentation of overall findings.

PART II

THE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE AND STUDY FINDINGS

Part two of this dissertation includes Chapter Four through Six. Within this section, the study will be discussed in light of the action research cycle: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Chapter Four will discuss the participants of the study as well as the initial planning that took place, with some data from the earliest class sessions and writing assignments. Chapter Five will discuss the class sessions as they unfolded over the semester as well as the findings. And finally, Chapter Six will focus on the overall findings of the study based on the exit interviews and the data as a whole from the entire semester.

CHAPTER FOUR

PLANNING AND PARTICIPANTS

At the heart of this critical action research study is the assumption that basic writing students are located within systems of power that emphasize the assimilation to the dominant writing conventions of the academy mostly through the reception, rather than the inception, of instruction. It is also assumed that this position puts the basic writing student at an inherent disadvantage to truly understand language acquisition and all of its ramifications of identity, culture, and self. Furthermore, since this study is critically oriented, it is assumed that the use of critical pedagogy within the basic writing classroom can not only foster a critical consciousness that promotes lifelong learning, critique, and discovery in adult students, but also writing competency that is informed by critical consciousness. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how critical pedagogy can foster writing competency and critical consciousness among adult basic writing students in the community college setting. The potential of both writing competency and critical consciousness is a possible solution to the tension of discourses present in the basic writing classroom that can engage students in an education of wonder and critique.

The study took place over a 15-week semester at a large community college in the Northeast of the United States. The specific section of basic writing chosen to be part of the study met twice a week for an hour and a half each class period. While some supplemental course material was posted in a digital space, such as the biweekly Critical Incident Questionnaire, all class content and data collection happened during these

meetings. Following the 30 class meetings, the study concluded with an exit interview with each participant. The study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What is the role of critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom and what are ways it can be developed?
2. How can teaching a basic writing course from a critical pedagogical perspective foster writing competency and critical consciousness?

As this study is designed to address a local problem in the practice of teaching basic writing to adult students in my own classroom, an action research methodology is the methodology of choice because it has the potential to offer solutions that are beneficial to both the participants and to me as the instructor and researcher as we try to develop together an appropriate writing pedagogy, as well as open the door to a possible critical inquiry perspective. This chapter focuses on providing an overview of the class and the initial planning for the course, introduces the participants, and provides my early reflections at the earliest phase of the study.

Course Overview and Study Participants

Since the basic writing sequence is oftentimes a gateway to full, credit-bearing courses, the makeup of each class section is generally diverse in age, gender, course of study (major), and previous college writing experience. Since the study took place within the second level of the non-ESL basic writing instruction sequence, some students in the study have taken a lower level of basic writing (generally focused on sentence-level writing), while others have progressed into the sequence from the ESL sequence (see Table 1). Originally, 21 total students were registered for the course. During the initial call for participants, which took place during the first class meeting, a total of 15 students

consented, including six students who progressed through the ESL sequence. However, the ages of the 15 who consented ranged from 17-51 years old. In order to focus primarily on an adult population, the decision was made to eliminate any consented participants younger than 26 years of age. Additionally, one participant who fell within the age range would not return any of my emails or calls to set up an exit interview. In order to avoid incomplete data, this individual's data was removed from the study. Given all of those conditions, the study ended up focusing on six participants, all at least 26 years old, consented, and able to give a final exit interview. The participants for this study were a diverse group in age, gender, race and ethnicity, orientation and family status, as well as writing course experience and course of study at the college. Table 1 addresses issues of positionality and gives the reader and greater sense of the participants overall.

Table 2

Participant Summary

Name	Age	Major	Positionality Details	Writing Course Experience
Amy	36	Nursing	White female Wife and mother	Previously took same course online, and did not pass
Danielle	51	Business Management	White female Wife, mother, grandmother	Completed writing pre-requisite course
Humar	38	Sonography	Turkish Muslim female Wife and mother	Completed ESL sequence
Marcus	34	Nursing	White, gay male No immediate family members	Previously took same course, and did not pass
Melissa	26	Nursing	Latina Mother	Completed ESL sequence
Ronnie	46	Business Management	African-American male Husband, father, grandfather	Completed writing pre-requisite course

As part of the planning stage of the critical action research, one assignment was set in stone (personal educational narrative), while general guidelines for future assignments, in order to comply with college learning outcomes for the course, were presented to students to help in the planning of future assignments. It was already determined to divide students into writing groups for the duration of the semester. Writing groups would serve as writing workshop groups (Murray, 2003) as well as discussion groups throughout the semester. The writing groups were also tasked with presenting two general writing topics to the rest of the class. Each group was in charge of presenting two topics and the final group grade for each presentation was an average of their own self-assessment and my assessment of the presentation. Midterm individual conferences were also set up before the course began as an informal way to talk with each student about their experiences in the course, and elicit any advice they may have on changing the course for the remainder of the semester. I designed and administered biweekly Critical Incident Questionnaires (Appendix B) via the college's online course management system. Other than the first writing assignment, all writing assignments were designed and agreed on by the students as a group.

The first writing assignment was a personal educational narrative and gave students the opportunity to uncover their experiences and opinions of education and writing. This assignment determined a number of things related to course planning such as topics to be covered, presentation topics to pursue, and writing assignment themes.

In order to better understand the participants, a brief introduction of each participant will be followed by the original text of their personal educational narrative. The narratives included here are written entirely by the participants and have not been

modified or edited by me at all (other than removing specific names and places). The narratives offer a look into each participant's goals and experiences with writing, as well as their writing itself. I purposely did not edit these narratives to present the participants writing as it was at the start of the semester.

Amy

As mentioned in the table above, Amy previously took the same writing course but did not pass it. She took the course in an online environment and in her exit interview expressed her frustration with the lack of instructor feedback in the online course. Amy is a 36-year old mother who is pursuing a nursing degree. She experienced the entire semester through her role as a mother and caretaker—emphasizing issues of safety and success in later writing assignments. Throughout the semester she participated energetically in class discussions and asked many questions outside of the classroom environment. Returning to school at a later age, Amy saw the necessity of performance at the college level and its relation to her future success in the nursing field, causing her to be a vocal member of the classroom, as well as the clear leader of her writing group.

“I graduated from [High School] in 1995. I was the first to graduate high school on my dad's side of the family. During my tenth grade year I had a baby and was going to quit school, but my favorite teacher talked to me about the importance of staying in school. She worked with me through the rest of high school. If I was falling behind in my classes she would help me get caught up and show me that I could do it. She encouraged me so I would not give up. When I was a teenager I was wild and always wanting to run around and not be responsible. This included not going to school, doing my school work, and not being at home much.

“The goals that I have set for myself is to finish school and to get a job in phlebotomy to better support my family. In order to accomplish my goal I need to pass my classes and finish school and to find a job within my major. Other ways to obtain these goals are showing up for school every day, getting help when needed, and getting good grades in all my classes.

“One of my first memories of education/writing was a night mare. I had no clue how to start or finish the paper when my teacher assigned it. I had trouble putting my thoughts on paper and organizing them into the proper order so it would make sense to the reader. This always made me feel like I would never succeed as a writer. I can write a letter to my husband, friends, or even to my children that can express what I want to say. But when it comes to sitting down to write a formal paper for a class I get frustrated and do not know how to arrange my thoughts into the correct order. While in school I try to use bigger words to be more professional and to add to the class discussions. At home when I am around my family and my friends I use slang, smaller words, and a little [regional dialect] (i.e. all = done). The reason I talk this way is because it is easier for my children to understand and this is how I was raised to talk by my mother.

“The best part of education is studying something you enjoy and feel good about it. The best part about school is learning new things and knowing you can do it. As well as meeting new people in my classes. The best part about reading is learning and hearing about other people’s life’s stories, opinions and other perspectives. The best part about writing is being able to express yourself. The best part of learning for me is that I learn visually and enjoy working with others that are willing to help me.

“The worst part of education is trying to do my work with four children at home while my husband works second shift. This makes it very hard for me to work on my class work and take care of my children. They are very active boys that need my constant attention. The worst part of school is you need to take classes that have nothing to do with your major. The worst part about reading is I really do not like to read. Because I feel that I have trouble staying focused on one thing. And I cannot sit in one spot long enough to focus on a book. The worst part of writing for me is trying to figure out how to put my thoughts on paper and putting them in order so it makes sense to the reader. The worst part of learning for me is when I really do not understand something. It makes me lose interest in the class and it makes me feel like I can’t do the work.

“My goal for this class is to overcome my feelings about writing formal papers, so I can accomplish my educational goal of being a phlebotomist and a good writer. I am starting this course not knowing how to organize my thoughts correctly and I hope that at the end of this course I will be a good writer.”

Danielle

Having battled, and defeated, cancer two times prior to this semester, Danielle entered this course determined to not let anything stand in her way. Her life is riddled with medical issues culminating in her own ongoing fight with cancer, her time unemployed due to an unrelated disability, and her husband’s rapidly deteriorating health during the semester. Danielle completed the basic writing 1 course in a previous semester and was focusing her course of studies on business management, with the ultimate goal of owning a business of her own.

“I have short term and long term educational goals to acquire knowledge in business. One short term goal is to do the best that I can in all my classes here at the college. To accomplish this I plan to attend all my classes every day, doing the required homework assignments, and studying hard for all my tests and assignments. This is only my second semester here at school; I have over a year and a half to go before I get my Associates Degree in Business Management. Right now my long-term educational goal is to transfer to Millersville University to acquire my Bachelors in Management. At the present time I am not working, due to health issues I am considered disabled. Hopefully I will be able to return to work after I get my Associates Degree.

“My family’s history with education starts with my sister and me. Both of our parents only made it to seventh grade, finally talked my mother into going back to school and getting her GED. My sister and I were the first to graduate from high school. She graduated in 1978 from Eastern High School; I graduated a year later from Vocational Technical School. While at Tech I studied cosmetology. After graduation I took my state boards, got my license and went to work doing hair. Boring! I worked in the field for a couple of years and decided it was not for me. At that point in time I decided to go back to school and do something different.

“Electronics was the big thing then at that time. I graduated from a Technical Institute in June 1993 as an electronics technician. I applied for a technician job at a local company and was offered an assembly position. After three years of doing the tech job at the lower pay grade of an assembler, I quit. I went to work at Hardees as a cashier and worked my way up to General Manager. I managed two 24 hour stores and loved every minute of it, except the long hours. Eighty hours a week gets old after a while even

though I was well compensated. After sustaining a severe injury to my back from a fall, I was placed on disability. The past twelve years I have endured many surgeries and lots of therapy to regain my ability to walk again. I was given the opportunity to go back to school and hopefully gain employment. My educational journey has been a long one. Most people think of an educational journey as just going back to school; to me it is not only school but the daily challenges in life.

“My educational experience so far could be defined as confusing. Some of the classes that I am required to take have absolutely nothing to do with management. One of the classes is biology. Why do I have to take a class on the human body when it has nothing to do with running a business or supervising employees?

“Until I took basic English I never had the opportunity to really explore my writing. I was never required to write any papers or essays in high school. I have discovered that I enjoy writing and learning about the different styles of writings. It is like opening up a new door to another world, where I can go to make myself feel better. It helps me to see things in a different perspective when I write it down on paper.”

Humar

Humar is one of two participants in this study who came to the basic writing 2 classroom through the college's ESL sequence. A 38-year old wife and mother, Humar comes from a well-educated family and is herself highly educated in her native country of Turkey. However, she began seeking a career change when she came to the United States and is pursuing sonography at the college. She spent a lot of time throughout the semester writing about issues that were important to the well-being of her family and specifically sought to challenge assumptions of her Muslim faith through her writing. She played a

very quiet role in the classroom, choosing not to speak in larger group settings, but was very active in motivating and keeping her writing group on task during their various activities and presentations.

“My name is Humar, I grew up in an educated family. My father has a bachelor degree, so does my mother. Education is always the first priority in our family. I had been taught that getting an education is the only way for having a better life. My parents were demanding, and I tried my best, went to college and got a bachelor degree. Even it had a significant effect on me when it was time to pick a husband. As a result, I ended up with a PhD. After I had my kids, I started to raise my kids as the same idea that my parents had raised me.

“After my kids started school, I have a chance to fulfill my longtime dream which I can work in healthcare field as my husband does. For that reason, I enrolled in this community college as a part time student in Diagnostic Medical Sonography Department. Going to school and keeping up with all these homework and household chores have been a huge challenge to me. But I gradually learned how and adapted to every kind of situation aroused.

“Among the challenges I am facing, writing is especially difficult one. After I started ESL, I realized that talking was easier than writing. People seem to understand my words even with a bad grammar, but it is not the case with writing. Every time, when I was about to write something in English, I did not know where to start or how to construct the sentence or organize the paragraph. After I finished ESL course, I had a huge progress in writing. Now, when I am reading, I pay close attention to its words,

grammar and details, like, how the article organized, where the punctuation marks placed and how the authors came to the conclusion.

“My goal for this course is not only to get a good grade, but also become a good writer. I have always believed that language is a bridge that connects places to a new road. And writing is a powerful tool that allows you to express yourself with the art of language.

“I may not become a famous writer or author, but I would like to write a story for my kids about the long journey of my life.”

Marcus

Similar to Amy, Marcus previously took this basic writing 2 course; however, his first attempt was in a similar physical classroom. He did not pass that semester and retook my course because a friend recommended it to him. Marcus is 34 years old and spoke and wrote about issues related to sexual orientation throughout the semester. Interestingly, he was very comfortable talking to me individually about his passionate views on marriage equality, but oftentimes seemed to censor himself when in larger groups. By the semester’s end, however, Marcus became more comfortable voicing his favorable opinions of the gay community and, while he did not explicitly identify himself as gay during the semester of this study, made it clear through his final projects that he was. Marcus is pursuing nursing and has some experience in other health-related careers.

“My experience with education so far has been very positive. With in my family history, there has only been two people that has graduated from high school, they are my sister and I. I attended High School, where I graduated in 1996. In order for me to get into college I had to graduate. Upon graduating high school, I knew I could get into just

about any college I wanted. I was told college is not as easy as high school. My impacted influence that I have and that I had through out all my schooling has been positive. I have no negative influences.

“My goals so far for my educational journey are as followed: to graduate, and go to college, which I had done. Some other goals I have are to graduate from college, get a good job, make lots of money, and to continue my education in the medical and nursing field. My first experience with education was scary. I felt that I might be made fun of in certain ways. On the other hand, my first experience with writing came when I entered middle school. I felt that I was not going to be able to do the tasks that were expected from me, and that I was not going to do well in English at all. Surprisingly enough, I did it and I felt great about myself. The difficult memories that shaped my feelings was that I had to do what needed to be done in order to get to where I am today. And because I did that I was able to attend college. In order to get into college you either have to be awarded a high school diploma or a G.E.D.

“My goals I have for my time here are to get through all my classes, pass all of them, get through clinicals, and graduate so I can obtain the best job out there in my field of study. Also, I want to make this experience a lifetime to remember and cherish. I plan to attain these goals by doing all my homework and turning them in on time and attending all my classes, everyday.

“The worst parts of schooling is failing your classes and having to retake them. The worst part of reading, writing and learning is that they are very difficult, but you can learn it quickly. The only worst part about education is that you need it to get anywhere

in life. For me, there is nothing bad about it. It is the best thing you can do with your life. Education is the one thing everyone needs to get anything in life.”

Melissa

The youngest participant at 26 years old, Melissa was working two jobs and raising children on her own. Also pursuing a nursing degree, Melissa previously completed the ESL sequence. She struggled throughout the semester to come to class on time and later revealed that she was responsible to transport her children and a neighbor's children to school each morning. Despite these struggles, Melissa was determined to move on in the writing course sequence to reach her goal of getting a nursing degree. She focused her energy on her education as she saw it as a service she was providing to her children, with the goal of improving their lives.

“My name is Melissa I'm from Dominican Republic. I grew up in Puerto Rico so my first memory of school it first grade. I remember that I had a lot of friend in school specially one of my friends Joel Matos Ortiz. I think the better year in my education was my first grade. I was so grateful to be in one school that I really love. I was a good student always with a really good grade. I remember one day in school with my friend Daysi her mom always give her money for all her A+ in school. Her mother always used to pay her for her grade. One day I asked my mom why she never gives me any money for my A+. I'm 25 years old now and I still remember what my mother said that afternoon to me. She said to me. 'I don't had to paid you for the best choice in your life. Education it likes a diamond with better grade you will shine more.'

“My middle school was great time for me. I was a excellent class room in which everyone had excellent grade. For some reason I had in my mind that we was the smart

group in the school. It was types of school were they organized the student by the student's grade. My plan for the middle school was maintaining my grade that way I can be with my friend always at the same time I felt so proud to be in a good group in school. In nine grade I graduated from school with honor roll. It was the best graduation. My mother was so proud of me because I finish middle school with honor roll. I start high school with excellent grades in Puerto Rico. I was on ten grade it was a new experience for me a new school. I was so happy to be with my friend. Even that I know that I had two more years to graduated from high school. My friend and I was having plan already plan for our high school graduation. But at that moment I don't know that my mother had another plan for me.

“When I finished my ten grade my mother send me to a new different world for me. I came over here. I was so confused it was hard to communicate with people here. Because I don't speak any English. It was hard to just go out and shopping. I was sure that when I started school in my eleven grades it will be a disaster. When I started school. My first day of class was so hard I don't understand anything. I miss my friend from my old school. When I was in lunch I thought that people wanted to fight because they speak so loud. It hard to came over to another country were you don't understand anything. I was so worried about my grades. I was a excellent student. I work really hard to learn the language English it not easy for me and I still working in improve my English. But I feel so proud to had my high school diploma. I graduated from high school with a really good grade. My plans for my future it to be a nurse, and learned more English to be useful in United States.”

Ronnie

Similar to Danielle, Ronnie entered this course having previously taken the basic writing 1 course. At 46 years old, Ronnie, an African-American, found himself playing the role of a husband, father, and grandfather, oftentimes caring for his grandchildren. During the semester, Ronnie was largely unemployed and studying business in order to open his own business at some point. Toward the end of the semester, Ronnie's family life began to change and he began to struggle with attendance and turning in assignments. He eventually disappeared entirely from the course, forced to look for work and become the main breadwinner as his wife's health prevented her from sharing the workload.

"My name is Ronnie. I was born in [birth place]. I am the son of Ronnie and Janice. I have one sister by my mom and two by my dad. I am married and have five children. I also have four grandchildren.

"My quest for education has been a long and happy journey. I will be the only one in my family to go to college. My mom went to college. Where she graduated with a degree in accounting. When I was in high school I wasn't the best student. My mom was always there for me. She kept me strong. My mom was the greatest positive influence on me. I'm not only doing this for me but, for her too. The only negative influence I have is me. Being lazy and waiting to the last minute. I'm still trying to fight that demon.

"I always set goals for myself. My goal this semester is to better understanding of the grammar. That is my main goal to be a natural. What I mean by that is to let things happen. I also want to work on my thought process. Processing information better. Writing better papers and being more informative. Those are the main things I have to work on.

“My first memory of education in writing is 9th grade English. It was a nightmare. I was scared and didn’t really know how to spell. I didn’t want to be known as the guy who couldn’t spell. I felt all a loan and couldn’t breathe. It was the worst.

“Besides not know that much about grammar. The spelling was the worst and a close second is being lazy. In high school I didn’t have to do is much too past. Today I look back and wish I would have taking advantage of the time I had.

“My goals at college are simple. First learn about everything I can no matter what it is. Second is to have a better understanding of things I read. Third to be the best writer I can. To write with confidence and a better understanding of what I’m writing. Last but not lease is to graduate.

“Finally the worst part of learning is I should have been did this. The best part of my educational journey is I still have time to do it. There really is no down side to education.”

Analysis of Participants’ View of Writing Competency

Since this critical action research study is rooted in writing competency and how students perceive writing competency after being taught from a critical perspective, it is important to outline the participants’ initial understanding of writing competency. Based on the personal educational narratives above, it is clear the participants shared some common understandings of what it meant to write at the college level, write competently, and which idiolect to use when. The educational narratives asked participants to provide a history of their educational experiences and while the participants may not have had the language to discuss idiolect and various discourses, investigation of the personal

educational narratives reveal that they have deep-rooted conceptions—preconceptions—before starting the semester as to where they hope to end up from a writing perspective.

Through the personal educational narratives and the first Critical Incident Questionnaire, which was given during the fifth class meeting, it is clear that the participants were focused on the lower order concerns of writing, and this impacted their understanding of what it meant to be a competent writer. Lower order concerns, a writing pedagogy term referring to writing concerns that include grammar, spelling, punctuation, is to be contrasted with higher order concerns (thesis statements, organization, support and examples). However, participants revealed some more sophisticated thinking as well.

Focus on Lower Order Concerns

The most commonly requested topics in the CIQ to discuss further were lower order concerns: grammar, punctuation, sentence-level mistakes, spelling, and titles. Within their personal educational narratives, Ronnie, Melissa, and Humar echoed these concerns. Humar directly equated writing competency or success with getting good grades. Ronnie clearly articulated being insecure and self-conscious about his spelling ability, while Melissa and Humar, both ESL students, expressed concerns about being able to communicate, on a basic level, with those around them. Amy, for example, believed that writing competency could be measured through vocabulary proficiency, and stated:

As a college student, as a requirement on better words, more describable words instead of just slang versus I really would just write however I thought it was supposed to be, never really took notice that there was a big difference between a

college writing or professional writing compared to a letter just to a friend or home.

Embedded in her response is an assumption of the validity of certain discourses of the English language. She is clearly putting a greater emphasis on, what she refers to as, “professional writing,” seeing it in a better light than writing to a friend. Additionally, she adds that writing competency includes issues of format and quantity of writing, another lower order concern, as she reflected in her exit interview:

Being able to give you close to the correct amount of pages that you wanted without running on. Getting enough information that was needed to make that paper. I know a lot of times I was sitting there thinking boy, I have a page to go yet, and I just don't know what else to write. I felt like I'd done gave him everything he possibly wanted. So I would just sit there. I'd re-write every – I went through three notebooks in your class. Everything you wanted, like I shared with you before, I wrote everything out. So I would go back through my writings and see if maybe I was typing too fast and I missed something, which there was times I did, so that might've given me maybe another half a paper or something came up in my head, like hey, I forgot to mention this part in the paper.

It is clear that Amy's previous experiences with writing, and in this course which she has taken before, were focused on quality being measured in number of pages written. This is fairly common for the basic writer—there is often an assumption that competent writers are able to produce large volumes of writing. Often overlooked is the quality of the writing. This also reveals a pedagogical approach to teaching writing. Some, albeit rare, assignments in some courses hinge on the number of pages written.

Oftentimes instructors will deduct points based on amount of words or number of pages written. What this does, in effect, is create a writing process that is geared toward meeting the number of necessary pages, rather than focusing on the writing itself. The placement test students take before enrolling is also tagged with an acceptable range of words to be written in the essay prompt. During the test, and during some courses, students assume that if they write the amount of words or pages requested, they will achieve a passing grade.

Marcus echoed Amy's initial sense of writing and speaking professionally, linking it to the job market:

To me it's what your employers look for. They want to see if you're going to be able, you know, to speak properly while you're on the job. And that goes for if you're serving tables or if you're working in retail. You have to be able to speak professionally to your customers.

Melissa also touched on the way employers view writing and speech, claiming, "if you have a company, you don't want to hire ghetto people in your company." Similar to Amy, Marcus and Melissa drew a sharp distinction between writing and speaking "professionally" and non-professionally, equating non-professional writing and speech to slang and swear words.

Limited Sense of Higher Order Concerns

There was, however, some focus on higher order concerns. These writing concerns, generally given more attention in writing classes and seen as more vital to successful writing, can be anything from thesis statement, organization, paragraph structure, supporting details and evidence, and introductions and conclusions. Amy

articulated the clearest sense of higher order concerns in her personal educational narrative (and later echoed throughout her reflective writing and exit interview). While she may have been lacking in the vocabulary to articulate her higher order concerns, she was clearly concerned about her own writing process and being able to get ideas down on paper to convey specific meaning to the reader. She located writing competency as an issue of format and organization. Additionally, Danielle spoke of her goals for writing as wanting to integrate the methods learned in this course into her other courses. She would qualify herself as a better writer if she is able to be organized and thorough in her writing in other courses.

Interestingly, Humar writes about her desire to leave a story—a narrative—to her children, but when asked about her goals for the course, she lamented not even knowing what an essay was. Typical for basic writers, the assumption that one type of writing is academically acceptable and another is not has a silo effect on students. They feel trapped between their own story and the foreign language that is required by the instructor for the class. This tension highlights the main tension found in basic and second language writers and the tension upon which this study is truly rooted in: the varying idiolects of students within the academic environment.

Similar to other participants, Ronnie expressed his goals to be career-focused. He sees himself as the provider to his family and with his wife's recent health issues, he has had to put his career aspirations on hold. Ronnie struggled throughout the semester to remain in the course, missing a number of classes due to life circumstances, but expressed in his exit interview a very clear determination to progress for his family's sake. Likewise, Melissa expressed her specific goals for this course to be centered around her

career goal to become a nurse. Within that goal of achieving a specific career path, Melissa also noted an issue with time management. In sentiments later echoed at mid-semester and during her exit interview, Melissa struggles with managing her work, school, and family life, a very typical stressor for adult learners in general.

Marcus identified his goals for the course as “to understand how to write better and become a better writer, and to just pass this class so I can move on to the next one.” Embedded in his answer are two typical and seemingly conflicting statements. On the one hand, Marcus is sincere about his desire to “become a better writer” by avoiding slang words and writing more chronologically or organized. On the other hand, Marcus expresses a desire to move on in his course work and get out of the remedial cycle. This desire to “hurry up and become a better writer” is common among basic writers. There is a very real understanding that the basic writing course is holding academic progress back. However, this truth must be reconciled with awareness that writing competency takes time.

And finally, both Danielle and Marcus focused their understanding of writing competency as a means to an end. Not specifying higher or lower order concerns, Danielle and Marcus both used metaphors that contain a sense of writing as a means to an end. Danielle specifically envisioned writing as something that opens new doors of self-expression and realization, while Marcus understood writing as a necessary tool for his own future career goals and aspirations. Likewise, in the initial CIQ, students discussed metaphors of their learning and writing in generally negative or deficient terms, with a sense of movement or hope. Metaphors like “a cautious old man,” “blind person,” “a crawling baby,” and “like a baby learning to walk” convey an initial sense of writing

competency as a life changing skill that needs to be mastered in order to progress. Writing competency, then, with the exception of Amy, was initially understood as a series of lower order concerns and procedures that needed to be learned and mastered in order for the student to continue growing. Missing from any initial understanding of writing competency is any critical component or multiple discourse discussion. Writing competency is straightforward and linear, which lines up with an assimilative approach to writing instruction, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the initial planning of the study as well as introduced the study participants through their first writing assignment, the personal educational narrative. Additionally, this chapter provided an analysis of the participants' view of writing competency based on the data presented in their personal educational narrative as well as some reflection from their exit interviews. Chapter Five will present the remaining stages of the action research project, described through the lens of the five major writing assignments during the semester.

CHAPTER FIVE

ACTION RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Since this study is theoretically grounded in critical theory and pedagogy, critical action research was chosen as the methodology as it allows for a social constructivist point of analysis. In privileging the worldview and positionality of the participants, this study was aimed at solving a locally-bound problem; that is, how to best teach writing to basic and second language learners of English. The overarching purpose or goal of this study was to identify pedagogical methods and tools that can bridge the gap between participants' home discourse and the academic discourse and move students from a position of assimilation/amalgamation to critical awareness of the various discourses. Chapter Four introduced the participants and the data for the earliest phases of the study. This chapter focuses more on the findings in light of five major writing assignments, and the midterm evaluation.

In order to accurately report the experience of this critical action research, I have broken the 30 class periods down into four major categories, around which four major writing assignments took place. While the semester calendar underwent five major revisions (Appendix H-L) throughout the semester based on student feedback and new information and topics we decided to cover, the general structure of the semester remained the same. The calendar revisions were in response to my assessment of the learning taking place (and whether or not a specific topic needed more time, for example, the mechanics of citation) and feedback from the students through class discussion and the biweekly CIQs. The class agreed upon any revision to the calendar and each student was given an updated calendar to follow for the remainder of the semester. The five

major writing assignments that the students worked on during the semester were a personal educational narrative, a compare and contrast, a research project, a persuasive argument, and a final creative portfolio project. Therefore, based on the five major writing assignments, the action research experience should be understood within these assignments. Each class session informed the next writing assignment as well as related discourses on writing.

This chapter will first highlight the philosophy behind the writing assignments and methods of the course, followed by a description of the role and purpose of the writing groups. The bulk of this chapter will be devoted to a description of the action research experience presented through the five major writing assignments of the semester.

Philosophy: Walking the Road Toward Critical Awareness

Since this study is a critical action research study, it is designed to identify a better way to approach and deliver a solution to a local problem. The local problem, once again, is the writing instruction for basic and second language learners in a community college setting. It has been established that adult basic writers are constantly navigating back and forth between discourses of their home and the academy and the current deficit model approach to basic writing instruction ignores that reality, asking for students to exchange their “deficient” discourse for a “professional, academic” discourse.

Essentially, the overall design of this critical action research was to generally move students from one point to another on the spectrum of thinking about education, writing, self, and the academy. In his 1912 poem “Proverbios y Cantares,” Antonio Machado wrote:

Wanderer, your footsteps are
the road, and nothing more;
wanderer, there is no road,
the road is made by walking.
By walking one makes the road,
and upon glancing behind
one sees the path
that never will be trod again.

The phrase “the road is made by walking,” later popularized by Paulo Freire and Myles Horton, is a very appropriate metaphor for the process and general framework of this critical action research. I began this semester with a general framework for the proposed progression of students from a point of assimilation and amalgamation to a point of critical awareness and social action. This process—this walking—done by participants and students mirrors the writing process, which was an integral part of my instruction during this study. It is indeed in this progression that critical consciousness can be potentially reached. Each assignment, therefore, builds off the previous in a progression forward down the road toward a critical consciousness. While each assignment was not generally designed to produce a certain mindset in students, each one does propel students toward a critical awareness/social action. A further discussion on how each assignment served that purpose will take place below.

Dialogue as an Act of Democracy

Part of walking the road toward critical consciousness involves including others in the journey (Freire, 1974). In truth, becoming critically aware necessitates critical reflection and dialogue. With the goal of returning classroom authority and power to the students, writing groups were formed early in the semester. The writing groups (roughly four students in each group) were organized based on the makeup of each student, in

order to facilitate the most diverse possible combination of students. For example, students with an ESL background were not all grouped together; rather, they were put in groups containing native speakers of English. Students who took the previous level of basic writing were also spread out among the groupings.

The writing groups were responsible for two major things over the semester. First, writing groups were responsible to select, research, and present a “writing topic” to the class. Each group presented twice and topics were identified by the students through their reflection on writing assignment one as well as other pressing needs throughout the semester. Therefore, the semester calendar underwent five revisions to accommodate the new needs and concerns students wanted to cover in the writing group presentations. Furthermore, each student was given the opportunity to write a brief self-assessment on his/her group presentation, giving me a score out of 50 points based on how well they perceived their group performed and how much they contributed to the group. The student self-assessment scores were averaged as a group and averaged with my assessment, which led to the group’s final grade on that presentation.

Second, the writing groups were responsible to conduct writing workshops for each rough draft written. Writing workshop process follows the standard set by compositionist Donald Murray (Murray, 2003) very common in writing classrooms and documented in Wordshop Production’s demonstration film, *Student Writing Groups* (1988). The writing workshop consists of a three part process: 1) one student reads his/her rough draft out loud to the writing group who listen and jot down general reactions, 2) the same student re-reads the rough draft aloud and the group members make notes on positives, negatives, and questions they have, 3) feedback is shared with

the reader. Students performed two major writing workshops (for the rough drafts of assignment two and assignment three), and later performed a modified workshop called a Professional Learning Group (PLG) focused on writing assignment four and five. The PLG will be discussed below.

Inherent in the writing groups and the course structure as a whole is the assumption that dialogue will not only take place regularly, but also be part of the democratic process in the classroom. Central to critical pedagogy, and the various discourses stemming from and related to critical pedagogy—critical feminism, critical multiculturalism, critical race theory, and critical media literacy—the act of dialogue itself creates an environment in which new knowledge and learning can exist. Freire’s original writings position dialogue as a counter to an anti-dialogic learning experience. It is through a dialogic relationship that critical pedagogy and its related discourses can move learners toward a sense of liberation (Grace & Wells, 2007; Kaufmann, 2010; Lange, 2004).

Within this study, and the entire semester, dialogue not only occurred on a very regular and consistent basis between the students and me, but also among the students themselves. Further de-centering the classroom and giving the power back to the students requires the students to investigate new ways of knowing among themselves. The writing groups and Professional Learning Groups both aided in this process. As opposed to students centering their revisions of their writing assignments on my comments alone, the writing groups and PLGs allowed students to dialogue with each other and rely on each other for assistance in the process, further instilling a sense of ownership and democracy in the classroom environment.

Critique, De-centering, and Creation

Additionally, dialogue, as a centerpiece of this study, facilitated a number of other outcomes that are central to critical discourses in education. Specifically, dialogue enabled the critique of the ideology of the supremacy of the academic discourse. This discourse, in tension with students' home discourse, was discussed and critiqued throughout the semester, as evident through the description of class sessions in the next section. Without dialogue, the critique would not have taken place. Through critiquing the dominant discourses, students were also able to critique the dominant form in which they are educated. This took place through the de-centering of the classroom power from me, as the instructor, to the students as co-planners of lessons, writing assignments, grading requirements and grades. This process will be detailed throughout the subsequent chapters, and highlighted in Chapter Seven.

Likewise, dialogue and critique enabled students to engage in a process of knowledge creation and creative ways of knowing. Countering a common critique of critical pedagogy, this study took the approach to critique *and* create (Tisdell, 2011), with a focus on others ways of knowing. After a semester of writing multiple drafts of essays, students were encouraged to make use of their cultural imaginations (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2009) in a final portfolio project. Details of these writing assignments will be discussed next in this chapter.

Attending to Positionality

In order to have a relevant, personal pedagogy of writing during this study, the issue of positionality was discussed and attended to in a few different ways. First, as the instructor, I openly shared my positionality and cultural background in order to create a

classroom environment that was conducive to discussions of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, orientation, and class. Because the class consisted of a diverse set of students, it was deemed important to focus on creating a climate that would engage students in discussion of their own positionality and how that interacts with their writing.

Second, positionality was highlighted in the supplemental readings and the topics I chose to emphasize with students throughout the semester. I intentionally tried to select readings from a diverse set of writers, and offer examples of writing on diverse issues. This exposure also impacted the classroom environment and opened students up to discussion of their own positionality as well as problematizing the dominant discourses in regards to positionality. It should also be noted that in the introduction to participants in Chapter Four, all of the participants wrote narratives that explored their positionality. Therefore, special attention was given to details of positionality in Table 2 in Chapter Four. Further examples of the emphasis on positionality and its ramifications on the study and participants will be highlighted in the subsequent sections and chapters.

The Writing Assignments

This basic writing course was obviously focused on student writing and research. Based on the college's learning outcomes for the course, it was predetermined that the course focus on the various stages of writing (pre-writing, writing, post-writing), examine the various strategies within a writing process (invention, arrangement, editing), emphasize close-reading skills, engage in research management, and produce longer written essays. Within those general learning outcomes, each instructor can determine the writing assignments, as he or she sees fit. Table 3 outlines each writing assignment. Detailed descriptions will be given under each new writing assignment heading.

Table 3

The Writing Assignments

Assignment	Description	Critical Components
1. Personal Educational Narrative (narrative)	A narrative essay encouraging students to reflect on their experiences with writing	An introduction to the idea of various discourses and the power of language
2. Comparing the Discourses (compare/contrast)	Investigating similarities and differences of academic English and home English	A critical reflection on mechanics, purpose, audience, context, and benefits and usage of the two discourses in which they embedded
3. Creation of New Knowledge (research)	Adding new knowledge to a topic of their choice through research	Interrogating the source of knowledge and encouraging students to add their own voice to a field of their choice
4. Social Change Within Communities (persuasive argument)	An essay that allows students to argue a topic to a specific audience	Arguing a solution to a local problem within students' community
5. Creative Ways of Representing Learning (final creative portfolio)	Culmination of the semester's work including creative reflection on the learning process	Allowing for critique and creation as well as engaging in other ways of representing learning, challenging rational representations

In the initial planning stages of this study, the first writing assignment was developed as a catalyst for the remainder of the study. The personal educational narrative would serve as an initial piece of data, upon which the rest of the course could be developed. Based on the writing in the personal educational narrative, we would identify issues to discuss, topics to cover, and themes of future writing assignments. Likewise, the final creative portfolio was also determined in the initial planning stage as a capstone to the course and the study. Given its open-ended nature, I felt confident developing this

assignment early as it could be adjusted to serve any new purpose deemed necessary as the study continued. The next five sections will discuss the action research experience through the structure of each writing assignment.

Writing Assignment 1: Personal Educational Narrative (Class Periods 1-3)

The goal of the first writing assignment was to assess how the students felt about themselves in light of the basic writing course they have been told they need to take. Every student has a story to tell. Some of the most powerful stories they tell are related to their lived experiences. Assignment one was planned in advance to offer students a space to tell their own stories in relation to their experiences with writing, being placed in a basic writing course, and education in general.

I asked students to reflect on two short stories before writing this assignment. Amy Tan's (2002) "Mother Tongue" and Nicholasa Mohr's (2002) "The English Lesson" both deal with a tension between the acceptable language of the academy, and a presumed unacceptable home or native language. Students were asked to reflect on this idea and discuss how they use language and writing in their daily lives. This essay introduces students to the idea of various discourses and the power that language and the role of the student and the instructor play in the classroom experience.

Before getting into assignment one, however, my first task was to set the stage for the study. After giving information sheets and consent form, the class seemed to understand what the goals of the study were. The faculty secretary provided the informed consent form and collected it from the class. We then discussed the syllabus in general and I informed the students they would be in charge of group presentations as well as designing course content and assignments based on their needs.

Uncovering the mystery. In order to get a sense of what topics they would like to cover in class, I asked the class to journal about some of their “issues” with writing and what their concerns are. Many of the students shared their responses: verb tenses, punctuation, subject/verb agreement. The presence of lower order concerns, as reflected in the initial understanding of writing competency in Chapter Four, led me to believe the students were in search of a formula. In my journal, I noted that students approached the course as if there was “a mysterious academic discourse that they must “crack” in order to succeed.” Grammar and lower order concerns point at a tension between the discourses of these students. They enter a classroom and assume that the instructor has the knowledge they need to succeed. I reflected in my journal that this assumption that the students held had the possibility to alter the environment of dialogue and empowerment I sought to create in the classroom. Determined not to let that happen, I wrote: “Next class, I will challenge the students to question the very idea that they need to learn certain lower order issues rather than other issues.”

Metaphors for writing relationship. Toward the end of the week, we began to discuss how we feel about writing. So I prompted the students with a journal of “describe a metaphor for your relationship with writing.” I wanted to see how the students felt about their own writing. After journaling, we discussed in small groups and each group came up with one metaphor for their relationship with writing. The first group described their relationship like a bird in that you need to learn to flap your wings before you can fly. The second group described it as a frustrated marriage, rife with awkward silences and miscommunication. The third group described the relationship as a neatly rowed staircase—each step leads to another and eventually, you find yourself at the top. The

final group used a bomb as a metaphor, claiming that their writing was scattered and lacking any organization “when it goes off.” Lacking in a specific target, the writing generally does more damage than good. Overall, negative relationship metaphors dominated the discussion again indicating a deficit approach in the students to their own writing. Where this deficit-consciousness came from will be explored in the findings section later in this chapter.

We also talked about Mohr’s “The English Lesson” and Tan’s “Mother Tongue.” Students understood the control of the instructor in Mohr’s piece to be both a positive and negative. There was a tension in the class about instructor control and if it is constructive to the learning environment. The students went back and forth about how effective classrooms were run, many sharing their own experiences of being called on without warning and forgetting everything they had prepared to speak on. Those who defended instructor control talked of it in terms of keeping students on guard in order to have them participate, and forcing students to learn all the material, not just one section. “Mother Tongue” brought up the topic of multiple Englishes. Conversation here revolved around accents and dialects rather than discourses.

On the due date for assignment one, I asked the students to reflect on the experience of writing the assignment. I planned on using the findings from assignment one to plan the remainder of the semester, depending on student need. As the assignment asked students to reflect on their position within multiple discourses, the writing and reflection of the students on the writing was vital. The reflection on the narrative raised a number of interesting points that highlighted their experience writing the assignment. The groups reported that the process of writing assignment one was difficult, but writing

about themselves is a preferred topic for assignments. Students struggled with what to include in the assignment, thus making it harder on them, they felt, during the writing process.

Self-created themes. I then asked students to get into groups and read their assignments out loud to each other, taking notes, and keeping track of some larger writing related issues that rise to the top. Essentially, I asked the students to pull some themes so that I could compare with the themes I pull when I read the assignments. These themes will be part of the rest of the semester planning as well as the group presentations. As a class, we settled on needing to discuss 1) everyday English v. academic English, 2) verbs, word choice, punctuation, 3) brainstorming and idea generation, 4) thesis statements, 5) introductions and conclusions, and 6) focus and support. These general themes, as provided by the students, were used to plan the rest of the semester in regards to student group presentations, general class topics, and future assignments.

My initial assumption that students would be interested to discuss the difference between writing for the academy and writing in everyday life was reinforced as it came up in student writings many times (as evidenced in the text of assignment one in Chapter Four). While the students expressed interest in the topic conceptually, there was some confusion on the existence of the two discourses. On some level, students recognized that the discourses existed; however, in practice, students almost unanimously deferred to the academic discourse. Participants universally understood the academic discourse as “more professional” and preferred by both me, as the instructor, and future places of employment. This assumption was expected and reinforces the idea that participants were firmly rooted in the assimilation stage of language acquisition. For their futures and for

their own good, they were under the assumption that they needed to acquire a new language—the academic discourse—in order to succeed and the metaphors the students used in their first CIQ represents a growing experience with an end goal in mind. Metaphors like “a crawling baby,” and “a baby learning to walk” conveyed a sense of perceived immaturity of the participants who were looking forward to a time of maturity.

Writing Assignment 2: Comparing the Discourses (Class Periods 4-12)

In order to return some of the course ownership and planning to the students and participants, they were in charge of deciding what assignment two looks like. After assignment one, students began to center their needs for the course on issues of feeling out of place in the classroom, general comprehension (“lost in translation”), and insecurity when writing and talking about self.

However, in preparation for assignment two, students were still generally struggling with the idea of multiple discourses, despite having identified that as an issue to discuss and articulating the tension in their first writing assignment. Writing assignment two was then planned to offer a comparison between the two discourses (Appendix G), asking students to reflect on the context and usage of the two discourses in which they embedded. Students were encouraged to discuss each discourse in relation to mechanics, purpose, audience, context, and benefits and usage. Further integration of the critical readings was also encouraged. We discussed the readings that were meant to highlight various tensions in language and culture in hopes that students would lend some insight into what their second writing assignment can be.

Students were having a hard time understanding the multiple discourses within the English language. The very idea challenged their assumption that there is one “right”

way to write and speak English. While I've had success discussing this with other classes, this section specifically was struggling at this point in the class and seemed to want to think that there is only one English (the true, perfect and right version), despite writing about the different stages of academic discourse acquisition in their initial narrative. Part of this resistance to duplicity and in between-ness may be attributed to the fact that a number of students in the section are former ESL students. Within the ESL program, students are taught to assimilate and assume the language of the dominant culture in order to survive in the academic setting. This approach took place via reading comprehension quizzes, as Humar articulated:

Quizzes were based on the story that we read. We had to read five to six, sometimes 10 chapters in one night and discuss it the next day in the class, and that credit based on those stories' characters and the meaning in the story. What did they do? Who was there? What took place?

Since her ESL course experience was centered around language assimilation, Melissa carried this approach over to her other courses: "My thing for today [everyday], I wish I could learn one word or something new every day."

Based on this struggle to identify and articulate the existence of multiple discourses, I assigned a journal that asked students to think about what type of English is being presented in our textbook, what rules are being privileged, and why that is. Initial relations to the journal prompt are "there is only one English. The right way."

But with further discussion, the students were able to articulate and understand the tension between Englishes. By the end of the class period, the students felt better about the writing assignment two and the ideas I was discussing. Writing assignment two

asks them to compare and contrast their academic and home Englishes. I wasn't initially satisfied with their depth of discussion and understanding of the tension, even though many of them expressed the tension in their narrative. The readings designed to encourage this thinking seemed to fall short, but with discussion of the readings in light of this journal prompt, I could see the students starting to understand my goals.

Discomfort with the tensions. The concept of tensions is a main concept of the study that highlights discourse and cultural tensions and the difficulty in reconciling them as recommended by Berman (2000). Dwelling within the tension consists of the ability to hold “contradictory propositions, or emotions, simultaneously; sustaining the tension of this conflict so that a deeper reality can emerge than one would have if one simply opted, for example, for Self or Other” (p. 6). It is simple, it can be argued, to opt for either complete refusal of “standard English” for one’s “home English” and never advance past basic writing courses. Rather than challenge issues of power and privilege inherent in language itself, choosing to reject investigation of the dominant language in favor of relying on the “Self,” or natural language, leaves both the learner and the system unchanged. Likewise, complete rejection of a “home language” in favor of assimilating to the language of the dominant culture is a failure to self and overdependence on an “Other” that may be known *of*, but not *known*.

Through reading the rough drafts of assignment two, I observed that a lot of the students were missing the mark on describing the tension found within language and how power structures play a part in it. We discussed each story in detail and I encouraged the class to make note of tensions.

Living with the tension. Students were able to begin to live with the tension, or at least understand it over time. Our discussion evolved a good bit and eventually we were able to identify aspects of each short story read so far that reflect and mirror what is considered the “norm” and what is considered a “deviation.” These themes in the reading are meant to help the students think about how some dialects are privileged and some are not, without consideration of the cultural backgrounds of the dialects. Table 4 below represents the notes the class came up with together after the discussion and in preparation for the writing of assignment two.

Table 4

Dwelling Within the Tension

Reading/Author	Academic/Professional/Norm	Home/Slang/Deviation
“The English Lesson” Nicholasa Mohr	Speaking in front of the class The academic language Using English rather than native language	Native language outside of class Native language in class
“Mother Tongue” Amy Tan	Embarrassment when her mother cannot be understood Wanting her mom to speak “proper” English Proper English when giving lecture	When with mother, sentence structure changes Perception of mom’s limited English
“The House on Mango Street” Sandra Cisneros	The ideal is a house that is nice and permanent No embarrassment Good neighborhood All shows wealth and stability	Moving from place to place Peeling paint Living in a dodgy neighborhood Perception of others on her
“His Grace” Mikhail Naimy	Power in titles and authority structures Being called by your title Being respected and feared	Realizing titles are meaningless There is a void behind titles that mean nothing Living your life as if you are better than
“Barbie-Q” Sandra Cisneros	Brand new toys The image of a Barbie doll on women All the accessories Money, wealth, status	Damaged/used toys Previously owned The smell of burning Worn out

Sandra Cisneros' (2002) "Barbie-Q" was commonly misunderstood as a story about toys. We watched a short film about how Barbie dolls reinforce negative self-images of women. We also listened to a radio program about Enron emails and how the language used can signify whether or not the email was going up the chain or down. Being within a structure of power is a tough concept. We discussed how the word tension is part of the equation here and outlined how the supplemental readings to date highlight this (Table 4).

Generally it was a struggle to get the students to see the tensions in which they are embedded. There is an inherent privileging of the academic discourse, or what is professional and normal, especially among the former ESL students. Marcus reflected wanting to learn the academic discourse so that he could "write better and become a better writer and to just pass this class so I can move on to the next one." Danielle discussed the advantages of taking on the dominant discourse as something she could make use of for long term success:

As far as my writing, you know, becoming better at writing essays and understanding them more because I know that just from the classes, you know, the essays and stuff that I wrote in class like the compare and contrast, stuff like that. I've used that in my biology to write essays for him. And, you know, all around become a better writer.

Transitioning, we also turned to discuss lower order concerns of writing, based on the initial planning of the first few class periods. Through group presentations, we discussed introductions and conclusions as well as various grammar topics. I found that the groups were looking for formulas on each topic. In other words, they wanted to

present the one way to write an introduction and conclusion. They discussed a lot of ideas that are rooted in a mechanical, behaviorist approach to writing. Similar to the five paragraph essay, there is a formula for conclusions that says, “summarize what you just wrote.” This thinking is not any fault of theirs—it has been taught to them since elementary school. So we struggled to break the mold and discuss alternative, creative approaches to conclusions and introductions. Students were resistant, again relying on previous flawed knowledge and conceptions of writing.

Generally, group presentations increase student interest and ownership of a topic. I ask students to give a summary, activity and a critique of the topic. The critique is a chance for the students to describe the tension within that specific grammar concept. Interestingly, the students asked for and decided they needed, lessons on grammar. It fell flat. I am not surprised in some ways because it is part of my discussion on failures of basic writing that grammar drill and kill does not work. In my journal from the time, I wrote: “While I do not drill and kill, even examples and discussions of punctuation and verb tenses caused most of the students to glaze over. They get easily distracted and fidgety when we discuss these lower order concerns, even after asking for them!” The irony here is that while students ask for instruction in lower order issues, they are less interested in them, compared to other discussions.

Writing Assignment 3: Creation of New Knowledge (Class Periods 13-19)

The third major writing assignment for the semester revolved around research. As part of the learning outcomes of the course, students are required to demonstrate basic information management skills such as locating and citing sources and maintaining academic honesty and avoiding plagiarism. Therefore, assignment three required students

to locate and document a certain number of sources and write a standard research essay with a specific research question. However, in keeping with the democratic classroom environment, students were in charge of their own topics. Furthermore, I positioned the assignment as a chance for students to create new knowledge. We had a discussion about how using sources is a way of entering a conversation with other experts on a topic. By interrogating the source of knowledge and the power that the production of knowledge has on students, this essay encourages students to add their own voice to a field of their choice. Students were encouraged to identify research topics that were meaningful to them.

Learning to interact with sources. At first, students were confused about how to go about learning to interact with, and interrogate, sources and needed instruction on the mechanics of citation. We discussed using sources appropriately in text (parentheticals) led by a student group. The group presented general information, without much detail. Students were visibly overwhelmed as we discussed how to cite sources in text. Building a chain is the metaphor I used to get them to see how sources incorporate with their own ideas.

Generally, participants acknowledged struggling most with the research assignment because of documenting sources which, as Amy claimed, were “low-level, nothing major,” but had a significant effect on the participants confidence about the assignment. Danielle identified the feedback given on rough drafts to be the most helpful during her writing process of the research paper, as well as examples that can be followed.

Marcus made the greatest stride in his research assignment. He focused both his research and persuasive essays on the issue of marriage equality, an issue that he described as meaning a lot to him. In terms of creating new knowledge, Marcus pushed that boundary the furthest and was able to articulate that in his exit interview:

As far as writing them I think what helped me the most was doing the research and putting them together because I've actually learned a lot more with both topics than I had already known about the issue. So I want to say doing the research and putting them together also was a big help, but the reason I wrote them was because the topics mean a lot to me and it's time that, you know, people realize, you know, it doesn't matter where you go anymore, you're going to see it everywhere. You know, it doesn't matter which state you live in, you're going to hear about it. You know, you're going to hear about this; you're going to hear about that; you're going to see this; you're going to see that. It's time to put the two together and balance them out.

Clearly taking a position on a controversial topic, Marcus was able to create new knowledge for himself, as mentioned above, as well as for others in the classroom.

Anchoring in the personal. The students seem to learn and understand this process better when they were personally engaged with the topic, as it is evident in Marcus' example above. The creation of new knowledge theme is also related to the multiple discourses theme that was presented earlier. In fact, much of the conversation continued on into other writing assignments. In order to better convey the point, I showed students the 1974 resolution from the National Council of Teachers of English entitled "Resolution on the Students' Right to Their Own Language." In that resolution, recently

reaffirmed in 2009, NCTE and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) presented a counterpoint to “a tendency in American society to categorize nonstandard dialects as corrupt, inferior, or distorted forms of standard English.” Fearing the damaging labeling of students taking place in the academy in late 1960s and early 1970s, this resolution affirmed the need for qualified teachers to nurture the unique dialects found within the classroom, rather than discriminate or oppose them. I presented the document to the students and asked them to read and journal their reactions and response.

The second language learners in the class were mostly vocal about instructors not discriminating against them in writing classes, based on the document. Many expressed an insecurity and fear of sharing work in front of instructors or classmates due to their self-perceived shortcomings in grammar and diction. The document seemed to energize them and make them aware of the equality of their language, and helped to increase their personal engagement. They latched on to the idea that the instructor cannot discriminate against those who have accents or use a different dialect of English (first resolution). My reaction from the time, in my journal, was: “While the larger idea of students owning their own discourse may be a bit complex and may have been missed, the students really latched on to the idea of non-discrimination, especially the former ESL students. They’ve clearly been through this before.”

Native speakers of English were also energized by the document; they perceived it added validity to their home discourse. However, others were very vocal about the need to assimilate to the majority language for purposes of succeeding in academics and career goals. Humar resisted the idea the most claiming that there was only one English and

what good could come from knowing and using multiple Englishes. Melissa described the tension of multiple discourses and languages that exist in her home as she is raising children in an English-speaking school. She says that speaking in Spanish and English to her children confuses them as the two languages mix and her children begin to blend the two in their own classrooms:

You know how little kids give you book from school that you have to read every night. So before I used to read the book and my daughter used to look at me like what'd you say mommy? What is that? And I tried to spell it and I tried to like, now I can read her a book without she asking me, mom what'd you say? I don't understand. It is a big difference and I feel proud of me. Because even I make time for her and read to her so I won't read the difference between English and I speak to her in a professional way. I don't tell her slang words because I don't want that she became like poor speaker. I want that she know the difference between the two English. So when I talk to her now that she's older and she know how to speak and write English and Spanish I speak to her in a professional way.

Similarly, Ronnie discussed the impact of multiple discourses on future generations. Seeing his granddaughter begin to "speak in slang," Ronnie expressed the desire to try to "flip it over to proper English with her," while still struggling with the tension himself. His motivation, however, continues to be his family:

Like when I write my dad I'm writing everything because my dad is real as stickler for. He has a Ph.D., so he's a real stickler for no slang and none of this. But I'll put it in quotes, just to mess with him or something. He says my writing's

really changed, so that's the first he ever said that to me so I do feel better. And now my writing is proper English and it's proper grammar and it's punctuation [...] he couldn't believe it. He said I never seen you write like this. You never wrote me a four-page letter. You never did this. You always call and like, for like Christmas I didn't send him a card I wrote him a letter and he liked it. And he said he framed it and everything.

All my life, me and my dad have always had these problems because I never thought he gave me credit for nothing I did but sports. But now he actually, he actually said that he's proud of me for going to school, and he can see a difference in my writing and he gave me like. That's the most I'm going to get from him so I took it as a compliment.

While reaching new levels in his relationship with his father, Ronnie also expressed the tension between the discourses that are exposed when the academic discourse is used within a culture with a different discourse, often being told that he “talks white.”

Midterm Individual Conferences (Class Periods 14-15)

At midterm, I held individual conferences with each student to discuss how the semester is going for them, any issues with writing they would like focused on in the second half of the semester, and any overall impressions they would like to share with me. Generally, these midterm conferences are a good way to catch up with students individually; a traditional semester is very fast paced and with 21 students enrolled, there is not always time to talk to students individually. The midterm conference data, similar to the biweekly CIQs, was used to adapt the course in the second half.

There is a risk, however, with these individual conferences that students merely reproduce language that has been prevalent in the course of the semester in order to avoid looking like they are lagging behind. Despite being told that the conferences have no impact whatsoever on their grades, students do generally fall into a format of trying to act like everything is fine. To avoid this, I asked students to think specifically of things that are going well, things they would like to change for the second half of the semester, and things they would eliminate in the course altogether. By guiding students with these questions, the emphasis shifts from the student and his/her classroom performance toward a discussion of how they see the course serving their needs. This approach is very similar to the biweekly CIQs. However, participants took advantage of the midterm conferences to express where they were in life and how that intersected with their academic goals. Much of the midterm conference data will be discussed in more detail in the findings in the next chapter; however, to begin to understand the lived experience of these adults within the classroom, it is important to note what they chose to emphasize in their individual conferences with me.

Overall, the midterm conferences with participants were positive within a realistic framework. Participants acknowledged struggles, both academic and personal. Ronnie, who began missing a number of classes toward midterm, exhibited a determination for the second half of the semester. Based on the roles he plays at home as a father, grandfather, and husband, Ronnie saw himself as a standard bearer for his family. “I mean I’m there for people who need me. I don’t ask for nothing in return and no recognition or nothing, you know. And I like to be leaned on when people need stuff,” he later expressed in his exit interview. At midterm, however, he was dealing with personal

issues that were keeping him from attending every class. His wife was going through some medical issues and he found himself in a caretaker role for his granddaughter. “I am not giving up,” he repeated over and over during our conference. “My wife can’t really work no more and all this and that so I’ve been thrust up in the front of putting my goals aside, you know, and being a provider now. So that changed my goals, but I do want to graduate from college.”

One of his ultimate goals, echoed by Danielle, is to achieve a degree that will allow him to make a change for his family. Both Danielle and Ronnie confirmed this in their exit interview and pointed at the downturned United States economy for their return to the classroom. Danielle noted that with the health issues of both her husband and herself, it was of utmost importance to “get through” a degree in order to be in a position where she can start her own business, rather than work a job that has her “punch a clock and [she] has to be there.”

Since community colleges bring a wide array of students to the classroom and the participants of this study were entirely adults with major out-of-school commitments, it is not surprising that issues of employment and family life and care were at the forefront of a number of participants’ issues at midterm. Similar to Ronnie, Melissa, a former ESL student, found herself stretched thin at midterm due to the health and basic care of her young daughter. Normally coming in to class late, she mentioned, was due to her daughter’s school schedule, as well as the schedule of her neighbor’s daughter, who she helps out with in the morning. Melissa also exhibited a very determined attitude toward this course and a lot of it revolved around her young daughter. As her daughter was starting school herself, Melissa noticed that there was a growing rift between the type of

English she used and the type of English that her daughter was being taught in school. In her exit interview, she went into more depth on this difference:

I used to read the book and my daughter used to look at me like what'd you say mommy? What is that? And I tried to spell it and I tried to like, now I can read her a book without she asking me, mom what'd you say? I don't understand. It is a big difference and I feel proud of myself.

The desire to align Englishes with family members was also expressed by Humar. While I would consider her a very high performing ESL student in that she possessed many technical English skills, she expressed insecurity in her own language acquisition. Frustrated by her own grammar mistakes at midterm, Humar was determined to get an A in the class, but she was also determined to set the language bar high in her own household by speaking only English with her children. Both Humar and Melissa expressed the only way to have their children succeed in school is to have a mostly assimilative language situation at home. Specifically, Humar stated:

I wanted my kids do good at school and I paid attention to other people's kids when they speak English [only at] home, [they] have hard time catching up in school... If my kids grow up learning that speaking English with the right grammar, they don't have to fix themselves at the end because they're already on the track. That gives them some time when they go to college and write papers.

Both Amy and Marcus felt that they were on a road to redemption at midterm. Both previously took the same course (with a different instructor), and had very different, and sometimes negative, experiences. Amy, who previously took the course in an online environment, felt at midterm that she was "finally getting it" by modeling her writing on

the examples discussed in class via the readings and her own research. Previously frustrated with a lack of “one-on-one interaction” in the online environment, Amy expressed a sense of comfort that allowed her to ask questions that helped her understand the writing assignments.

Similarly, Marcus was retaking the class—for a third time total—claiming that he was “too smart for it last semester,” feeling frustrated last semester with the lack of opportunity to express his feelings about his writing process. Unfortunately, in the first half of the semester, Marcus wrote an almost identical assignment two rough drafts as another classmate. When approached, he admitted to patterning his rough draft on his classmate. At midterm, however, he expressed a fairly mature understanding of the issue and moved on, claiming he “wouldn’t let it slow him down” in his ultimate goal of getting an A in the class.

Writing Assignment 4: Social Change within Communities (Class Periods 20-26)

For writing assignment four, I wanted to push students into a very explicit form of critical inquiry. Essentially the entire semester had been building up to assignment four where students are given the opportunity to identify a local problem and petition the larger power structures to solve the problem. Students were encouraged to choose a problem that they were personally facing. The emphasis on arguing a local problem within their own personal community was designed to help students understand that they can change a perceived threat or injustice through writing and well-reasoned arguments.

I centered the discussion of the persuasive assignment on a cause and effect relationship. The cause and effect essay is seen throughout basic writing textbooks and is considered appropriate for the basic writing classroom. Where cause and effect essays

generally fall short is attaching the relationship to larger, local problems that can be acted upon. Therefore, the persuasive writing assignment is meant to allow students to think critically and push back on a problem they encounter within their community or communities.

Examining complexities within issues. A danger in examining the cause and effect relationship is the tendency to simplify the issue. So we discussed examining local problems from the perspective of the most local solution. Rather than search for an omnipotent solution, we discussed simple, local solutions. For example, Marcus chose to pursue marriage equality as a local problem. Specifically, he noted that same sex marriage is not legal in the state in which he resides. His first audience that he identified that he wanted to persuade to legalize same sex marriage was the President of the United States. Likewise, when Humar decided to attempt to solve the problem of discrimination and bias toward Muslim-Americans, she first wanted to convince “Americans, everyone.” This oversimplification (assuming that the easiest fix is the person/entity with the greatest control) would in fact undermine both students’ arguments and lead to no solutions.

To further examine this idea, we watched the film *You Got to Move* (1985), which focused on Myles Horton’s Highlander School and its role in educating and activating citizens to articulate and act against a local problem by engaging the most local power structure. When the Cranks Creek community flooded due to the heavy strip mining in the area by mining companies, the community members first took their grievances and persuasion of a solution to the mining company, the most local entity, rather than oversimplifying the issue and writing a letter to the President. Cranks Creek community, in this example, was forced to climb the ladder of authority, eventually petitioning state

government for changes. However, the point remains clear. In order to make a change, solutions must be presented locally. Through discussion and group work, Marcus eventually decided his best chance at change was to target the Governor of the state and Humar decided to convince parents to raise their children free of anti-Muslim beliefs. As one student wrote in a CIQ at the end of the week, “if you wanna be part of making a change, you can not just sit around and wait for it. Get some people that feel the same way and change whatever it is.”

Using individual and group learning for persuasive writing. We made use of both individual and group learning techniques to understand persuasive writing. As a class, we discussed persuasive writing techniques and local problems that effect us daily. We also analyzed Chinua Achebe’s “Dead Men’s Path” and examined the problem and who might be able to solve it. Each student came up with a local problem they want to be fixed. The problems fell into two categories: 1) daily problems (fix roads, slow down in my neighborhood, living conditions) and 2) larger national issues (marriage equality, gun ownership and rights).

To further instill the idea of action as part of this persuasive assignment, I introduced students to a number of letters to editors from local newspapers. To continue brainstorming audience and solution, I broke students up into small groups to perform Professional Learning Groups (PLGs). PLGs are designed to empower students to become active partners in the learning process and to be held accountable for the choices they make. In line with the Freirean concept of rejecting passive learning and accepting active learning, PLGs are a constructivist approach to sharing and creating knowledge, scaffolding pieces of information upon one another (Sheety & Rundell, 2012). In small

groups, one student introduces a topic or a problem they are struggling with. The rest of the group makes suggestions to solve the problem, and the presenter picks one solution to implement. That implementation takes place (outside of the classroom) and is reported on during the next PLG.

Very similar to the action research cycle, PLGs entail a problem, feedback, action, and reflection. I asked students to come to class with any remaining issues they had with writing, the writing process, or the fourth writing assignment, and investigate the problem within a PLG setting. Group discussion went one of three ways: strong group reliance and independence, a quick discussion that got through everyone's problem quickly, or continued asking of the instructor to solve the problem. Groups that fell into the last category commonly commented that, "my problem is something that I think you need to solve for me, not my group." However, PLGs are designed to put the ownership on the students as far as the explanation, discussion, and brainstorming of solutions. The critical goal of this activity at the end of the semester was to reinforce to students that the instructor does not own the knowledge and does not own the rules of the English language. At this late point in the semester, it was interesting to note that some students still struggled with a communal approach to knowledge creation. The majority of groups, however, performed the PLG perfectly and had very active and inventive discussions that create new approaches to writing issues.

The students presented their persuasive arguments to the class and were generally excited about their arguments and the chance to present them. Humar noted that having the forum to express a critical topic was empowering to her:

That's the chance to tell other people what kind of person you are. Oh, a Muslim. You can't just talk to people one person, hey the Muslim people not too bad, they're not terrorists. You can't say that. That's a good chance for me to tell everyone that we're just normal people like them, like people everywhere.

And it is this empowerment that was the goal of this assignment. When students are able to identify a local problem within their community, and a way to remedy or solve that problem, through writing, an act of critical awareness has taken place. Humar specifically used her positionality as a starting point for a critique of the dominant assumptions of Muslims. In her case, wearing a *hijab* in public (the catalyst for her "problem") put her religion on display and she struggled throughout the semester to speak to, and process, the implications of being a Muslim female in America.

Writing Assignment 5: Creative Ways of Representing Learning (Class Period 27-30)

To finish up the semester, we focused on a final portfolio. As part of the necessary learning outcomes of the course, a final portfolio is an assignment that allows students to take a cumulative look at their semester and reflect on their experiences. Part of the final portfolio asked students to produce something creative that reflects what you have learned. In addition, students wrote a short letter of reflection to me on their experiences over the semester. By engaging students in creation, this assignment allows students to complete a two-step process of critical consciousness, as previously described, as well as engage in other ways of representing learning, which challenges the reductionist educational approach that privileges rational representation of learning. In general, the students were first troubled by the request to produce a creative work. Many

commented on their own lack of creativity, fearing that they would be graded from an artistic perspective. However, after reassuring students that the creative piece was meant to help them articulate what they learned, and they would not be graded on the art specifically, they began to feel more at ease. To further promote a sense of ownership and relevance, I tasked the students to come up with how I should grade the final creative portfolio. Through dialogue with each other, the students brainstormed in smaller groups and eventually came together in a larger group to request assessment of the final creative portfolio based on the following criteria: 1) turned in on time, 2) completion and following directions (in syllabus), 3) creativity effort, 4) neatness and format, and 5) proper grammar and mechanics (based on the issues we covered during the semester).

In general, the creative works and subsequent presentation of the works, were done quite well. One participant, Danielle, chose not to do a creative piece, electing to write an extra reflective piece instead. Many of the ESL students in the course chose to produce short videos highlighting what they learned in the semester. Another popular type of creativity was found in poster board collages.

At this point in the semester, Ronnie began missing class at an alarming rate. I made many attempts (emails, phone calls) to get him back into the class to finish out the semester. After not hearing from him for close to a week's worth of classes, I was able to get in contact with his wife who let me know he was okay, but most likely not going to finish out the semester due to "other things he has going on." Understanding a little bit about his home life as he shared during midterm individual conferences, I assumed that he would most likely not be able to make it back to the class consistently for the last week. Fearing that he would not agree to an exit interview, I contacted him after finals

week and surprisingly he agreed to the interview. I believed he would bring an interesting perspective to the study as his situation is becoming more common in community college classrooms: starting the semester strong and fading away close to finals week. While Ronnie did not turn in a final reflective portfolio, he did reflect on his semester, and what caused him to eventually fall short of goal of passing the class, in his exit interview:

I think I let myself down this semester. Because all the opportunities was there for me and I didn't really. I don't think I really took advantage of everything I should have. I know I missed a lot of school because I had personal problems but I still feel as though I let myself down and I really didn't take advantage of it. And I wasted my money because I didn't take advantage of what was there for me. But I hope I never be in that position again. But I didn't take full advantage of what was there for me. I didn't so I'm going to sit here and say I did. I let myself down.

Despite not finishing the semester, Ronnie provided a great deal of insight regarding his understanding of the tension between academic and home discourses. Living in a situation where writing and speaking "proper English" is met with ridicule and negative assumptions, Ronnie expressed his continued concern for the welfare of his family within the home discourse. Clearly articulating a situational use of academic discourse, Ronnie found himself constantly going back and forth, almost subconsciously, and being aware of his use of academic discourse within his home community:

When you're dealing with certain people you know you have to use certain language. Like when I go to my interview I'm not going to sit in there and be like, naw man and stuff like that. I'm going to say, do you know what I mean. I

don't know, it's hard. I find myself still on this side trying to get over to the other side and there's times it comes when you're talking to certain people that, like when I'm talking to my friends. If I speak proper English then they think I'm a nut or something. [...] Because they think I'm stuck up, or you get branded like talking like white people and all this and that. But then when you go down, like when I go down south they always say I speak proper English even if I'm speaking slang.

New realizations. Amy's creative work was a painting of a brick wall. She discussed that the brick wall represented her frustrations this semester with her writing process. She felt that the brick wall would prevent her from finishing writing assignments. However, now at the end of the semester, Amy uncovered a way through the brick wall through revision and the rewriting process. Through classroom discussions and the additional reading selections, Amy came to a better sense of herself as a writer and was able to get through the brick wall. The final creative work, then, was of her overcoming the brick wall—a challenge she has had for the last few semesters. Through applying reading selections (in Amy's case she really connected to Sandra Cisneros's "House on Mango Street" which reflected her own lived experience), Amy was able to translate the tension found in the story to the tension she feels with writing. She was able to see that there are "two ways of talking and writing" and she does not necessarily need to pick one discourse over another. However, she discussed, academic writing discourse does have its advantages: "It makes you better [...] it makes your paper more understandable. It makes you look like you can do something that may be a requirement than 'Oh, she just sat there and just did whatever she wanted.' [...] Without knowing the

difference between the two [discourses], I would not have been able to do it.” Again, Amy reiterated that there was an appropriate time to use her home discourse (such as in classroom journals and notes, letters and emails to family members), but she continually came back to the idea of using the academic discourse for “professional” writing (course requirements). Portions of her final letter of reflection highlighted this growing critical understanding of the various discourses:

My opinions of your class changed a lot throughout this semester. I can remember the first assignment you gave us. I thought what this man is talking about and what is it that he really wants from us. Doing this first assignment I was so nervous and scared to write it. I kept thinking how am I going to do this? I heard from others that you are a hard instructor, that you do not give A's even if you earned it so it made me even more nervous. After giving us this assignment and I saw my grade I said to myself maybe he is not so bad.

I really never understood the real way to write a paper. After you started going over all the other assignments with us of what you wanted I was not as nervous at writing them for you. The more I wrote the better I felt and the more confident I gained in myself. I am no longer afraid to write anything except citing a research paper. I strongly feel that I became a good writer. I have experienced a whole different way of writing.”

As Amy professed through the semester, she was very much in search of the “real way to write a paper.” Not uncommon to the other participants, Amy was searching to crack the code of academic discourse. She was immersed in an assumption of deficit of her own idiolect, and in search of the proper way to write. This “whole different way of

writing” gave Amy confidence moving on into other English classes: “I came into the classroom with no clue, but I left with a lot of clues. With a lot of knowledge that I never had and I’m not afraid to move on. I’m not worried to at all to go into [English] 101, not one bit.”

Danielle, who chose not to produce a creative work, shared a similar story during her final reflection. Before the semester started, she felt herself to be a deficient writer, despite having taken a lower level of basic writing the previous semester. “Before taking your class, I was afraid to write. I did not know how and what to write.” Despite claiming writing was a new door opening for her, Danielle recounts some of the prescriptive writing pedagogy she was in search of throughout the semester:

I guess you can say that my options and experiences have definitely changed, not just this semester but with my first class with you. Before I took your class I hated writing now I like it. I had no idea how to write a paper, now I am learning the right way. I have more confidence in myself as a writer. Since I have been in your class I have been doing something I never would of considered doing before the class. I have been writing a daily journal. It has helped me to deal with the everyday perils of life and with my cancer. It has helped me to be more conscious of how I write and how to phrase things I was to convey.

Balancing freedom and requirements. Similarly, Melissa reflected on her search for the right way to communicate with those native to the English language. As a former ESL student, Melissa perceived herself as deficient in the English language to the point of not wanting to speak in front of others. For Melissa, the greatest growth she experienced in the class was the confidence to speak in front of her classmates during her

group presentations. In contrast to her first presentation to the class, her second presentation (near the end of the semester) was delivered in “the professional way to speak to your class mate and professor.” To represent this new-found appreciation for language diversity, Melissa created a large poster presentation dedicated to the diversity of our classroom and the diversity of language in society. Titled “Diversity of People, Diversity of Language,” her creative work expressed a learned freedom from the prescriptive writing methods, and thought processes, that plagued her. Danielle also expressed a shift into a new understanding of writing competency in her final reflection:

You have taught me that writing can be fun. And that we write for many reasons. I was surprised to learn that writing in my journal every class has helped me to become more creative with my writing. Because it does not matter what I write in the journal, only that I just kept writing. I feel that I have become more relaxed when it comes to writing. I don't worry about if the spelling is correct, did I use the correct punctuation. I just write whatever comes to mind.

Marcus conveyed a similar balancing act. His creative presentation was a representation of two different words coming from one person's mouth, signifying not only the plurality of discourses and languages, but also the hypocrisy of those in power in regards to his central issue of focus: marriage equality. He reflected further on this balancing act in his writings:

I learned that you can write about anything and make it sound good. I learned that using proper grammar, punctuation, word choices, etc. all leads to being a good writer. Being a good writer takes many skills. I also learned the difference between Home English and Academic English. I found out that there are many

different ways of speaking the English language. I learned that there are many types of English as well.

Hoping for formulas. Humar, on the other hand, was still struggling with the various discourses in the English language. Her creative work was a short video, highlighting her learning from the semester. She narrated the video, and highlighted lower order concerns. Clinging to lower order concerns as the most valuable things she learned in the semester makes sense in relation to her larger semester narrative. As a student who progressed through the ESL sequence, she was clearly dismayed at the notion that more than one English exists. Understandably, she was in search of *the* English to master. She wrote in her final reflection that if multiple Englishes existed, it would threaten her own academic and personal progress:

I remember, ever since I started to learn English, I'm trying to speak the right way with right grammar. I felt bad about myself when I couldn't come up with the correct sentence. I don't have different English at home either, because I'm trying so hard to be model for my kids to speak correctly and to do the right thing. And by any chance, if I make mistake while I'm speaking, my kids correct me immediately, even my first grader son doesn't show any mercy. I don't mind being criticized by my kids, because they will learn from my mistakes and best of all they will not have any hard time speaking and writing at school now or in the future.

She goes on to reflect on how becoming competent in academic English is tied to her family's long-term success in the United States based on popular portrayals of language:

Movies have a big influence on people throughout the years in the whole wide world. In the movies: Rich, powerful and educated people always speak with the right grammar. Opposite of that, poor, undereducated people always speak with bad, broken English. That is how the Director is telling people about the perfection and imperfection. In everyday life, we judge people by the way they speak, they dressed, the car they are driving, the neighborhood they live in and the Diploma or the degree they possessed. We always have certain standards that we came up to label people and things to divide them in classes. And it is the same thing regardless times and places. The way of people think and do always the same no matter where they are and what era they are in. The languages might be different, tools and technology they use might be different, but that labeling will always is the same. And it is hard to avoid or change that. Like you said in the classroom, we cannot open people's brain and change the way they think.

While some data from the final reflection pointed to a continued acceptance of the assimilation of the academic discourse, participants exhibited a remarkable ability to entertain and discuss conflicting thoughts and opinions, thus being active in, at the very least, critical awareness. The ability to discuss two or more opposing viewpoints is complicated and exposes a shift in thinking in the participants who previously could not conceive of the idea of multiple discourses and the power inherent in language. The final creative project and reflection allowed students to engage these ideas and express their understandings in a new, personal, and not solely rational way—a way of representing learning that is more natural to the students' daily lives.

Summary of Class Sessions

This chapter discussed the action research cycle phases of the study. Moving through the phases of action research, this study was informed by the ongoing application, observation, and reflection of both the students and participants and me, as the instructor. A number of changes were made to the course content based on expressed student need and my observations, as detailed above, in order to get them to complete the required learning outcomes as well as begin to travel down the path of critical awareness. An alternative method of basic writing instruction took place, focusing students on 1) the various discourses of the English language, 2) the position of the students within the discourses, and 3) making use of the discourses to resist larger powers of language domination and pursue a personal, reflective, and authentically critical form of writing competency. Chapter Six will discuss the overall findings of the study based on this alternative method of basic writing instruction.

CHAPTER SIX

OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This chapter will outline the major findings of this critical action research, broken down into categories: those related to critical consciousness and those related to writing competency. While there is plenty of overlap between the two categories it is necessary to outline them separately as outlined by the research questions for this study. Since this study sought to uncover the role and purpose of critical consciousness and critical pedagogy within the basic writing classroom as well as how critical pedagogy can increase writing competency, the findings section of this chapter will be divided into categories around 1) the role and development of critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom, and 2) fostering writing competency and critical consciousness through the use of critical pedagogical teaching perspectives. Through the involvement of students in the planning, acting, and observing stages of this critical action research, the data yields very interesting findings regarding the basic writing classroom.

Role and Development of Critical Consciousness

The first research question of this critical action research revolves around the role of critical consciousness and its role and development in the basic writing classroom. Traditionally, as previously mentioned, basic writing, or perhaps writing composition in general, is not typically taught from a critical perspective. Critics of critical pedagogy have claimed that politicizing the writing classroom steers students away from the process of writing and toward a specific ideological conversation (Hairston, 2003).

It is in the basic writing classroom, however, where critical consciousness, or *conscientização*, (Freire, 1970) is most vital. Adult students are entering a classroom

where they are being indoctrinated into the academic discourse without an examination of the very language they are being taught. Eventually, students unconsciously accept the espoused benefits of shedding a home discourse and taking up the academic discourse, at least in their written language. All of the participants in this study noted, at some point in the semester, their desire to “learn how to write professionally” to be able to become successful in their future careers and life. Learning how to write “professionally”—essentially adopting the academic discourse—is a mystery to basic writing students, who then turn to the authority structure within the academy to help them solve the mystery. In the case of this study, participants sought to decode the un-decodable by figuring out exactly what I, as the instructor, thought their writing should look like. Humar, in her exit interview, likened her experience in her first writing class to a blind person, from birth, trying to imagine the shape and texture of the moon. Without the appropriate theoretical knowledge of what a moon generally looks like and its function in the world, the blind person would have no possible way to accurately imagine the moon itself. The blind person must first theoretically understand the universe in which they find themselves before being able to accurately imagine the moon.

And this metaphor makes the case for the use of critical pedagogy and critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom. Students must first be able to understand what is at the heart of the various discourses they are entwined in before they are able to negotiate using the various discourses in their lives. What is missing in traditional basic writing instruction is an emphasis on uncovering the tension between the academic and home discourses and offering students a setting in which to discuss, critique, and possibly resist, the dominant forms of language and education.

It is to this end that this study began to uncover ways to develop and implement *conscientização* in the basic writing classroom. From the data of the study, two general findings regarding the role and development of critical consciousness arose. First, in order for critical consciousness to be developed, it is necessary to democratize the classroom environment. Second, centering the basic writing course on the existing tensions of discourses helps to develop critical consciousness in basic writing students.

Democratizing the Classroom

It is understood that the typical classroom environment is one where power and authority structures are systemic (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1993). This embedded authority structure in the classroom is evident from both the physical structure of classrooms as well as curriculum. For example, the classroom in which this study took place was physically structured like any other typical college-level classroom: a row of tables and chairs facing in one direction, a podium in front of the class, with a white-board behind it. The walls of the classroom are stark white, except for the one front facing wall—the only one with any color. The subconscious affect of the physical space of learning indicates that all learning—all knowledge—comes from one source: the instructor. In fact, the students who sit at the tables are unable to communicate with each other due to the single, long, tables, unsuitable for group discussions or any movement at all.

Within the curriculum, approaches to basic writing have often featured drill and kill tactics that emphasize lower order thinking and writing, and a constant search for the “right” answer, as opposed to observing the process and journey of writing. Again, the subconscious affect here is that students look for answers in one place and are less likely to question what is being taught to them. This was seen throughout the semester in this

study. Amy, for example, described in her exit interview her desire to know exactly what I wanted on assignments so that she could turn it around and get the most possible points on the assignment.

It is difficult to move students away from a liberal-centered approach to education and toward a progressive and/or critical-centered approach. Indeed, students have been acculturated to believe that education only works one way. And it is against this assumption that critical pedagogy and the work of Paulo Freire and others pushes. In order to democratize the classroom environment and return the power back to the students, I employed a number of techniques in this study that attempted to empower students and move them toward critical consciousness with the goal of liberating them to follow a lifelong, personal writing process. While it may seem disingenuous to “allow” students to “become liberated,” as the instructor of the course (and the person “in charge” of the students’ learning), I must create an environment where liberation can be attained (Freire, 1974).

Within the confines of this study specifically, I approached democratizing the classroom seriously through engaging the students in planning a number of aspects of the course, putting them in writing groups tasked with teaching a portion of the course and conducting writing workshops.

Ownership through planning participation. Central to the critical action research component of this study was handing over ownership and control of the course to the students through planning participation. On the first day of class, I handed out the course syllabus with a course calendar and assignment sheets nearly blank. This took many students by surprise and caused some initial confusion. However, as the course

progressed, participants began to articulate an appreciation of having a hand in the course planning. Danielle, described being included in course planning as both empowering and a rarity:

You gave us the opportunity to voice our opinions as to where we needed structure. Where we needed help. Whereas with my other classes, it's like set in tight. This is what we're doing and this is the way we're going to be. You have flexibility in the class. You gave us the opportunity for our input, which is a rarity.

Ronnie, who linked a rigid, set in stone curriculum to a difficulty in learning, echoed this sense of rarity in course planning. Ronnie articulated, in his exit interview: "The other teachers are like robots. Whatever was on that syllabus, that's what you did that day and there was no deviation from that." This became a problem when students don't understand the material the first time around, causing them to not be able to ask questions, or ask for the class to slow down.

Marcus articulated the same point concerning the planning process and the ability to remain organized based on his own course planning, which he claimed, "no other instructors do that here":

I thought it was a good thing for me because then that way I knew how to plan out, you know, my whole semester for English. You know, how long I had to do each assignment, you know, to make sure I had enough time to do it and get it turned in to you on time. You know, it gave me, you know, an early head start toward getting some of them written. That way I could go back, have other people proofread them and make the corrections as I went along. So I feel that

that was fairly decent, you know. I did like that, you know, because it makes it a lot easier for us students. That way we know what to expect out of the instructor for the whole semester.

Clearly, being part of the course planning and having the confidence in a semi-flexible schedule enhanced the learning experience for participants. In many ways, by giving students a participatory role in the course, two major goals were accomplished: course investment and critical reflection on traditional educational processes. Participants were able to compare and contrast the investment and control they felt in this course with other courses. Initial investment in a basic writing course is vital to persistence and completion, as the literature shows in Chapter Two. If students are “invited in” to the inner confines of putting a college-level course together, they will be more likely to see the course out and complete (Roy, 1995), further de-mystifying the college experience.

This beginning spark of critical consciousness allowed students to think more clearly and critically about the education they were receiving in other classes, as shown through both Ronnie and Marcus’ comments above. Similarly, Danielle reflected on this in her exit interview: “You were open to suggestions and if things didn’t go as planned that was okay. [...] Yes, you have a certain agenda of things that you have to have done, but if it doesn’t get done that’s okay too.”

Being able to articulate what type of education is best for them and how they learn best, students will be more likely to assert their own power in other classrooms that are instructor-centric and furthering the goal of becoming independent, liberated learners.

Ownership through writing groups. As previously mentioned, the source of instruction in classrooms has historically been the instructor or the institution. Paulo

Freire rails against this model of education, likening it to a passive deposit of information into students, rather than an active creation of knowledge. Rather than create a student of dependency (on the instructor or institution), Freire advocates for a student of liberation, critically conscious and able to be self-sufficient:

I wish to emphasize that in educating adults, to avoid a rote, mechanical process one must make it possible for them to achieve critical consciousness so that they can teach themselves to read and write. (Freire, 1974, p. 48)

It is interesting to note that Freire puts an emphasis first on achieving critical consciousness that then enables a liberated, self-sufficient learning process. Critical consciousness is a precursor in that it reveals various power relationships to learners that can cause them to adapt the way they view the education process and become owners of their own process. Without pulling the curtain back and revealing the systemic power relations embedded within the classroom and learning environment, liberation cannot take place.

It is to this end that I chose to run a major part of this course through the writing groups. Again, the writing groups were responsible to select a specific writing topic and research and present the topic to the class. The batch of writing topics were decided on by the students as issues they would like to discuss during the semester. The writing groups were responsible to complete a self-assessment after each presentation, giving themselves a grade for their work. Writing groups were also responsible to conduct writing workshops twice during the semester. The data shows that writing groups were indeed successful at further democratizing the classroom experience and creating ownership of

the course content and process. Melissa explained enjoying the investment she was able to give to a certain topic as well as get feedback from her group members:

You give the opportunity to your group to listen while you write and give an idea.

They give advice back to you. They teach you, my group because we have a really good group I think, we communicate. When I write the female gender mutilation I got really good feedback about the subjects. [...] I got really good feedback from my group.

While the writing and presentation groups were generally seen as a positive, there were concerns, namely equal participation by all group members. Amy, Danielle, and Ronnie both noted that unmotivated group members hurt the larger group process.

Danielle, specifically:

Overall it's good because you get to learn things about your classmates and how they think and stuff like that. But it also goes along, my biggest problem is participation. I mean if you have, and you're going to have it in every class and every person, somebody that just does not care. And they don't want to participate and it's left up to the rest of the group to take over where they left off.

In an attempt to additionally subvert the traditional classroom structure that centers authority and power with the instructor, the writing groups were given the opportunity to grade themselves on their presentations. Participants met this process with a good deal of uncertainty at first. Marcus articulated it best when he said he felt uneasy about grading himself because "its supposed to be the instructor's job to grade you as a whole and not have students grade themselves, so it was awkward." Ronnie reflected in his exit interview on the temptation to give himself a perfect score for each presentation:

I think that's tough, grading yourself like that. Because you want to always write like 50, 50, 50, 50, 50, 50, but sometimes you know you didn't do a good job. I mean you didn't do what you could have done. You always think sometimes that you could have done more and that's. I usually knocked off 10 for me because I thought that as a group we didn't do enough.

Upon further reflection, and within the framework of the semester as a whole, participants were able to articulate and appreciate the ownership created through the self-assessment process. Marcus concluded that, "it also gave us, you know, a sense of direction on the grade that we think we deserve to have." Humar specifically noted that self-assessment was a good thing because "everyone knows how much job they did, she or he did, and then she knows how much credit she has earned." In the final CIQ of the semester, many students commented on how the self-assessment process gave them ownership and "a grade they deserve."

The role of critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom is to democratize the learning experience and resist a passive educational model that plagues many developmental classrooms in general. The ownership created in the basic writing classroom through investing in student participation in course planning and writing groups throughout the semester set the stage for a practical understanding of critical consciousness that learners will be able to then articulate and further develop in their own writing and beyond. Indeed, any use of critical pedagogy and aspirations of critical consciousness must be tied into the larger social structures that adult basic writing students find themselves in. The democracy modeled in this course extended to participants' daily lives. As mentioned in Chapter Five, Humar found a way to articulate

the discrimination she faced as a Muslim student. Marcus found a voice in his advocacy of marriage equality. Ronnie was better able to negotiate the social circles he engaged in outside of the school setting.

And this is precisely what Freire indicated above. Critical pedagogy must not only offer an alternative educational environment, but it must also account for the lived social settings students find themselves in. Modeling and teaching critical awareness in the writing course helped participants understand how they fit in a larger social settings and how to articulate a position within those settings.

Course democracy must first be modeled to learners, who are embedded within a larger educational environment that has the tendency to discourage collaboration and critique, in order for the practical understanding of critical consciousness to take place. In a vacuum, critical consciousness means nothing to learners; however, when paired with something concrete such as course planning, self-assessment, or collaborative draft feedback, critical consciousness becomes a way of learning—a new way of learning that encourages both critique and creativity and sets the stage for lifelong learning.

Exposing Tension within the Discourses

The second major finding from this study in relation to the role and development of critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom revolves around shifting the course focus away from a skills acquisition, or deficit perspective, and toward exposing the tensions within the various discourses adult basic writing students find themselves in. Whether native English speakers or former ESL students, adult basic writing students are known to be navigating between home and academic discourses (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2002; Bizzel, 1986; Coles & Wall, 1987; Kasworm, 2005) and the traditional

push in basic writing courses has been to replace the home discourse with the academic discourse. More will be discussed in the next section how exposing the tension of discourses aids in writing competency, but it is also a vital outcome of the development of critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom. Once students begin to see a spark of critique, as noted above through their involvement in course planning and ownership, they are then more able to have a discussion about the various discourses and begin to critique the privilege given to one over another. This discussion, however, can be very abstract for basic writing students. Danielle, for example, was not aware of the various discourses before our discussion and assignment two: “I learned a lot doing that essay because until we started doing it I really didn’t realize that there was more than one English.” Additionally, both Humar and Melissa initially resisted the idea of multiple versions of English, as the idea seemed to threaten what they previously learned in their ESL course sequence, as well as their overall goals of assimilation into the dominant language and culture for the benefit of their family and children.

There was one exception. Interestingly, Ronnie, who lives in a setting where the most common non-dominant English discourse is used, was very receptive to the idea and was able to quickly connect the discussion to his actual lived experience. Discussing the tension between academic English and the Black dialect in which he is situated, Ronnie associated the various discourse tensions to the use of slang by individuals who are “still doing, committing crimes. They think that the system is against them.” Clearly, Ronnie is positioning his adoption and use of academic English as an economic benefit. Based on his story of wanting to start his own business, and being the sole breadwinner for his family, his focus is on the benefits the academic discourse can provide him.

A critique of critical pedagogy has been the lack of creativity and its overemphasis on the rational, oftentimes ignoring the creative. But there are multiple ways of knowing, which allow us to critique and create (Tisdell, 2011). It is in that vein, and the emphasis of other discourses within critical pedagogy that emphasize various popular environments for critique and new knowledge (Guy, 2007; Tisdell, 2011; Wright & Sandlin, 2009) that this study finds that in order to bring the various discourse tensions to light, it is necessary to use metaphoric approaches in the classroom. The data in this study suggests that the use of supplemental readings from diverse authors and reflective, personal writing are powerful tools for students to begin to investigate the tension between the discourses and further develop a critical consciousness.

Supplemental readings as a catalyst for discourse critique. Students were first puzzled at the supplemental readings as they tried to make connections to their writing assignments. Despite the very clear link in education between reading and writing, participants were surprised that stories would be read in a writing class. In her exit interview, Amy admitted that she thought the readings were “crazy” and did not really relate to a writing class. Ronnie felt that many of the stories, including “Mother Tongue,” a story about the tension between a Chinese American daughter and her mother, did not pertain to him.

However, through our discussion of tensions and living within the tensions, participants began to see the connection between the metaphors presented in the readings and the real-life tension between the academic and home discourses. Amy reflected that the readings helped her write her second assignment as “they all just maybe fit into what we were doing. So I think those were a good idea even though some people are like,

what is this? Why? I wouldn't change that." The participants clearly showed that in order to begin to uncover embedded lessons of the stories and begin to understand the tension within the discourses, they needed to have a personal connection with the readings. While Ronnie seemingly ignored "Mother Tongue" because of its characters, he was able to connect personally to "The English Lesson," a story about the isolation of ESL students in an American classroom, as he shared a similar experience in his own educational journey:

That's how I felt like when I moved to Texas, right. I was like the only black guy, but I wasn't foreign, but I felt like I was. I felt that every move I made was under the microscope, and I was kind of nervous and it hindered me from learning so my dad had to move me to a different school because I felt out of place. I was scared to talk, but now I can't shut up.

Humar, however, did resonate with "Mother Tongue," based on her own personal experience and sympathy to the mother character in the story: "And people kind of ignore, ignored me, tried to not hear me like that and no matter in the mall or in the hospital. It's kind of, it's hard when other people ignore [you]."

Amy found a personal connection in "The House on Mango Street" and used that connection to experience to motivate her "keep on writing." She concluded, based on the reading, a clear understanding of the discourse tension and where she resides within that tension, "I'm not bilingual at all – I think I speak normal, but I, and compared to the writing, I think I said that in the beginning, that's what makes me realize that there's two different ways of you even talking without being bilingual, I talk different than somebody else that may be that is not as well."

Likewise, Melissa found meaning in “The English Lesson” as she was able to relate to the main conflict in the story, which she describes in her writing assignment:

I can relate to “English Lesson” by Nicholasa Mohr because the student was afraid to speak in front of the class. Academic English in class had more pressure than casual English. Students get frustrated to speak proper English in front of the professor or other students. Sometimes it is really hard for me to communicate in front of other people. I’m afraid that people cannot understand me.

Marcus, on the other hand, understood the supplemental readings as reinforcing what he calls the “professional” way of writing and speaking, giving the reader the option to leave the home discourse behind. He came to this understanding, again, through the lens of academic and financial success, a major goal for him the entire semester: “Again, because it’s more professional to speak that way. If you can’t speak professionally, you’re not going to succeed. So the point of the stories were to help you understand that you don’t have to speak home English.” Writing specifically about the readings in his second writing assignment, he noted:

In the story Mother Tongue, it deals with a young woman who speaks a different English than her mother. The young woman did everything. Her speaking was more clear. Academic English is more difficult as I said in the last paragraph is more difficult to speak. Home English is easier for a lot of people. [...]

The House on Mango Street used moving around, bigger living quarters (i.e. bigger house), and an American dream as a form of academic English because it tells what the family wanted. The home English had to deal with poverty, instability, and peeling paint, which meant they wanted change. The story His

Grace is more formal in the academic English because it has to deal with power and authority structure. The home English in this story was that part of it all has to do with realizing titles are meaningful.

Therefore, the data clearly shows that the use of supplemental readings that focus on the tension between the discourses can, at the very least, help students begin to grapple with the critical conversation of which discourse is superior and why. In her second writing assignment, Danielle wrote:

As I reread these stories, so I could finish the final draft, I realized most of the stories have things in common. Some of the stories are about people from other countries, or non-English speaking people coming here to make a better life for themselves. To learn English so they would fit in with society. They also had different reasons for coming here. In the English Lesson the class wanted to learn to speak proper English, They all had different reasons but the bottom line was to fit in with society. In the House on Mango Street the family just wanted a house they could call home. They wanted to fit in with the people who lived there. In “His Grace,” [the main character] Bey came here to escape the customs and disgrace of the villagers.

While participants were hesitant to read in a writing class, they quickly latched on to readings in which they saw themselves reflected, further making the point to diversify the readings. As the theoretical language around discourse critique may not be approachable by adult basic and second language writers, using creative, metaphoric pieces to connect to students’ prior knowledge and experience, a common attribute in adult writers (Perin, Keselman, and Monopoli, 2003), is a valid and useful approach.

Reflective, personal writing as a catalyst for discourse critique. Similar to the necessity of linking supplemental readings to lived experience to examine discourse critique, this study shows that reflective and personal writing can also serve the same purpose. The ongoing design of this study was to expose students to higher-level critique through writing as the semester progressed (see Table 3). As the readings and discussions began to crystalize a form of critique in the students' minds, the writing assignments allowed the students to then turn that critique into a creation.

Not surprisingly, despite being a writing class, participants were not excited or motivated to do any writing. Part of this can be attributed to the fact that the writing class was mandatory and remedial, thus sub-consciously signifying to the students that they were deficient or “less than,” but also to the fact that writing assignments tend to be proscriptive and rigid in format and design, with little room for creativity, reflection, and personal connections. Basic writing students enter the classroom expecting to be told what to write and how to write it, with no deviation permitted. This formulaic structure will be discussed further in the next section.

However, entering this course, where students were not only asked to pick topics for three of their five writing assignments, but were also asked to help create the requirements of the assignments, liberated students and quickly signaled a more personal and relative course structure. The first few CIQs were dominated by positive remarks regarding the ability to choose writing topics and details about the writing assignments. There was more freedom within the writing assignments than expected by students and it was generally a positive thing as one student articulated in a CIQ, “because [the research essay] didn't have to be within our field of study.” This is an important note as “career-

related” research assignments are ubiquitous in basic writing courses. The opportunity to write outside what is expected was in fact a subtle form of critique—as it pushed back on assumptions—and allowed students to feel further empowered. As mentioned above in regards to ownership through participating in planning, pushing back on how courses are traditionally run and organized gives students the opportunity to see another way, one that returns the classroom power back to the students.

Based on the freedom given to students to choose writing topics and assessment details, there was plenty of excitement around the writing assignments. While the CIQs identified that students were thoroughly frustrated with the technical side of writing a research assignment (most notably, MLA citations), they were energized by their topics and the freedom to choose their topics. However, the most excitement revolved around the personal educational narrative and the persuasive essay. These two essays types—the narrative as personal and reflective, the persuasive as personal and critical—pushed the students the furthest down the road of critical awareness.

Generally, students enjoy writing about themselves. In the age of social media, students of all ages have a frame of mind that cultivates a sense of self-story. Both surprised and excited by the chance to write about themselves, participants found the narrative to be an enjoyable assignment. The educational narratives, presented at the beginning of this chapter as an introduction to each participant, served as both an introduction but also a baseline for the potential for critique. Participants invested time and energy into the assignment and were able to reflect on their educational experiences, both positive and negative. Surprisingly, when participants reflected on the research assignment, they also made personal connections as the primary reason for researching

and writing. Both Amy and Humar researched diseases/disorders that they or a family member is dealing with. Through researching and writing on causes and treatments, they both found themselves more aware and vocal about the diseases and, while the research assignment did not cure the diseases in their families, they found hope in being able to help their family members out. Humar reflected, “I know I cannot share their pain physically but encouraging them and helping them to make right choices, eases the pain in my heart.”

Melissa researched female genital mutilation and through her research claimed she came to a better understanding of the issue through the lens of women’s rights. In a moment of connection to the purpose of the research study, she struggled with the tension between critiquing the practice and also respecting a traditional cultural practice:

I believe in women[’s] rights. But at the same time I think it very important to follow your family tradition and culture. Because that [is] the way that your parent [taught] you. Female Genital Mutilation is a controversial topic because I think is not right for those girls to have the circumcision, but at the same time is a cultural issue. I believe that it is better wait until the girl grow up and decide if they wanted follow the tradition or they family command.

Regarding the persuasive assignment, the most critical of all the assignments, Amy, who was writing a letter to her township to provide better security at a local park due to recent fights and drug use, mentioned that it was an empowering assignment “Cause I got to get it all out by writing it. I, the more I was writing it, the more I could bring up. If I thought of other things that were bothering me, maybe not even as so as with the park, I could have smoothed something else in there [...]” Likewise, both

Marcus and Humar felt empowered through the writing, and presentation, of their persuasive essays. Both participants wrote arguments that exhibited critical consciousness—Marcus writing in favor of marriage equality, and Humar against anti-Muslim sentiment. “It’s my own; it came out of my life,” Humar noted in her exit interview.

The role of critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom is to democratize the classroom experience, through planning participation and writing groups responsible to lead the class. This ownership instilled in students leads to a greater critical understanding of how education is typically conducted and a possible alternative that both meets college and course learning outcomes and returns the power of the learning process back to the learners themselves. In order to further achieve and develop a critical consciousness that makes democratization possible (or able to continue), this study identified using both reading and writing to assist in discourse critique. It is indeed discourse that must be critiqued: the discourse of a typical basic writing classroom, the academic discourse that strives to replace a learner’s home discourse. It is in this critique and participation in ownership of the course that critical consciousness can transform both the writing classroom as an educational environment and, more importantly, the learner as the impetus for the education. Once critically conscious, learners are more likely to continue the educative process, on their own or within communities, of lifelong learning (Freire, 1974).

Fostering Writing Competency and Critical Consciousness

It is vital to keep in mind that the basic writing course is in fact a writing course. The learning outcomes, the course design, and the college expectations are for students

who take this course to come out prepared for college-level writing, specifically College Composition and beyond. This purpose cannot be lost within this study. As previously noted, a common critique of critical pedagogy in the writing classroom is that the course quickly becomes about politics and the instructor's ideology rather than writing itself (Hairston, 2003). Critics have argued focusing basic writing classes on solely writing. However, it is known that no classroom is free from politics and ideology. And it is with this assumption that this study situated critical pedagogy as the primary teaching method for this basic writing course. Critical pedagogy opens the door to open and honest discussions of the power and politics embedded within every classroom and gives students an environment for critique and creation, further enhancing their writing competency. It is for this reason that the second major research question of this study was to determine how critical pedagogy could foster both writing competency and critical consciousness. The findings related to this research question indicate that it is through the use of critical pedagogy that a critical consciousness can be sparked that in turn elevates students' writing competency, making them aware of their own desire for formulas, enabling their desire for self-sufficiency (and liberation), and becoming fluent in the discussion of various discourses.

Rejecting Formulaic Writing Pedagogy

It was clear very early on in the semester that the students were in search of a formula to crack the academic code, produce writing that would be acceptable to me as the instructor, and move on to their "real" classes. It was a challenge for the participants, throughout the semester, to think of writing competency as a class outside of formulas. In fact, based on their personal educational narrative, students identified a number of writing

issues that they wished to discuss. The writing issues they identified were predominately lower order concerns and, indeed, formulaic.

This focus on lower order concerns at the start of the semester (and as discussed in Chapter Four) reveals a deeper indoctrination of what good writing should look like. Generally speaking, basic writing students have had educational experiences that marginalize them in some form or another. The ESL students have been very visibly marginalized and have internalized the oppression. This is evident through the remarks of Humar and Melissa who oftentimes discussed issues of being (mis)understood by native speakers of English. They both also identified wanting to be able to meet their children's growing knowledge of English so that they could be helpful to them as they went through schooling. The semester's first CIQ emphasized the students' desire for further discussion on punctuation, grammar, and "how to write an essay and what it should look like."

What is then missing with their focus on lower order concerns is the opposite—what the writing is trying to convey and the methods it uses. Writing becomes a very simple, conformist act when a formula for a thesis statement, subject/verb agreement, or introductions and conclusions are taught. In focusing on formulas, writing instruction becomes less about the language being used and more about a prescriptive method of writing. In fact, what is lost is an investigation of the multiple discourses of the English language in which adult students dwell every day. While the academic discourse is still being taught, the purpose of its teaching is not to dominate students' home discourses; rather, learning multiple discourses helps students orient themselves as they navigate the waters between the discourses.

Accepting a formulaic approach to writing may seem as the easiest route toward becoming a successful writer, but it does have its disadvantages. The struggle here is linked to the lack of critique. When basic writing students accept a formula, they give up all hope of critique; rather, they admit there is one way to write and other ways are deficient. This acceptance is easily extendable to the classroom environment as a whole. If the instructor is the one with all the knowledge and the student must absorb as much of it as she can, there is no personalized educational environment, and all critique is lost.

Within this study, efforts were made to reject the culture of formulaic writing. This rejection, however, did not take place until participants began to see a spark of critical consciousness, as described above. For example, students were in search of formulas for lower order concerns (as well as higher order concerns, i.e.: “tell me how you want this essay to be written”), and resisted the rejection of formulas I presented to them on day one. It wasn’t until we discussed the NCTE’s “Students’ Right to their Own Language” document that students began to see that they have a voice and a personal writing process that does not fit formulas. Ironically, the document that provided the impetus to critical insight was produced by a large governing body, which can be critiqued itself for ideological dangers. In fact, when the document was shown to students, they questioned who the NCTE was. One student finally came to a conclusion, to the amusement of his classmates: “They’re they ones that make up all the rules!”

With all that said, coming to an awareness of an official ownership of the writing process inspired Amy, for example, to begin to own her own process. Without knowledge of the variety of discourses in the English language, she claimed she would not be able to pick and choose which discourse is best for a situation.

Searching for Liberation

Despite exhibiting a desire for a formula to “good” or “professional” writing, the participants also noted a desire to be self-sufficient in terms of writing. This may seem like a contradiction: on one hand students desire a formula to teach them how to write while on the other hand students desire to be free from needing to depend on anyone or anything in their writing. This is not a contradiction; rather, the two go hand-in-hand, especially for the ESL participants. Participants believed that they could use learned formulas and techniques to acquire self-sufficiency. Melissa, for example, discussed her acquisition of formulas throughout the semester left her not necessarily needing the writing center. She saw this as a success and a small victory toward her fluency. Marcus and Danielle reflected proudly on learning how to organize an essay and no longer needing to “bother the writing center with low-level concerns.” Ronnie’s mastery of spelling and grammar brought him and his dad closer.

Ironically, the participants showed that through working with their groups and conducting writing workshops, they were able to become more autonomous while becoming more dependent on each other as a group. And this is a unique component of critical pedagogy and an outcome discussed by Freire and Horton (1990). Critical awareness cannot come in isolation and necessitates a dialogic relationship (Freire, 1974). Likewise, in writing pedagogy, students are more likely to succeed as writers when they enter into dialogue with others about their writing (Davi, 2006).

The data in the study shows that participants were in search of liberation through a dialogic relationship with their writing group and the class as a whole. On a regular basis, the metaphors used in the biweekly CIQs to represent recent learning showed ideas

of growth (“a tree,” “a crawling baby,” “like a baby learning to walk,” “a preschool kid learning ABCs”) but also liberation and freedom: “like learning how to ride a bike,” “an acorn cracking out of its shell,” “flying in the sky,” “like a caterpillar and now I am a butterfly,” “the kite is now flying in the sky.” This liberating dialogue took place in multiple forms throughout the study: writing workshops, group discussions and preparation, multiple drafts of writing assignments, and feedback given on drafts from writing group and instructor.

Dwelling in the Tension of the Discourses

Basic writers are steeped in multiple English discourses on a daily basis. They are very aware of these discourses as they navigate back and forth between (literally) their home life and their academic life. While basic writers may not use academic discourse to articulate the tension they feel between home and academic discourse itself, they are able to articulate it in their own unique way.

Danielle and Amy discussed it in terms of “quick writing” they do to family members, while Ronnie and Marcus understood their alternative discourse as it relates to grammar and punctuation issues. Both Humar and Melissa also focused on grammar and punctuation, but also discussed the discourse of pronunciation and conveying meaning to an audience. Melissa reflected:

My final portfolio I used words like sophisticated, like big words for me. Like I said when somebody speaks two language, like I speak Spanish and English it’s hard to come out like sophisticated and stuff like that. So I used words like that on my final portfolio. Compared to my first writing that was like my education.

Humar expressed the same concern, but with a sense of being ignored because of her accent, which made her question relocating her family to the United States:

And people kind of ignore, ignored me, tried to not hear me like that and no matter in the mall or in the hospital. It's kind of, it's hard when other people ignore. [...] They didn't understand what I'm saying. Maybe they were busy. Or they don't have enough interest to ask me what I was about to say. So they ignore, not paying too much attention to what I'm complaining about or what I want, what my needs at the time. [...] I kind of feel angry, ashamed, frustrated and also why did I even come here in the place that I came to the United States.

Despite the various ways the participants understood and articulated the existence of an alternate discourse in the English language, they all knew of the existence of the discourse. However, all the participants framed the discourse from a deficit perspective, as something they needed to avoid or fix. Melissa referred to the non-academic discourse as a discourse belonging to “ghetto people;” Amy and Danielle both labeled it as a tendency to use “run-ons” or to “go on and on” and lose track of her purpose of writing; Ronnie describing a non-academic discourse in terms related to his own Black dialect:

When you're dealing with certain people you know you have to use certain language. Like when I go to my interview I'm not going to sit in there and be like, naw man and stuff like that. I'm going to say, do you know what I mean. I don't know, it's hard. I find myself still on this side trying to get over to the other side and there's times it comes when you're talking to certain people that, like when I'm talking to my friends.

In fact, in their personal educational narrative and goals, participants oftentimes listed these concerns (mostly lower order) as things they need to work on during the semester. Through the discussions and supplemental readings, participants began to better articulate the existence of multiple discourses, but still struggled to see them as equally valid, rather than mutually exclusive.

Despite being able to, on some level, understand and articulate the tension, there is a very distinct hesitancy to critique the academic discourse; rather, participants chose to embrace the academic discourse as a means to an end. In their second writing assignment, Amy, Danielle, and Melissa articulated that accepting the academic discourse was necessary to “help you with job interviews,” “show how well a person is educated,” and to achieve “higher paying jobs.” Melissa went on to write, “The person with the accent may be more qualified for the position, but with the accent it is harder to understand, resulting in no job.”

And this is not surprising, in fact. One has to look no further than the catalog course description to find a subtle assimilative assumption: “Development of clear, coherent paragraphs and longer essays with emphasis on basic grammar and sentence combining skills.” What the course description and course learning outcomes (Appendix F) do not require explicitly is the replacement of home discourse by the academic discourse. While the course requires writing competency, it does not advocate assimilation.

How, then, do the participants come to the assumption that they are “better off” assimilating to the academic discourse? What makes Humar, for example, question the existence and need for an alternative home discourse? A possible answer is the systemic

pedagogical emphasis in developmental courses on the deficiency of the student and the superiority of the academic discourse. While the course syllabus does not explicitly state it, students enter the basic writing classroom already defeated. They took a writing placement test and were told they needed to take a lower level English class. There is, therefore, an assumption of the superiority of the academic discourse. While it cannot be argued that the academic discourse is necessary at times, this data in this study shows that with a greater understanding of the various discourses, participants were able to increase their ownership of the basic writing learning process and better navigate between the discourses. Humar came to such a realization and powerfully expresses the potential for critical awareness through discourse navigation in her second writing assignment:

The tension is rising, pressure is building up. The desire to improve my academic English grows stronger every day, just like the little girl's desire to have a better house and better living condition in "The House on Mango Street." I want to be accepted. I want to be normal. I want to get a good grade on my paper because good grade[s] provide me with more chance to get a better job in the future. And improving my academic English is the only way to reach that goal. I started to feel ashamed thinking about the moments I spoke the "Home English." But later I realized that instead of hating my "Home English," I should be using it as a foundation for my academic learning. The good thing about my "Home English" is I don't have to start from the very beginning. I can enrich my English based on what I knew to graduate with good grades.

Again, Humar proves to have insight into the tension between the discourses, but also the process of critical awareness through her discussion of the tension. Rather than abandon

one discourse for another, she treats them both delicately and comes to the conclusion that they are inseparable and can both be used to further their own purposes.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

The purpose of this critical action research study was to determine the role and development methods of critical consciousness, as well as investigate how critical pedagogical teaching methods can foster both writing competency and critical consciousness, in the basic writing classroom. The study took place over a 15-week semester in a basic writing class and, through the ongoing action research cycle of planning-acting-observing-reflecting, resulted in a number of important findings.

Throughout the semester of the action research, students were not only participants, but they were also co-researchers, able to identify and attempt to solve real problems they faced with the basic writing classroom. Essentially, this study looked for a third way to do basic writing instruction. At the heart of this study is the tension between discourses that the adult basic writers face everyday. Through their personal educational narrative, students identified this tension and a desire to explore it. Through various experiments in the classroom, participants came to a greater understanding of their own position within the discourses and their own power to choose which discourse to use in what situation.

Part two of this study presented the action research cycle and major study findings. The findings of this study are useful in investigating a better way to conduct basic writing courses at the community college level. Part three, Chapter Seven, will discuss these implications further, but it must be noted that in order to instill a sense of life-long learning in students, the basic writing classroom must take the learners' cultural

discourses into account. Chapter Seven will discuss the findings presented in this chapter as they relate to new areas of insight in critical pedagogy in adult education and recommendations for reforming basic writing programs as well as lay out areas for future research.

PART III

IMPLICATIONS AND THE ROAD FROM HERE

Part three of this study consists of one chapter, Chapter Seven, and will focus on connecting the findings of this study to the major areas of literature in the fields with which this study intersects, namely, critical pedagogy and critical education discourses, adult education, and basic writing. This chapter will also outline implications for theory and practice, as well as areas for future research. The chapter will conclude with a final reflection on the study as a whole.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONNECTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

The purpose of this critical action research study was to explore how critical pedagogy can foster writing competency and critical consciousness among adult basic writing students in the community college setting. Specifically, this study was guided by two major research questions:

1. What is the role of critical consciousness in the basic writing classroom and what are ways it can be developed?
2. How can teaching a basic writing course from a critical pedagogical perspective foster writing competency and critical consciousness?

Essentially, this study was in search of a new way to do basic writing instruction. Various methods of instruction were outlined in Chapter Two, along with their strengths and weaknesses. There is a general problem to be solved in basic writing instruction. Since that problem involves students and their own learning environment, this study took an action research methodology in order to solve the local problem of how to teach basic writing more effectively. Action research allows the students involved in the basic writing course to be part of the problem identification as well as solution proposition.

Through the action research model discussed by Kuhne and Quigley (1997), this study implemented a basic plan in the first week of the semester, observed what reactions and input the students had on the plan, reflected on the remainder of the semester with the students, and instituted another plan. Altogether, this course underwent five total calendar revisions, with students giving plenty of input on issues regarding assignments, topics to be covered, group work, and final portfolio assessment.

This chapter will look closely at the findings presented in Chapters Four through Six, as they relate to critical pedagogy, adult education in general, and basic writing programs. This chapter will also discuss recommendations for change in the basic writing field, as well as areas of future research.

Critical Pedagogy, Writing Pedagogy, and Adult Education

This study sought to find a new way to instruct adult basic writers. Rather than instruct in a skills acquisition method, which emphasizes assimilation to the academic discourse, this study was designed to implement a solution in which the key components of critical pedagogy and other critical discourses in education could be attempted.

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two, critical pedagogy revolves around three major components: dialogue, the sharing of power, and critique of dominant ideologies. Therefore, this study implemented these three components, but also focused on two others, not prevalent in critical pedagogy itself, but drawn from other various critical discourses in education. This section will discuss these five components as they took place in the study.

Writing as a Dialogical Process

In his seminal works, Freire (1970, 1974) lays out a distinction between liberating and oppressive educational settings. One of the hallmarks of an oppressive educational setting is that it stifles dialogue, instead centering the course on the acquisition of information and the process of depositing that information into students. On the other hand, education that is in search of empowerment, wonder, and liberation will be centered on the act of dialogue, which is an act toward critical consciousness (Kaufmann, 2010). The goal of critical consciousness through dialogue is for learners to engage in

relations with the world, rather than imposing a reality. In fact, dialogue is “indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 83). This focus on dialogue does not remove the need for an instructor; rather, the instructor is encouraged to become the curator of democracy through dialogue (Kaufmann, 2010), leading learners to “engage in critical reception and production of language rather than lethargically to produce the status quo” (Gilyard, 2008, p. 3).

Throughout this study, dialogue was embedded in the course and took place in a few different ways. The primary venue for dialogue between students took place in the writing groups. The writing groups were tasked with teaching a portion of the class, but also for running writing workshop feedback session on the rough draft of each written assignment. Primarily, the feedback session lead to areas of revision for each student’s writing assignment. The participants positively reflected on the writing groups and feedback sessions, as discussed in Chapter Six. The participants found the writing groups not only gave them good writing advice, but also added to the ownership of the classroom environment as the groups were in charge of grading themselves on presentations they gave during the semester. This will be discussed specifically below as part of sharing the power with students.

Additionally, the students dialogued with me as their instructor. This dialogue consisted of a midterm individual conference with each student. The midterm conferences were a time for students to get individualized attention to the writing issues they were struggling with. For these sessions, I canceled normal class and ran the session during those time slots, increasing attendance and investment. The students were also able to dialogue with me concerning course content. This feedback, administered through

biweekly CIQs, which asked what students wanted to hear more about, what they would change in the class, in turn resulted in a number of revisions to the course calendar. This will also be discussed in more detail as a method of power sharing with the students.

Sharing the Power with Students in Course Development and Self-Assessment

Directly related to dialogue is the idea of de-centering the classroom power and sharing it with the students. Indeed, in Freire's (1970) critique of educational systems, his conception of an oppressive classroom environment is one in which the instructor holds all the power (Shor, 1997). Since all education is political, critical pedagogy itself is inextricably linked to "a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations" (Giroux, 1985, xiii). This struggle uncovers the production of social forms and norms by those in power (hooks, 1994; Giroux, 1985), oftentimes privileging specific ways of knowing and discourses (Giroux, 1990).

Therefore, in order to continue a process of struggling over power relations, this study gave the power back to the students in two major ways: course development and input, and self-assessments. Students were directly asked to give their input on the course planning. The first course calendar was mostly blank; after the first writing assignment, students were asked to develop themes and topics they wished to cover during the semester. Additionally, students were asked for their input in developing writing assignments two through five, as well as the grading criteria for the final creative portfolio. This type of input empowered students to become invested in their coursework. As highlighted in Chapter Six, de-centering the classroom and offering students the chance to plan and develop course material resulted in a more personalized learning environment that contrasted the rigid, content-centered environment in other classes.

Additionally, power was shared with students in terms of grading. As mentioned above, the writing groups were also in charge of identifying a topic and presenting a short lesson to the class. After the presentations, I asked students to fill out a brief self-assessment that consisted of a score and a brief rationale as to why they deserve that score. By engaging them in the grading process, the students became invested and felt they were given a grade they deserve, rather than relying solely on the assessment of the instructor.

A Writing Community of Multiple Discourses

The impetus for this study was the realization that adult basic writing students are constantly navigating between two discourses: the academic and the home. Behind this tension is a larger ideological tension. Building on both the dialogue and challenge to power structures in the classroom, critical pedagogy, or as bell hooks (1994) refers to critical and feminist approaches to education, also highlights the danger in assimilating to the dominant ideology, focusing much of its application to practice in ideology critique.

Ideology critique in critical discourses is the process of exposing and uncovering oppressive and dominant ideologies that have the tendency to oppress, with the ultimate goal of resistance and change (Brookfield, 2005). The tension between academic and home discourses in this study were examined as the academic discourse, as typically taught in a basic writing course, had elements of production and dominance (Nembhard, 1983; Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2002; MacKinnon & Manathunga, 2003).

Throughout the semester this study took place, students were engaging in a discussion of the various discourses in which they are embedded. Through the initial writing assignment, the tension between how to write the right way and how to avoid

writing the wrong way was clear. Students chose to pursue this topic and we developed our second writing assignment around a comparison of the two discourses. Despite requesting a discussion of the multiple discourses, participants were not clear about the existence and details of each. However, throughout the semester, through dialogue (Kaufmann, 2010), writing and feedback (Murray, 2003), class discussions, and supplemental readings, the participants came to a better understanding of the two Englishes and were better able to navigate the two. The study resulted in a dynamic change from desiring to find a formula that would correct their deficient discourse, to understanding the role and purpose of each. Participants were able to articulate dwelling in the tension of multiple discourses and showed an appreciation of both, as outlined in Chapters Five and Six. Through critique of the dominant ideology of the supremacy of the academic discourse (Shor, 2009), participants were able to come to new understanding and articulation of their basic writing experience.

Dialogue, de-centering power, and ideology critique are hallmarks of critical pedagogy and were all implemented in this study. The three build upon each other and do not have rigid boundaries between each other. Critical pedagogy, however, has been critiqued for limiting its discourse to rational ways of knowing and for limiting the discussion of the impact of student and instructor positionality on the learning environment. These basic critiques will be discussed next as they were addressed in this study. This study, while grounded in critical pedagogy, and other critical discourses in adult education such as feminist pedagogy, critical race theory, and critical multiculturalism, also drew on pedagogical methods developed in other disciplines and fields.

The various critical discourses in education, as outline in Chapter Two, at this point in time have influenced each other as critiques have been leveled and dealt with to form a theoretical framework for this study that is actually rooted in the critique of critical pedagogy but accepting and embracing of other non-rational ways of knowing. Central to this theoretical framework is the extension of critical pedagogical methods by other scholars to critique issues of positionality around race and culture (Closson, 2010; Guy, 1999), sexual orientation (Grace & Wells, 2007), gender and its intersections with race and class (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Tisdell, 1998), popular culture (Guy, 2007; Tisdell, 2008; Wright & Sandlin, 2009), other ways of knowing, and overemphasis on critique (Ellsworth, 1989; Tisdell, 2011).

Encouraging Other Ways of Knowing

Critical pedagogy has a reputation of critique, with very little actual problem solving. Ellsworth (1989) discusses this lack in critical pedagogy in terms of its over emphasis on the rational, privileging Western conceptions of reason, and creating a whole category of Others. Within the sphere of Others resides non-rational ways of knowing, or, as it is presented in this study, creative ways of knowledge representation. It is simple to critique; it is difficult to propose a solution. In fact, critical pedagogy is often criticized as lacking in creative solutions. Ideology critique must be bookended with creativity (Marcuse, 1964; Tavin, 2003; Tisdell, 2011).

This study implemented creativity and focused the final portfolio project on a reflection and new ways of knowing through creativity. The final portfolio assignment asked for a creative reflection on the assignments, group work, planning, and learning that took place over the semester. The creative reflection took many forms (artwork,

poetry, song, film, prose) and was presented to the class on the final day of classes. Along with the final creative work, students were required to write a one and a half page description of the work and reflection on the course in general.

It was in this process of creating and reflecting that interesting pieces of insight were added to the study. Humar and Melissa, struggling to critique the assumption of them being less intelligent than others because of their accent, turned to very visual representations of their learning. As discussed in Chapter Five, Humar create a video that focused on the tension she felt in her own language acquisition—more specifically the mastery of lower order concerns. Melissa presented a collage of diverse faces, words, languages, and ideas, swirling together into one larger picture, with the title “Diversity of People, Diversity of Language.” Their creative representations reflected a call for respect and understanding. On the other hand, Marcus was able to critique the hypocrisy around the marriage equality debate through his creative presentation by literally showing someone talking out of both sides of his mouth.

Through the creative final project and the consistent CIQ question asking for a “metaphor for the last two weeks of your learning,” students in this study were able to make use of a new way of expression and knowledge creation. The emphasis was to not only critique, but to also create (Daley, 2001; Tisdell, 2011). Similar to the role of reading and writing as a gateway to critique, the metaphors developed in the final project and the CIQ questions became a gateway to new understanding for students.

The majority of metaphors in the CIQs throughout the semester were related to some sort of growth or transition. It was common to see a metaphor regarding a baby learning to walk, a tree growing, or a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. Engaging

students' creative minds in the process of writing and critique proved to be useful and successful. In the final creative portfolio, students came up with useful metaphors for their new understanding of themselves and their positions in between the discourses of the English language.

Incorporating Attention to Positionality

Another critique of critical pedagogy in the adult education literature comes from the feminist literature. As mentioned in Chapter Two, while critical pedagogy is seen of great value to the fields of education, it has also been critiqued for its oversimplification of oppressive powers and for being overly rational in the way it has been incorporated and discussed in relation to higher education (Ellsworth, 1989; hooks, 1994), unable to extend much further than Freire's original economic and class context of writing and thought. More specifically, prior to the new millennium critical pedagogy had been critiqued for failing to include other dimensions of positionality, particularly that of the instructor, in its liberatory aims. It is clear, and it was an assumption of this study, that instructor and students' positionality does in fact impact the learning environment (hooks, 2003; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Tisdell, 1998).

Critical pedagogy has been critiqued for a lack of emphasis on instructor positionality as well as creative and other ways of knowing. The application of critical pedagogy in the writing classroom also incorporated attention to these issues that have been part of its critique; hence, I attempted to deal to some extent both with my own positionality as the instructor who is a male of Middle Eastern descent, and to incorporate other ways of knowing into the learning process.

Every learner is unique and brings his or her own agenda to the classroom environment. Likewise, every instructor teaches from an ideological perspective. And this was the starting point of this study. Critical pedagogy *must* account for learner positionality as it undoubtedly impacts their learning process. As discussed in Chapter Three, I shared my own unique positionality freely. By freely sharing my own positionality in the classroom, I attempted to problematize the dominant Eurocentrism (Brookfield, 2003) found in the classroom environment. Every participant in the study made connections to his or her life in the writing and the reading assignments. In fact, the impetus for a number of assignments for participants was aspects of their positionality. Amy, for example, wrote her persuasive assignment around an issue that was important to her “as a mother.” She wanted to see a safer neighborhood because of who she was. Humar and Melissa, two former ESL students, revolved a great deal of their writing around their ESL identity, focusing to write persuasive pieces about misunderstandings of their religion, their language, and their native countries.

For other participants from historically marginalized populations, positionality took center stage throughout the study. One or two aspects for both Marcus and Ronnie seemed to dominate their positionality profile and allowed them not only to focus their writing around it, but also find new meaning about themselves and a new voice of critique. Marcus wrote both his research and persuasive assignments about marriage equality. The classroom environment and writing assignments fostered a sense of engagement in Marcus that allowed him to feel comfortable to write and present to the class an argument for marriage equality, and also facilitated the development of his

critical consciousness. He found a new voice and an environment that allowed him to focus his writing on topics that were “very, personally important.”

Similarly, Ronnie’s racial identity gave him a powerful grounding to discuss and discover new meaning related to the multiple discourses in which he is embedded. While all the participants were able to articulate and discuss their position in the tension of the discourses, Ronnie, as discussed in Chapter Five, was able to connect the discussion of discourses to his lived experience, most powerfully to his lived experience in an African American environment, and being “branded like talking like white people.”

By addressing positionality, critical pedagogical teaching methods developed through the work of other scholars can capitalize on the lived conscious and subconscious experience of instructors and learners and potentially avoid a sterilization of critical consciousness. The critiques of Freire are accurate: not all oppression is the same, not everyone experiences oppression in the same way (Weiler, 1991) and the purveyors’ positionality of critical pedagogy must also be problematized (Brookfield, 2003; Ellsworth, 1989). This study shows that critical pedagogy can make use of instructor and learner positionality, allowing it to be a catalyst to dialogue and critique, without sacrificing the critique of larger systems of power.

Connections to the Basic Writing Literature

The basic writing literature, as laid out in Chapter Two, provides this study with a few points of connection that must be addressed here. The basic writing literature mostly addresses issues of success and blends it with current approaches. It is at the intersection of success and pedagogical approaches that this study sits. In truth, many critical

pedagogues at the community college and university level are teaching critically and with attention to creativity. However, there is a lack of empirical research in this regard.

Interestingly, and problematically, basic writing programs and courses are generally assessed in terms of success. As “gateway” courses (Gleason, 2001), basic writing classes are continually under the microscope as higher education budgets are constantly strained and under review. This scrutiny leads to a review of programs’ efficacy. Unfortunately, efficacy is mostly measured in terms of success, pass rates, and completion rates.

Attending to the Whole Student

This study offers new understanding into the literature around student success in regards to the basic writing classroom. As Chapter Two discussed, success in basic writing classrooms hinges on a number of factors in and out of the classroom. While developmental courses and sequences of courses are oftentimes seen as a cycle from which students can rarely emerge, the literature shows that a holistic approach to remediation benefits the student and allows him or her to move on into traditional, credit bearing courses (Crews & Aragon, 2004; Southard & Clay, 2004). The question then becomes, what does it mean to approach a developmental course from a holistic perspective? Is a holistic perspective confined to understanding students from a socio-cultural perspective, inviting students in to the academic discourse (Bartholomae, 2003; Curry, 2006)? Certainly this study shows that the opposite of holistic pedagogy in a basic writing course is problematic. When focusing on skills acquisition, participants in this study began to lose focus on their grasp on the course as a whole. While expressing a need for skills remediation, the participants, in reality, rejected formulaic, canned

instruction. This is an interesting point because it reveals a hegemonic system in the basic writing classroom that is also expressed in the literature. Embedded in a discourse of deficiency, basic writing students have taken on the language of those in power—expressing a need to focus on lower order concerns. It is as if fixing lower order concerns will make them better writers. The literature refutes this (Curry, 2006).

How do we attend to the whole student? This study shows that indeed focusing on more than skills acquisition will lead to a greater long-term success in writing. But holistic pedagogy must take into account the idea of process. Central to much of writing pedagogy is the idea of process. Every piece of writing has a process, and every writer has his or her own process. This process is inherent to writing (Emig, 1971), and can generally be categorized, albeit with unique shadings, in any setting.

This study does focus on process, but there is also a danger in reinforcing dominant ideologies through the use of process pedagogy. Within writing pedagogy, a move beyond process has been taking place. The shift away from process pedagogy toward a post-process pedagogy is not to ignore the various stages writers go through to produce a written product. Certainly, the benefits of multiple drafts, feedback, peer review, and continued revision are universal. However, process pedagogy can produce an emulative effect that reinforces the academic discourse. A holistic approach to writing pedagogy must take into account, not only students' personal histories and positionality, but also their own idiolect. And this is where post-process pedagogy can fit:

In short, writers thrive in a post-process classroom because it is there they are given invitations to probe the social and political gradations of writing, disposing of the prescriptive and supplanting it with a heuristic trek into language that is

contingent upon place and time, that tells students that truth is not given but is socially generated in a transactional context that often defies the simplicity of process composition. (Shafer, 2012, p. 294)

And it is from this perspective that this study took place. A holistic approach to basic writing must account for the politics of writing and give students a space to question and push back, not in search of reinforcing a specific ideology or political position, but in search of a lifetime of wonder and emancipation (Freire, 1974).

Other markers of success, presented in the literature, indicate that students who have been exposed to the higher education culture and who have access to learning assistance (and make use of the access) succeed at a higher rate. Within the traditional conception of success as described above, this study reinforces the literature. Participants who sought out help at the writing center, one-on-one instructor meetings, and invested in their writing groups, were able to nuance their writing and their perception of themselves as writers. Indeed, writing is not a solitary act and neither is the road to critical consciousness, which is why group work and collaboration was a central tent-pole of this course and study. We walk the road together and the literature reinforces this notion.

Re-orienting Success

But the troubling notion that success of basic writing programs and courses must be defined by student pass rates must also be addressed. Indeed the literature, and our higher education climate, situates pedagogical success in terms of the benefit to the student and the institution. It is assumed that the highest benefit to the student is to pass the class, move on, and graduate with a degree. In a weak economic climate, the push to graduate students increases, as witness through the National Completion Agenda

(Dervarics, 2009). Education, therefore, becomes an economic indicator and has the potential to be stripped of the liberatory potential and democratic investment (hooks, 2003). In reality, all of the participants in this study were in search of a better economic situation. That fact cannot be ignored. These participants were in search of a degree to move into a career to provide for their family. And this is a noble and necessary cause.

However, basic writing success cannot be pigeon-holed to short-term economic success. In fact, many of the benefits of a holistic, post-process, and critical approach to basic writing are not immediately evident. Critical awareness is a process and leads to a shift in how students approach the process of learning, encouraging inclusion of other ways of knowing (Lange, 2004) in search of consistent critical reflection.

Defining success in basic writing classrooms is inherently linked to the purpose of the instructor teaching the course. Historically, developmental courses have been used to “mainstream” students, oftentimes without regard to the students’ cultural or societal histories, as expressed by Mike Rose (1989). Therefore, success has often been seen as the ability of students to adopt the writing conventions of the dominant culture and employ them in writing tasks. This study shifts the axis for success toward the student and away from an ideological assimilation.

This is undoubtedly a delicate balance. How are instructors able to assess basic writers’ competency without a total assimilation to the conventions of the academic discourse? This problem was raised many times throughout the study itself. As an instructor of writing, it is my job to mainstream basic writers so that they can succeed in the academic environment. In order to succeed, they need to have some working understanding of the conventions of academic discourse. However, writing competency

does not need to be synonymous with cultural domination. There is a middle road.

Writing competency—the very beginning of basic writing courses—must be understood as the ability of students to knowingly navigate between the discourses, using one to inform the other, in a growing spiral of discourses. As discussed in Chapter Six, Humar put it best when she wrote (emphasis mine):

I want to be accepted. I want to be normal [emphasis added]. I want to get a good grade on my paper because good grade[s] provide me with more chance to get a better job in the future. And improving my academic English is the only way to reach that goal. I started to feel ashamed thinking about the moments I spoke the “Home English.” But later I realized that instead of hating my “Home English,” I should be using it as a foundation for my academic learning [emphasis added]. The good thing about my “Home English” is I don’t have to start from the very beginning.

Therefore, if basic writing instructors can shift the focus of competency away from assimilation and toward a critical awareness, as outlined in Table 3 in Chapter Four, students will be better prepared to be writers in diverse settings, understanding the various discourses in which they are embedded and better able to navigate the waters between.

This study was centered on the critique of the various discourses adult basic writers find themselves in. As discussed in Chapter Four, the students identified this as a major tension or problem to be solved and this critical action research set out to uncover ways to deal with the tension through critical pedagogical and its related discourses methods. It is simple, as writing instructors, to admit that learners are in fact embedded

within multiple discourses. It is difficult for writing instructors to make the statement that any discourse the students are involved in is acceptable. This is the tension for instructors. However, as we shift definitions of success and competency away from skills acquisition and toward a whole, critical understanding of writing and the various discourses, labeling one discourse acceptable over another is not the end-goal. The specifics of how to shift success back to the students in the basic writing classroom will be discussed in the next section, along with implications for theory and research in critical pedagogy and basic writing in general.

Implications for Theory: A Critical Pedagogy of Writing

With its connection to the major areas of the literature, as discussed above, this study also offers significant insight for theory. This study did not take place in a vacuum; a lot of the methods and techniques used throughout this study are not new and are not confined to critical pedagogies. An emphasis on the writing process (multiple drafts, writing groups, feedback) is a hallmark of any quality writing classroom and is rooted in sound theory and practice (Elbow, 1973; Emig, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 2003). Emphasizing student/student and student/instructor dialogue in the remedial and basic writing classrooms is a growing trend as instructors move away from skills acquisition classrooms and toward a holistic approach (Crews & Aragon, 2004; Southard & Clay, 2004). This study offers a new pedagogy of writing—a critical pedagogy of writing—that has significant implications for both theory and practice. This section will discuss the implications for theory, followed by a discussion of implications for practice.

A common critique of using critical pedagogy in the writing classroom is that it puts “dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking and

the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student” (Hairston, 2003, p. 698). This critique was addressed in Chapter Two and will not be fully countered again in this chapter. However, Hairston (2003) claims that teaching writing from a critical perspective will center the course of ideology and politics, rather than the craft of writing. This critique neglects to note that all classrooms are taught from an ideological perspective and are indeed political (even those who claim to not be political). It also assumes that making use of a critical pedagogy of writing pushes a specific ideology on students, causing them to unwillingly accept the politics of the instructor.

Casting students in this light, however, is exactly what a critical pedagogy of writing has the potential to undo. In a softer expression of critical pedagogy, Freire (1974) describes the theory’s aim to become “an education of ‘I wonder,’ instead of merely, ‘I do’” (p. 32). By cultivating a sense of wonder and resistance in students, a critical pedagogy of writing has the potential to instill personal, resistive qualities in students who are then able to better identify and potentially resist any ideological pressures from the instructor.

The purpose of a critical pedagogy of writing, as evidenced in this study, is to offer insight and new knowledge where both critical pedagogy and basic writing pedagogy have failed to do so. Based on the findings of the study, there are three categories of new theoretical insight to highlight, which help make up for what’s lacking in the current theoretical literature.

Highlight Tensions

Another central theme of this study, and indeed the catalyst for this study, is the discussion of various discourses that exist in the English language and in which adult

basic writing students find themselves embedded. A discussion of the various discourses of the English language necessitates a discussion of power and privilege, ideology, and hegemony. And critical pedagogy and its related discourses can and already do have these discussions, although lacking in specifics about the writing discourses. Language to critique and discuss the discourses can be found in the critical pedagogy literature and can be applied to the writing discourse setting.

It is in the basic writing literature, however, where there is a lack and almost a resistance to highlighting the tensions of the discourses. Basic writing theory and practice, as discussed in Chapter Two and in this chapter, revolve around an assimilative approach to language: the learner is deficient and in need of adopting the writing conventions of the academy in order to succeed. And in some practical applications, this assumption is correct. For an adult basic writing student to make a good impression in a job interview, for example, she needs to be able to compose a universally recognized letter of interest and resume. For an adult basic writing student to advance in his nursing career, he needs to be able to put down his description of a patient's condition in writing in a way that a doctor can read and understand. There are conventions to follow and from an economic perspective these conventions are beneficial to students. Throughout this study, participants desired to find a formula, crack the academic code, or learn how to write professionally, with the end goal of succeeding in a career setting.

This study does not recommend that basic writing instructors ignore the academic discourse, or teach their students that their own idiolect is equally acceptable in all settings as the academic discourse. To do so would be to ignore the principals of any communication course: audience and purpose. However, this study does argue and

defend the idea of having an open dialogue concerning the multiple discourses adult basic writing students find themselves in, with the goal of a deeper understanding of both in order to build knowledge and skill of each. Humar noted that she no longer needed to turn her back to her idiolect; rather, it is a starting point. As she wades the waters of the discourses, her home discourse served as the moon hanging in the dark sky on a clear night, providing her with guidance and motivation to reach either shore at any time.

Examining the discourse tension within the written English language does not seek to supplant one for another. It does, however, add a sense of individuality, ownership, and investment that can prove to be successful and point to long term educational success. And it is at this stage where writing instructors can begin to investigate a post-process pedagogy, as discussed above.

Highlight Creativity

As discussed above, the tendency to critique within critical pedagogy is high. The critique of critical pedagogy falls short of any new knowledge creation through creative efforts. This critique has been discussed in Chapter Two as well as in this chapter. More recent discussions in critical approaches to education have pointed toward a necessity for attending to creativity as well as critical approaches (Greene, 1995; Tavin, 2003; Tisdell, 2011) as part of the critical awareness process.

Within composition and basic writing, creative approaches are not rare. Writing itself is, or can be, a creative act. However, within the basic writing classroom, assignments other than personal narratives generally do not give students the freedom to enter into a creative dialogue with their writing. Again, basic writing pedagogy focuses on, at the very least, giving students the tools they need to assimilate to the dominant

discourse. Creative writing, therefore, is a discipline of its own and considered more advanced and inappropriate for basic writers.

This study showed that by engaging students in creative realms, new knowledge and insight can be created. Participants made use of the request for metaphors in the biweekly CIQs to access a part of their learning that may not be able to be expressed otherwise, as presented in the last chapter. The final creative projects gave the participants a chance to create knowledge outside of the standard essay format, engaging their creative sides to articulate the learning that took place throughout the semester.

Creative ways of knowing and representing knowledge can be regulated by a reflection on the creative work. This technique allows for full investment in the creative work, but a sound investment by the student who should be able to articulate exactly what inspired the creative work, what the creative work represents, and why she chose certain creative elements. Creative works and critical reflection go hand in hand.

This adds new knowledge to both critical pedagogy and basic writing fields. We can critique and create. We can learn the various discourses and conventions and access our creative imaginations. New knowledge, new methods of expression, can come from creative projects.

Highlight Positionality

A central part of this study was the focus on instructor and student positionality. The data shows that students were more invested and excited about writing projects that they connected to in their daily, lived experiences. As adults who are being pulled in

many different directions, being able to center writing and thought on one's positionality served as a guiding light, orienting students to the writing task at hand.

This chapter has discussed the challenges that critical pedagogy faces in the arena of positionality. The theory is oftentimes focused on the rational, ignoring the intricate and complicated make up of instructors and learners. Likewise, while composition and basic writing theory are amenable to personal, reflective writing (a pedagogy Hairston (2003) argues for in lieu of critical pedagogy), there is a lack of highlighting learners' positionality as it is not necessary to the acquisition of writing skills.

This study centered instructor and student positionality with the intent of developing an investment and long-term commitment to the writing process. This component of a critical pedagogy of writing can add new insight to critical pedagogy (as discussed above) and writing theory. Not only are students more likely to invest in the writing process and project, but they also become engaged in advocating for untold stories, and, through dialogue (Kaufman, 2010), become more invested in the classroom experience.

Implications for Practice: A Composition of Critique

In light of the new ground this study has gained in the theoretical frameworks of critical education discourses and basic writing, there are a number of implications for practice. These implications for practice are an outgrowth of the implications for theory discussed above and should be taken together.

Threats to basic writing programs are not new. Since their inception in the early 1970s at the CUNY, they have consistently been first on the chopping block when institutions of higher education run into budget concerns. Many have argued that college

is not the place to be remediating writers; rather, the bulk of the work should be done at the high school level.

Others have argued that basic writing programs must accelerate students through the process of writing courses in order to graduate students at a faster rate. Indeed, accelerated programs are taking place and have gained popularity as they merge one or two levels of writing. In fact, at the research site for this study, accelerated writing programs were taking place the same semester this study took place.

The problem with accelerated writing programs is that it does not address the ideological tension found in the basic writing classroom in regards to the various discourses adult students are entwined in. While accelerated programs may be successful in quickly assimilating a student to a certain type of discourse, it does very little to challenge the idea of the need to assimilate. In fact, the overall purpose of accelerated writing programs is primarily financial: it is more economical to have students quickly exit the developmental cycle and continue on in credit-bearing courses.

The Process of Composing Critique

There is continually a clash of difference in our politics, our education, and our religions. These differences, if they were present thousands of years ago, are still present today in our classrooms. These differences offer an education environment that lives on the edge, teetering between a deeper reality and a hostile environment. Which way the classroom eventually falls is decided every week, every class period, and depends on the instructor and the learner.

With an increasing hostile national political environment and elections that seem to put extremists on both sides into power, a hope for a deeper reality may seem dim.

What motivates the educator to tackle issues of power and privilege in the developmental writing classroom? Why not stick to the textbook's lessons and activities, teaching appropriate verb tense, comma usage, and subject/verb agreement, in a vacuum that notices not the cultural background nor the present realities of students? It takes too much effort, it is too contentious, and it runs the risk of replacing one ideology for another (Hairston, 2003).

It *is* difficult. It *does* run the risk of devolving into a shouting match. However, whether or not it works, the simple fact remains that it *must* work. Education itself is never politically neutral (hooks, 1994), so even with educators' best efforts to steer clear of issues of power and privilege, an agenda is being represented. And it is in the classroom where a real impact can be made.

After a diverse section of a developmental writing class I taught last fall spent the class period talking about the 2010 midterm elections, issues of power and privilege, capitalism, and educational access, a white, self-identified conservative Republican student turned to an African-American, progressive military veteran and said, "Why can we have a conversation about these issues without killing each other, and people in Congress can't agree on how to put people back to work?" His question spoke volumes and, although he may have been unaware of the weeks of preparation it took to get the class to be able to embrace a dialogic pedagogy (Freire, 1974), is a challenge to educators to create space to allow for civil, democratic dialogue (Kaufman, 2010) that allows for the discovery of a deeper reality within the learners' own unique cultural context.

It is important to note that critical reflection and consciousness can be fostered and take place at any level of education. Since the basic writing course used in this study

was the second level of basic writing, it is necessary to investigate the applicability of pedagogical methods at all levels of writing at the community college. Commonly referred to as “first-year writing” in traditional four-year colleges and universities, the writing sequence specifically at the research site can consist of up to three levels of non-ESL courses (Table 1). In order to further promote a long-term critical consciousness and a long-term discourse critique, the critical methods and findings in this study should be applied to all levels of writing instruction at the community college.

My goal for my students who have taken the two basic writing levels is for them to be aware of some of the larger issues of power surrounding their developmental writing status. Engaging in questions around the placement testing process (“Who’s interests are being served by placing you in developmental writing?”), the course content (“Who’s version of English is being taught in the textbook?”), and the writing assignments mandated (“Why is it necessary that we do research and who’s research are we representing in our papers?”), I have set the stage—laid the groundwork—for more in-depth ideology critique in English 101. Essentially, we can move students from cultivating an understanding of the various discourses and ideological tensions found in those discourses in the basic writing courses, to fostering a sanctuary (Lange, 2009) in English 101. It is in this sanctuary that specific writing assignments throughout the course will be used to explore issues perhaps felt unsafe to explore in the public forum. I believe it is important, now that these students have been “redeemed” from their developmental status, to further engage questions of power in relation to the classroom, the institution, and themselves and ultimately compose a deeper understanding of their own culture.

The first basic writing course students can take focuses primarily on sentence-level issues. The second level, the level at which this study took place, focuses primarily on longer essays and higher order concerns. College Composition focuses on different forms of essays and more directly on argument and persuasion. Across these three levels of writing, composing critique is possible. By extrapolating the findings in this study to the other levels of writing, what can be created is a sequence of critique and critical consciousness that will span levels of writing and better equip students to address issues of power and ideology in other classrooms.

In order to cultivate a critical consciousness across the levels of writing courses, it is necessary to apply the findings of this study as a rough framework to other courses. While this study's intent is not to be universally applicable (its findings are unique to its participants), there are some general guidelines that can be followed to continue to democratize the classroom experience for learners and to explore the tension of discourses in the English language.

Within this study, supplemental reading selections were used as metaphors for critique. Discussion ideology critique is difficult for students who may not have the vocabulary to do so. However, using metaphoric reading, this study shows, gives students a framework to express tensions that connect to their lived experience. A similar approach can be taken at all levels of writing instruction. While other critical compositionists are making these efforts, this study hopes to add to the literature.

Every student lives within their own positionality and will relate stories of race, gender, and class to their own lived experience. Readings can be assigned to coordinate with writing assignments or to start discussion that get at the idea of the various English

discourses. The participants in this study were able to personally relate to stories and supplemental readings and in turn were able to relate to the characters' struggles of being out of place, between two languages, or constantly on the move. This relation, this metaphoric connection, helped participants articulate their own understanding of tension in the discourses of the English language. There is reason to believe that this method can be successful at any writing level.

Critical Composition Writing Assignments

Because “language disrupts, refuses to be contained within boundaries” (hooks, 1994, p. 167), writing assignments have the ability to allow students to fully explore, without fear of public embarrassment or retribution. While not ignoring the role of community in anti-racist and social justice based critical multicultural education (Holst, 2010), it should be our goal to ask students to engage in these issues first privately (in writing assignments), and then publically (presentations) by constructing writing assignments based on the various rhetorical modes, or combination of modes.

Traditionally, the five modes of writing (*research, expository, persuasion, narrative, analysis*) have been used in English composition classrooms but have recently fallen out of favor because of their rigid structural approach. Although it is now widely accepted that multiple modes occur through every piece of writing, using the five modes as a general framework to design writing assignments is still appropriate and useful in designing writing assignments that not only meet the learning objectives of College Composition, but also allow students to continue to engage issues of power and privilege.

After a foundation of basic writing that encourages critique and dialogue about the various discourses of the English language, what is needed is a college composition

course that takes advantage of that groundwork and further instills critical awareness throughout the writing curriculum. A potential first assigned writing project is one that helps the student set the groundwork for discussing issues of culture. By asking students to define culture, we can encourage them to begin to take an inventory of what is included and not included in the term culture in their own understanding. Supplemental reading can be paired with this assignment that not only offers an example of an exploratory essay, but more specifically, explores issues of culture and identity. For example, Randall Kenan's (2003) "Where Am I Black?" introduces students to very basic terms and understandings around culture as the author explores his identity. By showing students that everyone has a culture (despite some students not being aware of how to locate or identify it) through the readings, the stage can be set for an in-depth exploration and the beginning of critique.

Building off of that formed definition of the word culture, students can then be asked to specifically focus in on their own story of culture. Butterwick and Lawrence (2009) noted that everyone has multiple stories related to culture and positionality to tell, and this assignment highlights these stories. To instill in the students a sense of cultural history, students may interview a family member regarding their own cultural story. The two cultural stories, when put together, will create a rich tapestry of connectedness similar to Alice Walker's (2003) "Everyday Use," that discusses cultural artifacts handed down from generation to generation.

But critique is not solely about storytelling. It also hinges on identifying a problem and proposing a solution. Similar to the fourth writing assignment in this study, persuasion can be a very useful tool of critique. Through writing cultural narratives,

students will be encouraged to locate problems that they feel are *culturally-bound*. By culturally-bound I am referring to problems that stem from, or are exacerbated by, people's positionality (e.g., unfair lending by banks to families of color, marriage equality issues, equal pay, etc.). These types of problems can be paired with Flannery O'Connor's (2003) "Everything That Rises Must Converge," a short story that directly deals with human flaws in light of racial tensions in a newly integrated South. Analyzing a problem takes a great deal of critical awareness and this step is a critical one in the composition course.

Not only analyzing problems, but also proposing a solution can offer an ownership and investment in the problem and a local community. Similar to the persuasive argument written by students in this study, this assignment locates the most immediate audience and petitions them for change within the community. By reading Henry Louis Gates' (2003) "Sin Boldly," a short story in which a racially charged issue is attempted to be solved by people across the racial divide, students will be able to put into practice a solution to an identified problem. Students will also be asked to persuasively argue their proposed solution based on research they have done.

In her poem "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children," Adrienne Rich echoes the tension of teaching the language of the dominant culture to those that it has historically oppressed. Her resolution to the tension, making use of the language to be able to communicate and, it can be inferred by the rest of the poem, speak about societal injustices, offers a perfect introduction to the final writing assignment of the semester. Since this study showed the power of creative projects in the meaning-making process of writers, a final writing assignment moves out from under the five modes of writing and

asks students to creatively represent their understanding of culture based on the semester's work. This assignment, coupled with Adrienne Rich's poem will challenge students to end the course with a sense of hope and deep understanding of their own culture. This assignment will also encourage students to understand how language of the dominant culture can be used to foster a creative cultural imagination (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2009), thus culminating the last three semester's worth of work with the adult students of color.

By fostering a sanctuary (Lange, 2009) to address issues of power and privilege and by allowing my students to engage their cultural imaginations (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2009) through a final creative presentation, I have attempted to continue a conversation that started two semesters ago in which adult students of color have come through the remediation process, successfully entered college composition, and completed their remediation cycle. Moving from critiquing to composing a new understanding in English 101, the adult students of color have not only completed their remediation process, but also a personal process of ideology critique, understanding, and rebuilding.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

While this study adds to knowledge to the critical pedagogy, critical educational discourses, and basic writing literature, a few limitations must be discussed here, at the conclusion of the study. As outlined in Chapter One, this study is ironically positioned to be in search of a critical writing pedagogy that de-centers classroom power and encourages critique and dialogue but can only do so if the instructor permits it. This irony was prevalent the entire semester and it is the reality of teaching a course that is embedded in a formal educational system. The course had learning outcomes, determined

by the English department and the college that must be followed. The course also had a set schedule. Within these structural confines, this study did its best to facilitate student learning and liberation.

This study specifically resulted in only six participants. Because of the diversity of the student population in the course, there was a range of ages represented. I limited my participants to those who were at least 26 years old. Doing so narrowed my participant list down from 13 consented, to seven who fit the age criteria. One student, who fit the age criteria and consented, could not be contacted with throughout the subsequent semester. While this number of participants is a weakness because it limited my participant field, it can also be seen as a strength. Due to the number of participants in this study, I was able to investigate each participant's writing, exit interviews, and comments throughout the semester in greater depth. While the number of participants was low, the participants who were in this study are a fair representation of the diversity of basic writing students in the community college setting across gender, race, nationality, orientation, and family status lines.

As this study came to a close, it dawned on me that in order to truly understand the critical awareness that was exhibited in the participants toward the end of the semester, there must be some sort of long-term study done with the same participants. As they left the basic writing classroom and entered College Composition and beyond, how do the participants approach writing assignments differently? How do they approach their own educational environment differently? There is no doubt that the participants moved down the road toward critical awareness during the study, but how long does that last?

Once someone becomes critically aware, do they remain critically aware or can it be lost once they return to a traditional classroom?

One area of future research that is necessary in order to better understand the usefulness of critical pedagogical methods in the basic writing classroom is a long-term study of basic writers who continue through College Composition (typically, English 101). It would be even more interesting to follow the same participants through the entire three-course cycle—basic writing one, basic writing two, and college composition—to determine how critical awareness impacts their long-term writing and educational success.

There is a temptation to want to quantify the findings of this study. In other words, in an environment focused on budgets, student success is paramount. Generally, colleges determine a student is successful if he or she continues in their coursework and completes his or her program. However, focusing on student success through the lens of persistence does not tell the whole story. It is difficult to quantify critical awareness. Can critical awareness be deemed successful? If so, how? A quantitative study could be developed to determine how students who come through a critical basic writing course compare to students who test directly into English 101 in regards to persistence and success.

In this study and in the discussion of the findings in light of the writing discipline, supplemental and metaphoric readings were an important part of the process of critical awareness building. However, I found it difficult to locate a text that included the types of readings that could be used as metaphors for the discourse tension in the English language. What was used, then, was a collection of short readings found in various texts.

While not ideal, the selections served their purpose. However, I ran into issues of fair use and copyright in subsequent semesters when trying to put together readings into a course packet. An anthology of readings centered on the tension in the discourses of the English language is needed at all levels of reading and writing classes.

Chapter Summary and Final Reflections

This chapter took a closer look at the findings of the study and how they make new inroads into the fields of critical pedagogy, critical education, and basic writing. Critical pedagogy, oftentimes criticized for being overly rational, can be used to not only critique, but to also create. This creativity takes the field of critical pedagogy in a different direction by making use of the other various critical discourses in education. Clearly in this study, participants were able to continue their own process of critical awareness through their final creative portfolios. In fact, in many cases, the creative portfolio helped synthesize the process of critique, and allow participants to articulate new knowledge.

This study also offers a re-imagining of basic writing courses and programs. By shifting the marker of success from solely student completion rates to a more holistic, long-term liberatory educative process, basic writing can have a much greater impact than it already does. And finally, this chapter discussed future areas of research and long-term improvements for the field of writing instruction in general.

In the field of writing instruction, process pedagogy has made a huge mark. Writing is a process, not a product, argues Donald Murray (2003). And despite the field beginning to shift toward a post-process pedagogy—one that de-centers the writing process authority and highlights dialogic, rather than monologic, interactions with

students (Breuch, 2003), and yes, a similar theoretical perspective as this study—there is still value in refusing to commodify writing and focus on the benefits to the writer during the *act* of writing. The writing process—or, making the road by walking—can provide insight and new knowledge to the writer.

And this was my experience throughout this study. This study and dissertation culminated years of thought, study, research, and practice for me. Being in the basic writing field is a lifetime commitment and purpose. This study, and the years of coursework that have informed and led up to it, has been about the process for me, one that started long ago. I have learned just as much about my practice and myself preparing and writing this dissertation as I have from the dissertation itself.

Inherent to any research study, especially an action research study, is a loss of control by the researcher. As an instructor, I tend to gravitate toward more control than not in regards to course planning, due dates, and assignment details. I have always couched this tendency in terms of minimizing student confusion on due dates, assignment details, and other requirements. There is a real concern here to minimize any distractions, but the loss of control that I experienced during this study forced me to rely, not on myself, but on the students. How simple an idea that education and a classroom experience should be focused and centered on the students. Rather than put forth my agenda, tendencies, or preferences of instruction, I took a back seat—literally and figuratively—focusing energy on empowering students to take hold of the learning environment. I found that de-centering the classroom was in fact liberating for my practice as well as terrifying.

Shortly after beginning my formal, full-time teaching of basic writing students, a colleague asked, “Why devote so much time and energy to teach *and* research basic writing students?” The underlying assumption of the question was that it is easy to teach basic writing—it is a formula. Quiz the students on verb tenses, sentence structure; ask the students to memorize vocabulary words and where to put a thesis statement in the introduction; give students examples of the five-paragraph essay that they can follow. Give them the formula and move on. Don’t waste your time teaching anything else and most certainly don’t waste you time researching how they learn. The statement also reveals another assumption about basic writing instruction: that it is a field of charity. I am often met with amazement when I describe the type of teaching I do: “How kind of you to devote so much time to these students.” This reminded me of Freire’s (1970) discussion of false charity as coming from the oppressors to the oppressed as compared to a social justice that teaches and gives access to liberatory processes.

These statements and assumptions still cause me to bristle. Basic writing instruction is not about formulas, it is about access. It is not about memorization, it is about the creation of new knowledge and ways of knowing. It is about critiquing the discourses and finding a new way. It is not charity; it is about doing what is right for the educational access of those who are subject to an educational system that divests, rather than invests in, them. That is what I set out to do in this research study. It may not be a popular approach to basic writing, nor is it a universal cure for all of basic education’s challenges, but it is our best chance to meet adult basic writing students where they are: in search of the moon to guide them as they navigate the water between the discourses.

Recently, an African-American student approached me after a basic writing two class. We just ended a class where we discussed the differences between the purpose and audience of academic English and home English. We had a vigorous discussion of the role of students' home English and why it rarely has a place within the academy. This student had a slightly confused look on his face, and paused before speaking. As he spoke, his confusion gave way to clear thought: "You know," he started, "I always thought this class would force me to write a certain way. But it lets me explore the kind of English I use everyday, and that it is okay. I like that." And to this student, I replied, "I couldn't agree more."

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APPENDIX A
RESEARCH SITE & IRB APPROVAL

Alfred Siha - Re: Request for Research

Page 1

From: Ronald Young
To: Siha, Alfred
Date: 10/31/2011 1:12:11 pm
Subject: Re: Request for Research

Alfred,

The plan that you submitted as a request to do research in partial fulfillment of doctoral study requirements is approved. Utilizing students in Engl 051 to test different approaches to making students competent writers, etc., will not only be worthwhile for you but ultimately to the college.

Good luck as you begin to work on how you will implement your strategies for the spring term.

Ron

>>> Alfred Siha 10/27/2011 2:18 PM >>>
Hi Ron,

Attached, please find my formal request for research involving HACC students. The proposed research will be focused on my teaching area of expertise, developmental writing, and will be done in partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree of adult education from Penn State.

I have also put a hard, signed copy in inter-office mail, which you should receive shortly.

Thanks,

Alfred

--

Alfred Siha
Instructor of English
HACC York Campus
2010 Pennsylvania Ave.
York, PA 17404
717.718.0328 ext. 3523
aasiha@hacc.edu

PENNSTATE



Vice President for Research
Office for Research Protections

The Pennsylvania State University
The 330 Building, Suite 205

Phone : (814) 865-1775
Fax: (814) 863-8699
Email : orprotections@psu.edu
Web : www.research.psu.edu/orp

Date: December 09, 2011

From: The Office for Research Protections - FWA#: FWA00001534
Stephanie L. Krout, Compliance Coordinator

To: Alfred A. Siha

Re: Determination of Exemption

IRB Protocol ID: 38312

Follow-up Date: December 4, 2016

Title of Protocol: Critical Pedagogy in the Basic Writing Classroom: An Action Research Study

The Office for Research Protections (ORP) has received and reviewed the above referenced eSubmission application. It has been determined that your research is exempt from IRB initial and ongoing review, as currently described in the application. You may begin your research. The categories within the federal regulations under which your research is exempt are:

45 CFR 46.101(b)(1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Given that the IRB is not involved in the initial and ongoing review of this research, it is the investigator's responsibility to review [IRB Policy III "Exempt Review Process and Determination"](#) which outlines:

- What it means to be exempt and how determinations are made
- What changes to the research protocol are and are not required to be reported to the ORP
- Ongoing actions post-exemption determination including addressing problems and complaints, reporting closed research to the ORP and research audits
- What occurs at the time of follow-up

APPENDIX B**CRITICAL INCIDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please respond to the following questions at the end of class. You may refer to the class discussions, readings, and activities that occurred during the last two weeks of class. You may answer with short phrases if you wish.

A time in class that I felt most engaged was:

A time in class that I felt least engaged was:

The thing that surprised me the most was:

The most important thing I learned was:

The thing I hoped we would talk more about was:

What I hope we will talk about in future classes:

A metaphor for my learning the last two weeks would be:

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project:: Critical Pedagogy in the Basic Writing Classroom: An Action Research Study

Principal Investigator: Alfred Siha
Harrisburg Area Community College
York Campus
2010 Pennsylvania Avenue

York, PA 17404
(717) 718-0328 x3585; aasiha@hacc.edu

Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell
Penn State Harrisburg
W331 Olmsted Building
777 W. Harrisburg Pike
Middletown, PA 17057
(717) 948-6640; ejt11@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this action research study is to explore how critical pedagogy can foster writing competency and critical consciousness in adult basic writing students.

2. Procedures to be followed: Participation includes completion of the standard 16-week semester (spring 2012 semester) as well as the completion of writing assignments for the course. One post-semester interview will be required. All class activities are required as part of the curriculum for the course and will occur regardless of consent; however, student data will only be used for research if you sign a consent form.

3. Benefits: The benefits to you include learning more about yourself as a writer and a social being. You will have a better understanding of your own writing process and how things outside of your control may impact that process. In addition, you will learn how to challenge assumed ways of teaching in the classroom. The study may also have an impact on the College's curriculum planning for future basic writing courses.

4. Duration: The post-semester interview will take approximately 60 minutes (week after grades are posted) and will be audio taped. The time to complete the writing assignments for the course will vary for each student and may include multiple drafts of each writing assignment. Some class time will be devoted to drafting, organizing, and

revising of writing assignments. A final portfolio/project is required for successful completion of the course.

5. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at the researcher's office/home office either under lock and key (hard copies of written assignments, tapes and transcriptions of interviews) or in a password protected file (digital files of audio interviews). The researcher and his primary advisor may read the various writing assignments and interview transcripts, but the PI is the only person with the key and password to access data. Interview data (transcripts, audio tapes, digital files) will be destroyed 7 years after the research is complete. The research will be completed in December 2012.

6. Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Alfred Siha at (717) 718-0328 x3585 or Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell at (717) 948-6640 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you.

7. Payment for participation: You will not receive monetary compensation for participating in this study.

8. Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise. Your choice to participate or not participate will have no influence on grades and class standing.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. **If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.**

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Participant Printed Name

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX D

STUDENT STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

Study Title: Critical Pedagogy in the Basic Writing Classroom: An Action Research Study

Study Design: This study is a qualitative critical action research study that will make use of your section of English 051 to identify, analyze, and propose a solution to the tension found within basic writing classrooms, specifically with adult learners returning to the community college classroom.

A number of pieces of data will be collected during the semester including:

1. Instructor observations
2. Written assignments
3. Critical incident questionnaires
4. A 45-minute, post semester exit interview

Inclusion Criteria: You are given the option to be part of this study by **signing an informed consent form provided**. Whether you sign up or not, your semester will proceed as normal, with no variation in assignments and instruction. Those who do consent to be part of the study will remain anonymous until the end of the semester, after final grades are posted.

Benefits: The benefits to you include learning more about yourself as a writer and a social being. You will have a better understanding of your own writing process and how things outside of your control may impact that process. In addition, you will learn how to challenge assumed ways of teaching in the classroom. The study may also have an impact on the College's curriculum planning for future basic writing courses.

Duration: The post-semester interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes (week after grades are posted) and will be audio taped. The time to complete the writing assignments for the course will vary for each student and may include multiple drafts of each writing assignment. Some class time will be devoted to drafting, organizing, and revising of writing assignments. A final portfolio/project is required for successful completion of the course.

Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at the researcher's office/home office either under lock and key (hard copies of written assignments, tapes and transcriptions of interviews) or in a password protected file (digital files of audio interviews). The researcher and his primary advisor may read the various writing assignments and interview transcripts, but the PI is the only person with the key and password to access data. Interview data (transcripts, audio tapes, digital files) will be destroyed 7 years after the research is complete. The research will be completed in December 2012.

Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Alfred Siha at (717) 718-0328 x3585 or Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell at (717) 948-6640 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you.

APPENDIX E

EXIT INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Before the semester began, how did you feel about your relationship with writing?
2. How do you perceive the relationship between the writing we worked on in class and the writing you do on a daily basis?
3. How would you describe your experiences in this course, specifically in terms of the writing expectations put on you?
4. What parts of the course helped you better understand yourself as a writer?
5. How have the supplemental readings in the course helped you identify areas of tension or struggle with your writing?
6. How would you describe the classroom relationship between yourself and me as the instructor?
7. What ways did working in groups offer you control over the course and your learning?
8. How did having a say in the assessment of your writing help you understand your role in the course?
9. How did the discussions and activities help you uncover hidden agendas within the academic discourse?
10. How would you describe your understanding of yourself as a writer now after the course has been completed?

APPENDIX F

ORIGINAL SYLLABUS & CALENDAR

Instructor: Alfred Siha, M.A.

Course Name: English Essentials

Campus: [REDACTED]

Course Reference Number: [REDACTED]

Office Location: [REDACTED]

Term & Year: Spring 2012

Office Hours: Monday: 11am-12pm,
 Tuesday: 9-9:30am & 2-3:30pm,
 Wednesday: 9-9:30am & 11am-12pm, Thursday: 2-3:30pm

Credit Hours: 3

Faculty Secretary: [REDACTED]

Class/Lab Room #: [REDACTED]

HACC Email Address: [REDACTED]

Class Meeting Times:
 T/R: 9:30-10:55am
 Delayed Meeting Time:
 11:00-11:50am

Catalog Course Description:

Development of clear, coherent paragraphs and longer essays with emphasis on basic grammar and sentence combining skills. Attention is given to the formulation of thesis statements and the development of ideas. A grade of C or higher in this course, which includes satisfactory completion of a final writing project, qualifies the student for ENGL 101.

Prerequisite Course(s) Required:

Placement through the College Testing and Placement Program or completion of ENGL 050 or ENGL 029 with a grade of C or higher.

Text(s), required:

Brannon, Bob. *A Writer's Workshop: Crafting Paragraphs, Building Essays*. New York: McGraw-Hill. 2010. Print.

Hacker, Diane. *Rules for Writers*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2009. Print.

Supplemental reading packet, provided by instructor.

Supplemental Materials:

- Binder for class notes and journals, filled with paper
- Access to a computer running Microsoft Word or equivalent (Apple Pages, Open Office, etc.) and a printer
- Flash drive

- Stapler and writing utensils
- **Learning Outcomes:**
 - Employ writing process strategies including invention, arrangement, and editing for effectiveness and correctness
 - Apply organizational strategies to respond to a range of writing tasks, including writing under pressure and with time constraints
 - Demonstrate competence in writing about reading by refining active and critical reading skills
 - Recognize and correct common errors in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure
 - Demonstrate basic skills in information management, including managing bibliographic information, locating and citing sources, maintaining academic honesty and avoid plagiarism
 - Express ideas in correct, complete sentences and in unified, coherent paragraphs and thesis-driven essays
 - Use computer technology for word processing, researching library database systems, and/or the internet

Methods of Evaluation

1. Attendance	See attendance policy below for details	30 points
2. In-class writing	I will not be grading what you write, but your willingness to write. Almost every class will start with a writing prompt and I will ask you to write for 10 minutes, with a time for volunteered sharing. I expect you to stay actively writing the whole allotted time—not doodling, daydreaming, or refusing to write.	30 points
3. Worksheets	There are two major worksheets that must be completed to help you with the next assignment as well as to get the points (20 points each)	40 points
4. Writing Concept Presentations	Working in assigned groups, you will be assigned to present a writing concept to the class. As a class, you will decide what writing concepts you would like covered during the semester. More details will follow on this assignment. Each group will present twice a semester. 50 points each, 100 points total.	100 points

- 5. Writing Assignments** The goal of this course to expose you to different types of writing. You will be assigned an initial writing assignment (personal educational narrative) and **will be involved in the planning of the details of the other major writing assignments.** Details of each assignment and assessment will be distributed well in advance. 550 points
- Your written, graded assignments are:

1. Personal Educational Narrative (50 points)

2. To be decided (50 points/100 points)

Essay type and topic will be discussed and chosen by the class.

3. Research Paper (50 points/100 points)

This essay must include research, but details will be decided by the class.

4. Mini Persuasive Argument (50 points)

This essay must be persuasive, but details will be decided by the class.

5. Final Portfolio (150 points)

All written assignments must be typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-point font.

All assignments must be submitted through D2L

Dropbox on the due date to receive full credit.

Total Semester Points

750 points

Semester Calendar
(subject to change)

Date	Topic	Assignment Due
Thursday, January 12	Introductions, setting the stage, syllabus overview	
Tuesday, January 17		Read Mohr's "The English Lesson" and Tan's "Mother Tongue" (handouts)
Thursday, January 19	Discussion of course goals and processes	Assignment 1 Due
Tuesday, January 24	Group Presentation 1:	
Thursday, January 26	Group Presentation 2:	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, January 31		
Thursday, February 02	Group Presentation 3:	

Tuesday, February 07	Group Presentation 4:	
Thursday, February 09		<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, February 14		Writing Assignment 2 Rough Draft Due
Thursday, February 16		
Tuesday, February 21		
Thursday, February 23	Library Period	Research Topic Worksheet Due <i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, February 28	Individual Conferences Session I, First Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Thursday, March 01	Individual Conferences Session I, Second Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Tuesday, March 06	No class. Midterm break.	
Thursday, March 08	No class. Midterm break.	
Tuesday, March 13	Group Presentation 5:	Writing Assignment 2 Final Draft Due
Thursday, March 15	Group Presentation 6:	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, March 20		Research Rough Draft Due
Thursday, March 22		
Tuesday, March 27		
Thursday, March 29	Group Presentation 7:	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, April 03	Group Presentation 8:	
Thursday, April 05	No class. Spring break.	
Tuesday, April 10	Group Presentation 9:	
Thursday, April 12	Group Presentation 10:	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday,		

April 17		
Thursday, April 19		Mini Persuasive Argument Due
Tuesday, April 24		
Thursday, April 26	Individual Conferences Session II, First Half	Research Final Draft Due Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials <i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, May 01	Individual Conferences Session II, Second Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Thursday, May 03	Final presentations	
Finals Period: TBD	Final Portfolio Due	Final Grades Posted by May 14

The majority of our course calendar will be designed by the class to meet **the needs that you see** in terms of your own writing competency. We will spend time in class discussing issues and topics to cover, as well as the details of writing assignments 2, 3, and 4.

However, some things are set in stone:

1. **Educational Personal Narrative assignment.** These details are outline later in the syllabus.
2. **Writing Concept Group Presentations.** These will happen according to the dates above; however, what types of concepts are discussed and covered will be up to the class.
3. **Research, Persuasion, and Final Portfolio.** These rough guidelines are set in stone, but the details, including topics and content, will be decided by the class.
4. **Supplemental Readings.** When appropriate to class discussion and assignments, selections from the supplemental reading packet will be assigned.
5. **Individual Conferences.** We will have two rounds of individual conferences this semester.
6. **Critical Incident Questionnaires.** These will be due roughly every two weeks and are taken on D2L. The CIQs give you a chance to let me know how to adapt and conduct the class.

Therefore, this course calendar **will change a few times this semester** as we continue to reflect, observe, and adjust based on our overall goals for the course. All changes will be documented by the instructor and made available to the class.

Academic Policies

Attendance Policy:

You are permitted three (3) skips the entire semester for any/all reasons. These skips will not negatively impact your grade. Use them wisely; we all get sick, or have dependents that get sick. A fourth (4th) skip will cause your final grade to be reduced by an entire letter grade (B to a C, C to a D, etc.). If you skip more than four (4) classes, I reserve the right to immediately withdraw you, or give you a failing grade for the semester. See Withdrawal policy below.

If you do miss a class for whatever reason, do not email me asking me what you missed and what is due the next class. It is your responsibility to contact a classmate, or to come and see me during my office hours to catch up. No exceptions.

It is necessary that you come to class on time each period and stay for the entire period. If you have a recurring situation that does not allow you to be on time or stay for the entire class each period, I would recommend dropping this course and signing up for a similar section at a different time. If this cannot be done, please see me individually to work out a plan.

When your schedule requires you to travel to another campus building for class, please park in the CSS parking lot located directly across from the Goodling building on Pennsylvania Avenue, and walk from building to building. Please do not drive from class to class.

Participation, Preparation, Professionalism:

In addition to attendance, you are expected to come to class prepared for discussions and workshops. This includes coming to class with prepared written responses to the readings and/or response questions, sharing your responses during class discussion, and commenting on the responses of others. You will also be expected to fully participate in all writing workshops through the sharing of your writing and offering detailed constructive oral and written feedback on the writings of your peers. Class time is reserved for working on assignments related to this course. **Please turn off all cell phones during class. The use of laptops/tablets/smartphones *may* be permitted during the semester at the discretion of the instructor.** Other professional considerations include meeting deadlines, adequate preparation, class participation, and punctuality.

The last criterion under this heading involves classroom dialogue and discussion. Please remember that our class is a community in which we all take turns speaking and listening with courtesy and respect. There will be many opportunities for face-to-face debate over issues about which we feel very strongly and may disagree. Dissent is good for challenging and revising perspectives, but should be expressed in such a way as not to quash the ideas of others. As you contribute to class discussions, please remember that

you have an audience comprised of a diverse demographic community with its own standards of what is acceptable language and speech in a university classroom context. I expect that we will learn from one another and have a lively classroom environment that is free from personal insult or intimidation.

Make Up Policy:

Generally, assignments **cannot be turned in late**, with the exception of those listed below in the assignment sheets. **If you do not turn in the assignment when it is due, I will not take it late and you will not receive points for the assignment.** Please plan ahead to be able to complete all assignments on the day they are due and to avoid computer problems, printing problems, and health problems.

If you are sick the day an essay assignment is due, please let me know of your illness (phone, email, in person) and arrange for your essay to get to me in hard copy before the end of that day. **I will not accept assignments sent to me over email.**

If you are sick the day of an individual conference, please notify me and we will arrange a make-up conference. These points you can make up. **However, if I do not hear from you concerning an illness and you miss a conferencing period, you cannot make up the points.**

Withdrawal:

A student may drop a course at any time during the regularly scheduled classes up to the school's official last day to drop a class by completing a Drop/Add Withdrawal form. After the refund period ends, the instructor's signature is required and the student may receive a W or F grade depending upon the instructor's assessment of the student's performance. No credit is granted with a W grade. The last class date prior to exam week is the deadline for dropping a class. If you need to drop the class for personal reasons, let me know and we can fill out a drop/add form. If you just stop coming to class and do not communicate your plans with me after the refund period, I reserve the right to fail you for the course.

Academic Honesty Policy:

We will spend class periods discussing plagiarism and how to avoid it. All of the below applies to you and should be avoided:

- A. Cheating – giving or receiving answers on assigned material, using materials, or aids forbidden by the instructor... unauthorized possession of examination
- B. Plagiarism – offering someone else's work, words, or ideas as one's own or using material from another source without acknowledgement.
- C. Interference – interfering without permission with the work of another student, either by obtaining, changing, or destroying the work of another student

- D. Buying or selling of term papers, homework, examinations, laboratory assignments, computer programs, etc.
- E. Falsifying of one's own or another's records
- F. Knowingly assisting someone who engages in A – E above.

If you plagiarize an essay assignment, you will be given a zero on the essay and you must meet with me to discuss the situation. If you are guilty of multiple offenses or deny blatant signs of plagiarism, I reserve the right to fail you in the course, ask you to leave the course permanently, or any of the above.

Incomplete Grade Policy:

A grade of Incomplete may be assigned when a student is not able to complete the course requirements due to extenuating circumstances. The Incomplete grade will be assigned only after a conference with the instructor and after a serious need is determined. The "I" becomes an "F" if the work is not completed before 8 weeks into the following semester.

Equal Employment/Educational Opportunity & Pennsylvania Fair Educational Opportunities Act

EEOC POLICY 005: It is the policy of Harrisburg Area Community College, in full accordance with the law, not to discriminate in employment, student admissions, and student services on the basis of race, color, religion, age, political affiliation or belief, gender, national origin, ancestry, disability, place of birth, General Education Development Certification (GED), marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, veteran status, genetic history/information, or any legally protected classification. HACC recognizes its responsibility to promote the principles of equal opportunity for employment, student admissions, and student services taking active steps to recruit minorities and women.

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Act ("PHRAct") prohibits discrimination against prospective and current students because of race, color, sex, religious creed, ancestry, national origin, handicap or disability, record of a handicap or disability, perceived handicap or disability, relationship or association with an individual with a handicap or disability, use of a guide or support animal, and/or handling or training of support or guide animals.

The Pennsylvania Fair Educational Opportunities Act ("PFEOAct") prohibits discrimination against prospective and current students because of race, religion, color, ancestry, national origin, sex, handicap or disability, record of a handicap or disability, perceived handicap of disability, and a relationship or association with an individual with a handicap or disability.

Information about these laws may be obtained by visiting the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission website at www.phre.state.pa.us. If an accommodation is needed, please contact Lori Shoemaker at 718-0328 (ext 3576).

 Community College Campus Information

Students with Disabilities:

The Americans with Disabilities Act exists, in part, to make sure that people with disabilities are not unfairly discriminated against in the pursuit of their education. In order to receive reasonable accommodations in class, students must provide the college proper documentation attesting to the presence of a disability. If you have questions about how to obtain the proper documentation for any special accommodations, please contact  (ext 3576.)

Academic Success/Support Services

The  Campus's Learning Center provides tutoring and academic skills development at no cost to full and part time HACC students. Located down the hall from the Welcome Center, the Learning Center is staffed with trained peer and professional tutors who know how to help you succeed. Tutoring for a variety of courses is offered Monday through Saturday mornings, afternoons, and evenings .on a walk-in basis. An updated tutoring schedule can be found on the bulletin board outside the Learning Center and on the York Campus web page. Weekend hours may be available.

The Testing Center provides academic testing for students who need to make up an exam missed during class and for Distance Education testing, including Internet, video, and compressed video courses. Test appointments are required, and students can make an appointment by stopping by the Testing Center (YORK 103), emailing (YorkTestCenter@hacc.edu), or calling 718-0328 ext. 3514.

Medical Emergencies

Should a medical emergency occur as a result of an accident or illness, contact the Safety and Security Department immediately and call 911 if it is a severe emergency. The Safety and Security Department will respond immediately. Officers are trained in first aid, CPR and AED. The Safety and Security Department will coordinate the arrival of outside medical assistance.

Contacting Security

NON-EMERGENCY  X 3568 (On or off campus)

EMERGENCY:  **direct to officer's radio.**

Delayed Opening Schedule

The announcement that  is on a "Delayed Opening" schedule will be made by 6:00 a.m. The delayed opening announcement will be communicated by means of

-  Home Page [www..edu]
- TV: WHP, WHTM, WGAL, FOX, WLYH
- FM RADIO STATIONS: WTPA 93.5, WRBT 94.9, WLAN 96.9, WRVV 97.3, WYCR 98.5, WHKS 99.3, WQIC 100.1, WROZ 101.3, WARM 103.3, WNNK 104.1, WRKZ 106.7, WGTY 107.7, HOT 92

- AM RADIO STATIONS: WKBO 1230, WLBR 1270, WGET 1320, WLAN 1390, WTCY 1400

In the event of a delayed opening, the following schedule should be followed. FOR EXAMPLE: If your class is regularly scheduled to meet at 8:00 AM, your class will *start at 10:00 AM and run until 10:50 AM*.

M/W & T/R		Friday	
Saturday			
Usual	Delayed	Usual	Delayed
8:00 AM	10:00 to 10:50 AM	8:00 AM	10:40 to 12:30 PM
9:30 AM	11:00 to 11:50 AM	11:00 AM	12:40 to 2:30 PM
11:00 AM	12:00 to 12:50 PM		
12:30 PM	1:00 to 1:50 PM		
2:00 PM	Resume Normal Schedule		

If you have questions on when your class should meet in the event of a delayed opening, please consult your instructor.

Writing Concept Presentations

Dates and groups will be assigned

You will be assigned groups early in the semester for this project. Your task is to present a writing concept with your group twice during the semester (two different writing concepts). You have freedom to be creative with these presentations (games, videos, handouts, etc.) but each presentation **must** include the following three parts (clearly presented and understood):

1. **Summary:** Provide a general overview, or summary, of the writing concept using the textbook and/or other sources (including online). Your goal in this section is to help the class understand and remember the concept. You may want to give handouts, worksheets, presentations, etc., in this section.
2. **Action:** In order to help the class apply the concept to their writing, this section requires you to lead the class in a brief activity. You may conduct this activity any way you wish (be creative!). You may think of ideas based on how you best remember a concept.
3. **Critique:** This is your chance to look at the writing concept as it applies to your daily life. For example, how can comparing and contrasting be used in your life? What are some ways unfair comparisons have been made to hurt certain groups of people? This section is designed to give you an opportunity to discuss frustrations with the “right way to write.”

These presentations will be assessed on the following:

1. Clear summary, action, and critique of grammar concept
2. Clarity of presentation and activity with class
3. Time (10-15 minutes)
4. Your grade will be an average of my assessment as well as your own assessment of your group’s presentation

**Writing Assignment 1:
Personal Educational Narrative**

**Due Thursday, January 19
50 points**

We all have a story to tell. Some of the most powerful stories we can tell are related to our life journey. This assignment is designed to give you space to tell your own personal story (narrative) in relation to your experiences with writing, being placed into this course, and education in general.

After reading Nicholasa Mohr's "The English Lesson" and Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue," write your own narrative of education and writing. Make sure to highlight any **existing tensions that you feel are present between writing and language you use on a daily basis and writing and language you feel is required of you in the classroom.**

Consider any/all of the following questions before and while you write this narrative:

- What has been your experience with education so far? Think of your own family history, where you went to high school. What are some of the positive influences? Negative?
- What goals do you have for your own educational journey?
- What is your first memory of education/writing and how did you feel about it?
- What are some difficult memories that may have shaped your feelings towards education/writing?
- What goals do you have for your time here at HACC and how do you plan on attaining those goals?
- What are some of the best and worst parts of education, school, reading, writing, and learning for me?

**Writing Assignment 2:
To be decided**

Rough Draft Due: Tuesday, February 14

Final Draft Due: Tuesday, March 13

50 points

100 points

The rough draft will not be accepted late.

The final draft may be turned in late through Tuesday, March 20 (20% grade reduction) but cannot be rewritten.

Exact details, based on our class discussions, will be given to the class in advance of the rough draft due date

**Writing Assignment 3:
Research Paper**

Rough Draft Due: Tuesday, March 20

Final Draft Due: Thursday, April 26

50 points

100 points

The rough draft will not be accepted late.

The final draft will not be accepted late and cannot be rewritten.

Exact details, based on our class discussions, will be given to the class in advance of the rough draft due date

The ability to not only locate and document sources but to also begin to interpret and apply them to a specific topic of interest is a vital skill for all students. The class will agree upon the specific content.

You are to find a total of four (4) legitimate sources (maximum of 2 websites) that are related to your area of interest. The purpose is to allow you to consult sources and begin to understand what **they** say about your area of interest. You should focus primarily on what the sources say about your area of interest. You may include your own opinions in the conclusion.

**Writing Assignment 4:
Mini Persuasive Argument**

**Due: Thursday, April 19
50 points**

This assignment will not be accepted late and cannot be rewritten.

Exact details, based on our class discussions, will be given to the class in advance of the rough draft due date

The ability to make sound, persuasive arguments is a necessary skill beyond English 051 and is an attempt to convince someone to accept an idea, policy, or take some action. This assignment, therefore, asks you to develop an argument on an issue that will be agreed upon by the class. Your essay should clearly exhibit the following:

- Take a Position on an Arguable Topic
- Develop Reasons
- Support with Evidence
- Acknowledge Opposition

**Writing Assignment 5:
Final Portfolio**

**Due Date: Finals week (TBD)
150 points**

This assignment will not be accepted late and cannot be rewritten. You will not be given a passing grade if you do not turn in a final portfolio during the final period.

The final portfolio is a culmination of an entire semester's worth of work. It will include some new, rewritten, and revised pieces of writing.

You will turn in the final portfolio on our final exam date (to be determined later) and should include a cover page (we will discuss this in class). The portfolio does not need to be in a binder or a folder; please staple all the contents together.

Your final portfolio must include:

1. A revised personal educational narrative (writing assignment 1), with a discussion of how you revised it. Please make sure you discuss your current perceptions of yourself as a writer and the writing process in general. **2.5 pages total.**
2. Three (3) rewritten journals from the semester, your choice. **1.5 pages each.**
3. Concluding personal narrative: A letter to me addressing how your opinions and experiences changed/remained the same throughout this semester, what you have learned about yourself as a writer, etc. Also discuss any advice you now have for a student about to enter English 051. **2 pages.**
4. A creative reflection on the assignments, group work, planning, and learning that has taken place over the semester. This creative reflection can take many forms (artwork, poetry, song, film, prose) and will be presented to the class on the final day of classes. **Please include a 1.5 page discussion of the creative work on your final portfolio.**

This assignment will be assessed on the following criteria:

1. Format: appropriate length for each piece, typed, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, with MLA cover page
2. Mechanics

APPENDIX G

WRITING ASSIGNMENT 2-4 REQUIREMENTS

Writing Assignment 2

Rough Draft Due: Tuesday, February 14 (50 points)

Final Draft Due: Tuesday, March 13 (100 points)

Discuss the similarities and differences between academic English (the English being taught here at HACC, represented in classes, textbooks, etc.) and the English you use on a daily basis.

Using points of comparison, write an essay that discusses the similarities and differences between the two Englishes from various perspectives. *For example*, discuss how each English approaches:

- Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc)
- Purpose (what are the purposes of each English)
- Audience (who is reading/hearing each English and how does that change and/or not change it)
- Confidence (which one are you more confident in and why)

Conclude your essay with a discussion of the benefits of each, when each can be/is used, and whether or not it is possible to use both. Discuss how each one shapes who you are, what you think about writing and education, and what each says about your writing skills. Within your essay, **you must** reference the themes represented in the readings so far this semester:

- The English Lesson
- Mother Tongue
- His Grace
- The House on Mango Street
- Barbie-Q

This assignment will be assessed on the following criteria:

1. Thesis statement/funnel
2. Discussion of each English in detail
3. Appropriate comparison of the issues
4. Format: 2 pages (rough draft), 3 pages (final draft), typed, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font
5. Mechanics (concepts we've covered so far in class)
6. Use of readings as examples and support
7. Workshopping guide with partner

Writing Assignment 3: Research Project

Rough Draft Due: Tuesday, March 20 (50 points)

Final Draft Due: Thursday, April 26 (100 points)

The rough draft and the final draft will not be accepted late.

The ability to not only locate and document sources but to also begin to interpret and apply them to a specific topic of interest is a vital skill for all students.

You are to find a total of four (4) legitimate sources (maximum of 2 websites) that are related to your area of interest. The purpose is to allow you to consult sources and begin to understand what **they** say about your area of interest. You should focus primarily on what the sources say about your area of interest. You may include your own opinions in the conclusion.

You must have a **research question** that is guiding your writing. All of your research should focus on your answering your research question. How do the sources answer your research question?

Example Topic: Sexism in the media

Example Research Question: How does popular culture portray women as sexual objects and what are the potential negative outcomes?

Within this example research area, you should focus your research on the two parts of your question: how women are portrayed as sexual objects, and what some of the negative outcomes can be. Your sources should **help you answer the question**.

On a separate sheet of paper, at the end of the research essay, please answer the following questions in one page total:

1. Why did you pick this specific topic? What about it interested you? How do you relate the topic to your everyday life?
- 2.
3. How has the research process impacted your understanding of the topic as well as your understanding of writing?

This assignment will be assessed on the following criteria:

1. Thesis statement/funnel, including research topic and question
2. Final page discussion of process (not part of page total)
3. MLA in-text citation as well as an MLA works cited page (check Hacker for hints)
4. Format: 3 pages (rough draft), 4 pages (final draft), typed, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font
5. Mechanics (concepts we've covered so far in class)

**Writing Assignment 4:
Mini Persuasive Argument**

**Due: Thursday, April 19
50 points**

This assignment will not be accepted late and cannot be rewritten.

The ability to make sound, persuasive arguments is a necessary skill beyond English 051 and is an attempt to convince someone to accept an idea, policy, or take some action. This assignment, therefore, asks you to develop an argument on an issue that will be approved. Your essay should clearly exhibit the following:

- Take a Position on an Arguable Topic
- Develop Reasons
- Support with Evidence
- Acknowledge Opposition

This essay should be written on a current topic that you care about. Think about some issues that are currently taking place in your communities (school, work, church, city, state, country). We will discuss topics that are appropriate to take a position on.

Lastly, this assignment will be written as a letter to the editor of a local newspaper. We will discuss how to do this in class. You will receive extra credit if you submit it to a local newspaper's opinion page.

This assignment will be assessed on the following criteria:

1. Thesis statement/funnel
2. Clear position on a topic
3. At least two reasons with evidence
4. Acknowledgement of the opposition
5. Format: 2 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font
6. Mechanics (what we've covered so far)

APPENDIX H

JANUARY 24 CALENDAR UPDATE

Date	Topic	Assignment Due
Thursday, January 12	Introductions, setting the stage, syllabus overview	
Tuesday, January 17		Read Mohr's "The English Lesson" and Tan's "Mother Tongue" (handouts)
Thursday, January 19	Discussion of course goals and processes	Assignment 1 Due
Tuesday, January 24	Course planning and reading review	Re-read Mohr's "The English Lesson" and Tan's "Mother Tongue" (handouts)
Thursday, January 26	Group Presentation 1: Generating ideas and organization	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i> Chp 1 and 2
Tuesday, January 31	Group Presentation 2: Introductions and conclusions	Chp 12 Read Cisneros "House on Mango Street"
Thursday, February 02	Group Presentation 3: Thesis statements	Chp 12
Tuesday, February 07	Group Presentation 4: Crafting paragraphs	Chp 3
Thursday, February 09	Assignment 2 discussion and planning	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i> Read Naimy "His Grace"
Tuesday, February 14	Writing Workshop	Writing Assignment 2 Rough Draft Due
Thursday, February 16	Group Presentation 5: Grammar, punctuation, word choice	Chp 24, 26, 27 Read Cisneros "Barbie-Q"
Tuesday, February 21	Academic v. home discourses	Re-read Cisneros "Barbie-Q"
Thursday, February 23	Library Period	Research Topic Worksheet Due <i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, February 28	Individual Conferences Session I, First Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials

Thursday, March 01	Individual Conferences Session I, Second Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Tuesday, March 06	No class. Midterm break.	
Thursday, March 08	No class. Midterm break.	
Tuesday, March 13	Group Presentation 6: Citing sources in text	Writing Assignment 2 Final Draft Due Chp 18
Thursday, March 15	Group Presentation 7: Works Cited page	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i> Hacker 415-462
Tuesday, March 20	Writing Workshop	Research Rough Draft Due
Thursday, March 22		
Tuesday, March 27		
Thursday, March 29	Group Presentation 8:	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, April 03		
Thursday, April 05	No class. Spring break.	
Tuesday, April 10	Group Presentation 9:	
Thursday, April 12	Group Presentation 10:	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, April 17		
Thursday, April 19		Mini Persuasive Argument Due
Tuesday, April 24		
Thursday, April 26	Individual Conferences Session II, First Half	Research Final Draft Due Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials <i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>

Tuesday, May 01	Individual Conferences Session II, Second Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Thursday, May 03	Final presentations	
Finals Period: TBD	Final Portfolio Due	Final Grades Posted by May 14

APPENDIX I

FEBRUARY 1 CALENDAR UPDATE

Date	Topic	Assignment Due
Thursday, January 12	Introductions, setting the stage, syllabus overview	
Tuesday, January 17		Read Mohr's "The English Lesson" and Tan's "Mother Tongue" (handouts)
Thursday, January 19	Discussion of course goals and processes	Assignment 1 Due
Tuesday, January 24	Course planning and reading review	Re-read Mohr's "The English Lesson" and Tan's "Mother Tongue" (handouts)
Thursday, January 26	Group Presentation 1: Generating ideas and organization	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i> Chp 1 and 2
Tuesday, January 31	Group Presentation 2: Introductions and conclusions Discuss results for Assignment 2	Chp 12
Thursday, February 02	Group Presentation 3: Thesis statements	Chp 12 Read Cisneros "House on Mango Street"
Tuesday, February 07	Similarities and Differences	Chp 11
Thursday, February 09	Group Presentation 4: Crafting paragraphs	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i> Chp 3 Read Naimy "His Grace"
Tuesday, February 14	Writing Workshop	Writing Assignment 2 Rough Draft Due
Thursday, February 16	Group Presentation 5: Grammar, punctuation, word choice	Chp 24, 26, 27 Read Cisneros "Barbie-Q"
Tuesday, February 21	Academic v. home discourses	Re-read Cisneros "Barbie-Q"
Thursday, February 23	Library Period	Research Topic Worksheet Due <i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>

Tuesday, February 28	Individual Conferences Session I, First Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Thursday, March 01	Individual Conferences Session I, Second Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Tuesday, March 06	No class. Midterm break.	
Thursday, March 08	No class. Midterm break.	
Tuesday, March 13	Group Presentation 6: Citing sources in text	Writing Assignment 2 Final Draft Due Chp 18
Thursday, March 15	Group Presentation 7: Works Cited page	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i> Hacker 415-462
Tuesday, March 20	Writing Workshop	Research Rough Draft Due
Thursday, March 22		
Tuesday, March 27		
Thursday, March 29	Group Presentation 8:	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, April 03		
Thursday, April 05	No class. Spring break.	
Tuesday, April 10	Group Presentation 9:	
Thursday, April 12	Group Presentation 10:	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, April 17		
Thursday, April 19		Mini Persuasive Argument Due
Tuesday, April 24		
Thursday, April 26	Individual Conferences Session II, First Half	Research Final Draft Due Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials

		<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, May 01	Individual Conferences Session II, Second Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Thursday, May 03	Final presentations	
Finals Period: TBD	Final Portfolio Due	Final Grades Posted by May 14

APPENDIX J

FEBRUARY 21 CALENDAR UPDATE

Date	Topic	Assignment Due
Thursday, January 12	Introductions, setting the stage, syllabus overview	
Tuesday, January 17		Read Mohr's "The English Lesson" and Tan's "Mother Tongue" (handouts)
Thursday, January 19	Discussion of course goals and processes	Assignment 1 Due
Tuesday, January 24	Course planning and reading review	Re-read Mohr's "The English Lesson" and Tan's "Mother Tongue" (handouts)
Thursday, January 26	Group Presentation 1: Generating ideas and organization	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i> Chp 1 and 2
Tuesday, January 31	Group Presentation 2: Introductions and conclusions Discuss results for Assignment 2	Chp 12
Thursday, February 02	Group Presentation 3: Thesis statements	Chp 12 Read Cisneros "House on Mango Street"
Tuesday, February 07	Similarities and Differences	Chp 11
Thursday, February 09	Group Presentation 4: Crafting paragraphs	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i> Chp 3 Read Naimy "His Grace"
Tuesday, February 14	Writing Workshop	Writing Assignment 2 Rough Draft Due
Thursday, February 16	Group Presentation 5: Grammar, punctuation, word choice	Chp 24, 26, 27 Read Cisneros "Barbie-Q"
Tuesday, February 21	Academic v. home discourses Discuss compare/contrast Discuss research topics/questions	Re-read Cisneros "Barbie-Q"
Thursday, February 23	Library Period	Research Topic Worksheet Due <i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>

Tuesday, February 28	Individual Conferences Session I, First Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Thursday, March 01	Individual Conferences Session I, Second Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Tuesday, March 06	No class. Midterm break.	
Thursday, March 08	No class. Midterm break.	
Tuesday, March 13	Group Presentation 6: Citing sources in text	Writing Assignment 2 Final Draft Due Chp 18
Thursday, March 15	Group Presentation 7: Works Cited page	<i>CIQ due at end of period</i> <i>Complete via D2L</i> Hacker 415-462
Tuesday, March 20	Writing Workshop	Research Rough Draft Due
Thursday, March 22		
Tuesday, March 27		
Thursday, March 29	Group Presentation 8: Cause and effect (Grp C)	<i>CIQ due at end of period</i> <i>Complete via D2L</i> Read Chapter 9. Do 9.1-9.4 Read Achebe's "Dead Men's Path"
Tuesday, April 03		
Thursday, April 05	No class. Spring break.	
Tuesday, April 10	Group Presentation 9: Persuasive writing (Grp D)	Read Chapter 16 Do 16.1, 16.2 Read Angelou "Graduation"
Thursday, April 12	Group Presentation 10:	<i>CIQ due at end of period</i> <i>Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, April 17	Research work day	Bring material to work on research assignment
Thursday, April 19	Persuasive Presentations	Mini Persuasive Argument Due
Tuesday,	Creating a portfolio	Bring portfolio ideas and

April 24		materials
Thursday, April 26	Individual Conferences Session II, First Half	Research Final Draft Due Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials <i>CIQ due at end of period</i> <i>Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, May 01	Individual Conferences Session II, Second Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Thursday, May 03	Final presentations	Final Portfolios Due Final Grades Posted by May 4
Finals Week May 5-11	Pick up portfolios Interviews for consented participants (TBD)	

APPENDIX K

FEBRUARY 28 CALENDAR UPDATE

Date	Topic	Assignment Due
Thursday, January 12	Introductions, setting the stage, syllabus overview	
Tuesday, January 17		Read Mohr's "The English Lesson" and Tan's "Mother Tongue" (handouts)
Thursday, January 19	Discussion of course goals and processes	Assignment 1 Due
Tuesday, January 24	Course planning and reading review	Re-read Mohr's "The English Lesson" and Tan's "Mother Tongue" (handouts)
Thursday, January 26	Group Presentation 1: Generating ideas and organization	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i> Chp 1 and 2
Tuesday, January 31	Group Presentation 2: Introductions and conclusions Discuss results for Assignment 2	Chp 12
Thursday, February 02	Group Presentation 3: Thesis statements	Chp 12 Read Cisneros "House on Mango Street"
Tuesday, February 07	Similarities and Differences	Chp 11
Thursday, February 09	Group Presentation 4: Crafting paragraphs	<i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i> Chp 3 Read Naimy "His Grace"
Tuesday, February 14	Writing Workshop	Writing Assignment 2 Rough Draft Due
Thursday, February 16	Group Presentation 5: Grammar, punctuation, word choice	Chp 24, 26, 27 Read Cisneros "Barbie-Q"
Tuesday, February 21	Academic v. home discourses Discuss compare/contrast Discuss research topics/questions	Re-read Cisneros "Barbie-Q"
Thursday, February 23	Library Period	Research Topic Worksheet Due <i>CIQ due at end of period Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, February 28	Individual Conferences Session I, First Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting

		materials
Thursday, March 01	Individual Conferences Session I, Second Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Tuesday, March 06	No class. Midterm break.	
Thursday, March 08	No class. Midterm break.	
Tuesday, March 13	Group Presentation 6: Citing sources in text	Writing Assignment 2 Final Draft Due Chp 18
Thursday, March 15	Group Presentation 7: Works Cited page	<i>CIQ due at end of period</i> <i>Complete via D2L</i> Hacker 415-462
Tuesday, March 20	Writing Workshop	Research Rough Draft Due
Thursday, March 22	Group Presentation 8: Cause and effect (Grp C)	Read Chapter 9. Do 9.1-9.4 Read Achebe's "Dead Men's Path"
Tuesday, March 27	Group Presentation 9: Persuasive writing (Grp D)	Read Chapter 16 Do 16.1, 16.2 Read Angelou "Graduation"
Thursday, March 29	Identifying problems in popular culture Persuasive assignment discussion	<i>CIQ due at end of period</i> <i>Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, April 03	Group Presentation 10: Writing letters/newspaper opinions (Grp E)	
Thursday, April 05	No class. Spring break.	
Tuesday, April 10	Creation of new knowledge discussion	
Thursday, April 12	Research/Persuasion work day	Bring material to work on research assignment <i>CIQ due at end of period</i> <i>Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, April 17	Remaining issues with writing	
Thursday, April 19	Persuasive Presentations	Mini Persuasive Argument Due
Tuesday,	Creating a portfolio	Bring portfolio ideas and

April 24		materials
Thursday, April 26	Individual Conferences Session II, First Half	Research Final Draft Due Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials <i>CIQ due at end of period</i> <i>Complete via D2L</i>
Tuesday, May 01	Individual Conferences Session II, Second Half	Bring completed conference worksheet and supporting materials
Thursday, May 03	Final presentations	Final Portfolios Due Final Grades Posted by May 4
Finals Week May 5-11	Pick up portfolios Interviews for consented participants (TBD)	

APPENDIX L**APRIL 24 CALENDAR UPDATE**

Tues, April 24: Portfolio Discussion. Persuasive Discussion. **Turn Persuasion in to D2L.** Room 110

Thursday, April 26: “You Got to Move” film. **Research Final Due in to D2L.** Room 105

Tuesday, May 1: finish film and discussion. Room 105. **Fill out final survey on D2L.**

Thursday, May 3: Final portfolio presentations. **Turn final portfolios in to D2L.** Room 105

Final grades posted by Friday, May 4.

Finals Week: Interviews with some consented participants. To be determined. I will contact you for a time slot during finals week.

CURRICULUM VITAE**Alfred A. Z. Siha****Formal Education**

- 2012 D.Ed., The Pennsylvania State University, Adult Education
2006 M.A., The Pennsylvania State University, Humanities
2006 Writing Instruction Specialist Certification, The Pennsylvania State University
2004 B.A., Messiah College, English

Teaching Experience

- 2010 to present English Instructor, Harrisburg Area Community College
2008-2010 Adjunct Instructor of English, Harrisburg Area Community College
2008 Adjunct Instructor of English, Messiah College

Other Professional Experience

- 2008-2010 Assistant Director of Multicultural Student Recruitment, Messiah College
2006-2008 Coordinator of Multicultural Student Recruitment, Messiah College
2000-2006 Writing Tutor, Messiah College, The Pennsylvania State University, Freelance