

11-1-2005

Confronting Race in the Composition Classroom

Kay A. Mooy

University of Texas at El Paso, kmooy@utep.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/rhet_comp

Comments:

Presented at the 5th Biennial International *Feminism(s) & Rhetoric(s) Conference*.

Michigan Technological University, October 5-8, 2005.

Recommended Citation

Mooy, Kay A., "Confronting Race in the Composition Classroom" (2005). *Rhetoric and Composition PhD papers*. Paper 2.
http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/rhet_comp/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at DigitalCommons@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Rhetoric and Composition PhD papers by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

Confronting Race in the Composition Classroom

Kay A. Mooy

Teachers can confront the hegemony of whiteness with a variety of pedagogical styles including feminist pedagogy, writing with students, personal identification, self-grading, and technology integration. The students may also have some say in choosing assignments and projects. We can never do away with hegemony but we can confront it with “transformational pedagogy.”

I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group. Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”

What does all this mean for education? One implication has to do with subject matter, with curriculum. Students must be enabled, at whatever stages they find themselves to be, to encounter curriculum as possibility. Maxine Greene, *Landscapes of Learning*

The issues of race and ethnicity are present in all that we do and say especially in an academic setting and in our individual classrooms as students and teachers. Research into the borderland areas of whiteness theory (Otherness, overt racism, etc.) is important to all scholars when we attempt to communicate to a broad spectrum of students and instructors. We must know what bias or position we inhabit in order to reach all of our students, not just the ones that represent the dominant stance. If we are missing a segment of our classroom population because of some overriding racial or ethnic stance, we can become ineffectual and dangerous to those we teach.

The present situation in our classrooms is that quite often, the teacher is white and the students are people of color. Often I am the only “white” person in my classroom. When colleges first started, the typical classroom consisted of well-to-do, well-prepared white males only. The demographics have changed dramatically. Most of my students are on financial aid. Many are the first generation college students in their families. Most of them work full or part-time while attending college. With open admissions at many institutions, the students may not be well prepared for the study ahead. I do not look like my students. I do not speak as my

students speak. We do not necessarily have a shared heritage or cultural system. The typical college class today is diverse and that makes for shifting power differentials inside the classroom. Instead of the teacher being white in a room of students of color, what if the instructor were a person of color but the majority of the class white? What power issues of the dominant or hegemonic group would enter into the classroom dynamics? In fact, the power in the classroom always swings to prefer the teacher. Visible whiteness adds another dimension to my perceived power as a teacher.

The present situation of whiteness is that while everyone may be talking and writing about it, few are able to overcome its hegemonic place in our classrooms and pedagogy. The dictionary defines hegemony as “The predominant influence, as of a state, region, or group, over another or others” (dictionary.com). Hegemony thus can be the power or influence of race and ethnicity issues in our classrooms in today’s college classroom.

No education is politically neutral in that everyone and everything has inherent biases. Once we accept that bias does exist it will be easier to address in teacher’s meetings. At least, we can discuss politically charged topics to reach a base understanding of hegemonic whiteness. Part of the discussion at least would include decentering Western civilization. It is harder to do than to say. Everyone involved in transformational pedagogy could agree to a sense of optimism about our ability to change according to hooks (*Teaching to Transgress* 38). As teachers, we can share concrete strategies for changing the way we teach to include a more inclusive stance. When we can identify such changes in a group of peers, then we may actually be ready to input some of those changes into a classroom or at least a mixed conference that included students. hooks says that one of the worries is that there will be a “tokenism” attempt to lump all diverse topics at the end of a course which is not truly transformational but is the first change most are

willing to make in their pedagogy and in their stance. The examination of the canon thus becomes the examination of hegemonic differences and stance.

Whiteness Theory

Whiteness seems to claim a neutral stance that does not stand up to examination. There is really no perceived or unperceived white neutrality. The presence of whiteness creates an inevitable awkwardness of distance that people both claim and attempt to avoid. If whiteness is your vantage point on the world, it may well seem neutral and comfortable to you, but it is not. Ask anyone of color if whiteness is neutral. There is a power of race and privilege the runs deep in our society in the US. Whiteness critique may be impossible because one forgets or never knows the white privilege that exists at the starting point of most examinations. It will be, at least, difficult and circuitous following whiteness through cultural studies, transformation pedagogy, and a variety of other venues.

Scholars such as David Roediger, Ruth Frankenberg, Theodore Allen, bell hooks, Noel Ignatiev, Toni Morrison, Howard Winant, Alexander Saxton, and Fred Pfeil address the historical and social construction of “Whiteness” across a wide spectrum of spheres, identities, and institutions, and redefine the necessity to make Whiteness central to the broader arena of racial politics. Community outreach programs and curriculum redesign as discussed in many of articles (Cushman, North, Lu, Heath, and Bloom) would be ideal for broaching this topic—in that way the participants would all have a chance to grapple with the implications of the hegemonic whiteness of our classrooms and institutions of higher learning in general.

According to Kendall Clark, “One method of oppression is the implicit denial of oppression by making its infrastructure as invisible as possible” (3). The denial of White privilege serves the interests of those who enjoy it. In our classrooms, there exists a power order

or hegemony. The invisible hegemonic theory of whiteness in our society and especially in our classrooms underpins all we do in the field of composition as teachers, students, and writers. How does this theory figure into classroom pedagogy that we experience as students and use as instructors? There are systemic hidden notions of “whiteness” that underlie rhetorical and interpretive activities in this country. Researching how whiteness hegemony is constructed and works, as a power structure in a culture that actually has a majority population different from the hegemonic whiteness in our diverse communities, is an important part of learning how our classrooms function.

Race and racism are two of the most hotly debated issues of our times. Race is a principle of power, differentiation, and classification, which should now remain persistently, obstinately, in view, but it does not. Consensus seems to suggest that solutions to the problems of racism need to come from both sides of the issue and to that end, “white privilege” needs examination. Students in progressive classrooms do not need to be taught to think progressively, they come to it in their studies and question the hegemonic whiteness that is invisible but always present.

Blindness to Whiteness

White privilege is a result of a society that is innately more accepting, understanding and forgiving of people with white skin and a white style of thinking. People say that race should not matter that we should, or do, have a “color blind society” (Jay 1). I say the same thing applies to the race situation in our classrooms, but does it really? Are we not indeed color blind when considering whiteness? We have created a blindness to whiteness, even been blinded by whiteness itself. Whiteness and race itself is a socially constructed reality that prevails even into

our classrooms. This issue of hegemonic whiteness is within all we read, write, and teach as rhetoric and composition students and teachers in our classrooms.

The traditions that surround whiteness are so deeply ingrained that we fail to recognize them in our daily agendas in our classrooms. White privilege is not taught but is rather a result of a hegemonic society that has been trained, as a whole to be more accepting, understanding and forgiving of people with white skin and thought patterns. That is why Peggy McIntosh, that I used to begin this paper, weighs in with the metaphor of a knapsack of materials that are included in whiteness that need to be unpacked and examined. People benefit in our classrooms and out from white privilege and soak up the benefits of whiteness. White privilege is not something one can dispose of and the list of ways in which white privilege plays out in our daily lives is huge. If you do not know you have it, or are only marginally aware but in denial, and you cannot give it away, what do you do with this commodity as a teacher and a student in the classroom? hooks says that “fierce critical interrogation is sometimes the only practice that can pierce the wall of denial consumers of images construct so as not to face that the real world of image-making is political—that politics of domination inform the way the vast majority of images we consume are constructed and marketed” (*Black Looks* 5). I want that fierce critical interrogation to lead me to a classroom that is more fair and dynamic and not color blind.

What are the actual racial dynamics in place in our classrooms due to the majority of our students being other than white? The idea of multicultural education seems to be a quagmire of murky ideas that need to be examined before we can build our classroom pedagogical foundation on such a premise. We will find ourselves forced to come to grips with a much more complex perception of so-called minorities in the United States. Horner tell us that instead of assimilation, “the non-traditional students should acquire a new tool—a common language—while retaining

rather than displacing their ‘home’ languages....This policy leaves intact the imperialism: the superpower status of a fossilized ‘common’ language” (qtd in Lu 201). Lu claims that comparing such words as public vs. private, standard vs. dialectal, and common vs. home reduces language into discrete and self-evident tools but also ranks them according to the interests of the status quo. Lu also says,

The “common” language is made dominant by the logic of simple arithmetic—the number of institutions requiring it and thus the number of people needing it. The simple arithmetic of it all covers up the foundation of linguistic imperialism, which is a logic of power, the power of the few to dictate how all perceive and work the world. (201)

How do we make multiculturalism work when there is no equity in large systemic terms that pervade our school systems and classrooms? We need to work toward a plurality of voices and allow students to use their “home” language when it is suitable in essays. How do we deal with the difference in our classrooms caused by the minority voice being the majority of students? Most educators do not have a set of diverse tools to relate to so much difference. The demographics argue against the hegemonic whiteness but we all know the whiteness stance is still overriding. However, we need to develop cultural codes in which to reach out to diverse student bodies. We have to learn those codes in order to be effectual teachers in such situations. Both the teacher and the student must learn the codes and in that act alone, there will be transformation in spite of the hegemonic whiteness that is in place. Often, professors and students will “have to learn to accept different ways of knowing, new epistemologies (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 41). Where and how do we develop those codes? We need to look to pioneers such as Paulo Freire and hooks for examples of liberating changes in pedagogy. These

two will take us down many paths that have only been partially explored. Nevertheless, we need to push forward to insinuate ourselves as the teachers of our diverse classrooms all the while aware of our own differences from our students.

Deconstructing the Hegemony

I am proposing an examination of the existing Whiteness theory that would uncover its invisibility to the best accounting I can do and to find pedagogical changes that can minimize the affects of hegemonic whiteness in our classrooms. This is a large order and one that I might find impossible but the works of Clark, Freire, and hooks, to name only a few, hold out some hope to me in searching for methodology to recognize and confront Whiteness wherever it exists.

Several recent scholars find a link between language, power, subjectivity, and knowledge (Min- Zhan Lu, Mike Hill, and Robert Jensen). My premise for this research is that the resources and opportunities in a society are unequally distributed among individuals according to group membership (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.). The enemy, if there is one, in this research project is dominance itself. Social institutions systematically reproduce inequalities that favor the dominant group and oppress others. The power of institutions, such as the one to which our classrooms belongs, is an issue discussed by many including James Porter, Patricia Sullivan, Stuart Blyth, Jeffrey Grabill and Libby Miles. However, they point out that institutions are not monoliths, but are human designs reinforced by their buildings, laws, traditions, and knowledge making functions to include the invisible hegemonic whiteness of our institutions.

The long-term goal of this project would be to improve classroom dynamics considering the current Whiteness theory in all its mutated forms. I also need to find pedagogical techniques to beard the lion of Whiteness in its comfortable den in order to make changes to remove some of the dominance in at least some classrooms and for some students who read this work.

Benjamin Franklin said, "...the Number of purely white People in the World is proportionally very small. All Africa is black or tawny. Asia chiefly tawny. America (exclusive of the new Comers) wholly so." This is an astute point made in 1751 by one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, if only Franklin had known that the "new Comers" would come to dominate North America. Despite this domination of an entire continent by the race, there is a lack of White racial identity in its entirety. In general, Whites have not had to define their identity based on race, because of the dominance of their race in the governance and economics of the United States. Shelby Steele stated, "Whites do not have to spend precious time fashioning an identity out of simply being white." It was not until recent history that researchers and psychologists began to examine the concept of a White racial identity. Out of these questions has whiteness theory developed. Whiteness theory is the presumption that a stance is taken on race and ethnicity within the hegemonic or ruling white community that thinks of itself as neutral. Neutral it is not.

Critical pedagogy with roots in the sociology of education applied a view of power to social relations in our classrooms. W.E.B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin, scholars from a wide range of disciplines put Whiteness on the table to be investigated, analyzed, punctured, and probed. According to Henry Giroux, a leading voice in critical pedagogy, says they rejected the assumption that an analysis of race means focusing primarily on people of color. Giroux says, "As Whiteness came under scrutiny by various social groups – such as Black and Latina feminists, radical multiculturalists, critical race theorists, and others – as an oppressive, invisible center against which all else is measured, many Whites began to identify with the new racism epitomized by right-wing conservatives" (286). I need to look at the hidden notions of whiteness that are the underpinning of rhetoric. Investigating this "whiteness" is

difficult and potentially very limiting because of its invisibility. Whiteness is a concept that becomes an unacknowledged standard or norm in our classrooms.

Competing Pedagogies

I want to look at the competing ideologies with their contradictions that Victor Villanueva talks about in “Rhetoric is Politics.” He talks of rhetoric as politics in the academic setting. He describes Antonio Gramsci’s idea of hegemony that allows academics to struggle against coercive ideologies as long as basic systems are not too seriously threatened. According to Gramsci, “reform tends to amount to...revolution-restoration” and does not result in true change (qtd in Villanueva 329). Those changes are truly movements without change, affirmative action quotas and more color in traditionally white positions while the basic inequities remain. I do not believe that epistemic rhetoric has been sufficiently problematized. It provides for competing ideologies but not for the contradictions of ideologies that are contained within the self. Research shows that hegemonic control is not maintained by force alone but also by consent of the subordinate class who see these interests as “natural” or a matter of “common sense.” That makes all sides of society complicit in hegemony.

“The theories of composition and the ideas of what writing is are changing” (Bleich 1). I approach the invisibility of this topic from a systematic evaluation and criticism of current whiteness theory—to further my own understanding of this theory and to expose the sometimes forgotten hegemony in place. Since it is not possible to remove the lens of whiteness, how do teachers, writers, rhetoricians and scholars, deal with, around, or through that hegemonic lens, especially in our classrooms? A beginning point to a systematic evaluation must begin with cultural studies, whose history can provide insight into the composition classroom and its accompanying pedagogy. How that pedagogy is affected by whiteness theory is of special

import. The following material provides a sample of the nature of current inquiry and methodology in cultural studies and illustrates what further investigation may find.

I know that inclusion of diverging voices in this examination is important. It is not just a simple matter of white, black, or brown but a combination of sources and materials so that each student can feel empowered. Clevis Headley, in “Delegitimizing the Normativity of Whiteness, says, “This move to establish ontological parity between whiteness and blackness mistakenly interrogates whiteness without focusing on the power and privilege intimately connected to white identity” (87). We as teachers recognize the hegemony of whiteness but may not internalize that to change our modus operandi in the classroom.

Clark, in her research, proposes that we use attunement, an ear tuned to the pitch of racism, modulated to register even the low, subtle tones of racial oppression through moral education and tutelage. She says that because of our socialization which is itself a product and reinforcement of White privilege this attunement must be earned by careful and attentive listening. I need to follow this pattern of attunement and see where it leads in my research. Is it possible to train our ears, head, and heart to recognize something that is so hidden? Where would one find such training?

Freire and hooks have done important work on critical pedagogy and the presence of tension within the arena of cultural studies. Their philosophies of teaching are deeply rooted in critical pedagogy. Since they are leaders in the field of transformational pedagogy, their scholarship to enhance the examination of hegemonic dominance in the classroom and how to make changes in the pedagogical stance of the teacher to incorporate the diverse classrooms we are facing in today’s society is essential to this study. Pedagogy is most often political and the role power plays in the classroom is important to look at in any study.

What are the trends in classrooms away from hegemonic whiteness in a society that supposedly privileges multiculturalism but does not truly follow through on that commitment? “The pedagogy of whiteness begins with recognizing ‘white privilege.’ At first this term surprises our students, for it names a reality that they have been taught not to see” (Jay 5). bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress* says,

The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained. To some extent, we all know that whenever we address in the classroom subject that students are passionate about there is always a possibility of confrontation, forceful expression of ideas, or even conflict. In much of my writing about pedagogy, particularly in classroom settings with great diversity, I have talked about the need to examine critically the way we as teachers conceptualize what the space for learning should be like. Many professors have conveyed to me their feeling that the classroom should be a “safe” place; that usually translates to mean that the professor lectures to a group of quiet students who respond only when they are called on. The experience of professors who educate for critical consciousness indicates that many students, especially students of color, may not feel at all “safe” in what appears to be a neutral setting. It is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or lack of student engagement. 39

If we analyze white privilege, it can help circumvent white resistance in which we move the discussion from personal to structural, from haziness to practical recognitions of how race works in our classrooms. The preferences of whiteness do not depend on what one feels or

thinks about race—the privilege simply just exists in our classroom as a controlling factor. Since we are not truly aware of the hegemony, what steps can a teacher or student take to bridge the distance in classrooms?

Pedagogy Methodologies

How does whiteness hegemony influence our pedagogy? My answer is to provide a variety of pedagogy to allow Mary Louise Pratt's contact/conflict to rise to the surface for confrontation. If we could allow just for some short period our students to walk in the shoes of the "other" would it make a difference in our classrooms? In our classrooms, as a writer, teacher, or student, we need to work on a new kind of education, education as the practice of freedom. We need to teach our students to transgress boundaries to achieve that gift of freedom. How can we rethink our teaching practices in the age of multiculturalism? What do we do about teachers and students who do not want to participate in that freedom? How do we deal with racism in the classroom?

I am a white affluent female assistant instructor in freshman composition classrooms. I have at least three hegemonic stances to deal with when trying to reach my students: whiteness, affluence, and education level. I must adapt my pedagogical attitudes and endeavors not only to accommodate the invisible hegemonic position that we all agree exists but also to embrace the diversity that is possible in the class. In order to do this, I want to identify contact/conflict zones and expand them to create bridges to students. I believe that the more we can reach out to our students in these zones, the better our classroom pedagogy will become.

Feminist Pedagogy and Dialogue

Using feminist pedagogy, we can share storytelling, do collaborative and peer group work, and arrive in our classrooms with lots of questions without predetermined answers. This

does not preclude men from using these strategies also. Freire in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* says that “Through dialogue the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: Teacher-students with students-teacher. The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself [sic] taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (67). That is exactly what I want to happen in my classroom: a process of growth for all not just a few.

Writing with Students

One method to reach across the hegemonic divide that I would also like to suggest is that we try writing along on a teacher’s displayed computer as the students type their own work showing them how difficult a job writing is and that we make mistakes, corrections, and revisions of our own work. I also do this joint writing on a more personal basis during a thirty-minute conference where we both write and then share the results. The student then sees writing as dynamic and alive not something that just springs forth perfect if you just know the correct technique. I would like to see all teachers try this in your classroom. My students have identified with me when I do this.

Personal Identification

I point out our differences and suggest ways to negotiate those areas. I give them access to me as not only the hegemonic instructor but as a writer, a person, a student just like them. I tell them that I was only the second person in my large family to ever attend college and that my brother had to leave school for a myriad of problems including academic and financial just as many of them do. I share my writing angst or scheduling nightmares as a PhD student, assistant instructor, wife, mother, and community activist. They get a chance to see me as a person like

them with a difficult past, present(s), and concerns. They tell me that this helps them relax and realize that everyone is worried about their schoolwork, their home life, and the social demands in their lives. We can share our humanity.

Choice in Assignments

Parker Palmers, who leads workshops on pedagogy around the country, suggests that there is a diverse universe of possibilities when he says simply, “To teach is to create a space...” (O’Reilly 1). Can the students have a hand in creating that space and bringing their own questions and projects to the site? I believe if we open the spaces and offer choices not just of readings but also of assignments, the students will fill that space. I gave my freshmen students a choice between an explanatory essay in the normal format of a 3-5 page paper or the chance to do a unit on visual rhetoric that would include lectures on the elements of rhetoric and the techniques best used in visual representation. The end product is a very visual information card much like the ones that you can purchase in any college bookstore as study guides or reminders of the principles of a subject or topic. They chose the information card and produced some amazing results on topics of their choice from how to play Texas Hold ‘Em to how to safely survive in the desert.

Students also choose whether to work one-on-one with another classmate or to work in a three-person group when we do peer group work. They choose which type of group work they will do—editing or peer review assignments. The students choose which essays we read as the examples for the styles of essays we produce in class. They choose how much a voice other students have in their grading process. They choose what portion of their grade (5-25 % of the grade) their peers control.

Listen to Teach Better

The best thing I have found I can do as an instructor is really listen. This takes some skill. My first inclination is always to have the student get quickly to the point, to ask a question that I can supply an answer to, and then both of us can move on to other work. However, if I control my urge to answer or interrupt and listen to a student or my class when in discussion as a whole or in small peer groups, I found remarkable things happen. If I let their stories spin out and hear them tell about something that bothers them or is important to them that they return to again and again, I wait calmly and at the moment when they seem spent, ask them a question. Is that how you want this or that to happen? What can you do to change it? How do you really feel? By turning the conversation back to them and their feelings and intuition and desires, the students often have the answers within their own hearts and minds. They can find a thread of a story for themselves or they can express their true wishes and opinions that they had just so recently been skirting around the edges of by discussing the problem within the group, class, or with me as an individual. Critics of such an argument could say that such a open-ended discussion takes too much of our precious classroom time. If we keep our syllabi open to units that can fit our students' needs, we can assess those needs after reading the first diagnostic essays and spending a few weeks in class discussions with our students.

Technology Integration

I also have my students turn one of their essays into a PowerPoint presentation, which allows them to use their computer skills which most entering freshman have in today's technological world. They learn the skill of distilling their arguments or essay points into distinct blocks of information to create slides. They again learn some visual rhetoric. We talk about rhetoric from the first day of class so they learn to make sure their work is rhetorically sound. These presentations shown to the class make up 5% of the total course grade of which,

their fellow students get to decide 50% of that 5%. It makes them aware of audience. It makes them aware not just of using all the cute tricks of PowerPoint because their fellow students know those as well and are harder judges of relevance than the instructor usually is. This grading by the students removes part of the hegemonic control of the instructor to the students in their class—their peer group, which usually ethnically mirror them than the instructor does. This type of project is possible only on sites that are prepared and wired for technology.

Conferencing

Student-teacher conferences are another place where race and ethnicity can come into play. Cultural differences do affect teaching and conferencing with students who are not members of the dominant Anglo-American culture. Muriel Harris says, “Students brought up in other cultures acquire habits, behavior patterns, perspectives, ways of delivering information, and other cultural filters that can affect writing in ways we often do not sufficiently attend to—and indeed are in danger of ignoring” (87). This cultural difference can also spill over into the conference. Different cultures have different operational styles. A person meeting with another person will take clues from all levels—verbal, written or body language. Once a conference has begun, the two people involved move into synchrony, reacting to each other. The way people handle synchrony is rooted in biology and modified by culture.

Many conferences turn out to be one-sided monologues, without student participation or only grudging minimal conversation. I find the best conferences happen when I listen as well as talk and when I let the student communicate freely. Dialogues give the student and the instructor a rich chance to voice their concerns, points of view and questions. Open communication and cooperation set the tone for friendly, helpful conferencing (Harris, 1989). Models such as

restructuring a paragraph cut apart into sentences help to teach students organization and coherence. Chris Madigan utilizes a response model of asking specific questions that will make the conference meaningful and productive. Peter Schiff also writes with his students in a conference for a short period and then shares his writing while he reads the student's writing. A student could also take apart a paragraph of their own and experience organization and coherence issues on his/her own.

The Teacher's Role

When a teacher so strongly identifies with his own knowledge without taking in to consideration the diversity of his students, hegemony is apparent. Does not that teacher need to take into account his students and their stance in connection with the material to be taught? What is politically correct and what is academically necessary to work within the framework of hegemonic whiteness? What consequences does my examination of the pedagogy involved in working with, around, and through a whiteness lens have for teachers, students, and writers?

A focus on the audience for this research contains academicians, students, and the larger public. It is difficult to hit such a broad spectrum so I must consider each group separately. Since these are institutional critiques that I make of our system, it will take institutional research and change to affect this topic. Realizing as many authors suggest as Shirley Brice Heath did, we need to make incremental changes that amount to eventually visible changes in the classrooms and the halls of academia (239). I find ways by individuals facing and realizing the hegemonic whiteness of our institutions to change my classroom atmosphere and social dynamic.

I feel support for my theories in an introduction that Ira Shor wrote entitled "What is Critical Literacy." He says, "We are what we say and do. The ways we speak and spoken to

help shape us into the people we become....We can remake ourselves and society, if we choose, through alterative words and dissident projects” (Shor & Pari 1). He goes on to say that all of us experience “learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (1). He speaks of “a dream of a new society against the power now in power” and cites the freeing work of Freire, Foucault, Raymond Williams, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Adrienne Rich. Several scholars believe that we can surmount the hegemonic forces ingrained into our society (Clark, hooks, Freire). “Struggles for gender equality and ethnic diversity linked issues of ending domination, of social justice with pedagogy” (hooks, *Teaching Community* 7). If we can do that, then we will find the ways to create pedagogical changes. If we treat language as a “dynamic process” with competing ways of seeing, thinking, and talking it could be possible to build a better world for all—one “less organized by axes of domination along lines of race, gender, class, sex, age, technology, educations, and so on” (Lu 193).

Also in the examination, I look at rules valued in individual academic or social sites. Who is it within each site that is authorized to standardize the rules of language? What language practices are delegitimized by such rules? How? Is there an alternative way to do language besides by reproducing standardized rules? (Lu 194) How could we link our efforts to organize everything from the top-down model to the actual existing conditions of work facing differently situated faculty and students? To better approach literacy, we need to question that there is only one common language that “all members of our nation, an academy, or a discipline supposedly need” (Lu 200). For students and teachers that want to build a more equitable world, how do we change or at least work with or around the standardized rules for producing and distributing information? Why? Perhaps, we could accomplish this in our classrooms by requiring

standardized language for general documents and allowing the use of the home or private language in certain essays and work for affect as many authors have suggested.

The hegemony of whiteness in our society, according to McIntosh, is like having an elephant sitting in the middle of the room that it is impossible to ignore but that everyone tries to talk around. I want to find a way to talk around, over, under or through that elephant or if necessary to build a bridge across the elephant to engage students in the classroom around hegemonic dominance. Mikhail Bakhtin illustrates my point about talking around, over, under or through by saying, “Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated-overpopulated-with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process” (294). As instructors, it is our job to choose and present the language in our classrooms in a very complicated setting of racial and ethnicity issues.

Recognizing that white privilege is an elusive and fugitive subject is one of the first things I must do in this study. Privilege is so deeply embedded and entwined in our social order that it is hard to see and, thus, hard to fight. There is tremendous pressure to avoid the issue because if we face it we must “give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country, one’s life is not what one makes it, many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own” (McIntosh 2) McIntosh goes on to say that unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege means that much of the oppressiveness is unconscious. Disapproving of the systems will not change them especially when the systems are ingrained in the culture and the classroom. McIntosh also says,

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool

here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects. Most talk about equal opportunity seems to be now to be about equal seems to be now to be about equal opportunity to get into a position of dominance while denying that systems of dominance exist. 3-4

Systemic change takes decades or more, but there are people out there like Peggy McIntosh considering the effects on our classrooms and culture of hegemonic whiteness. Making a classroom as democratic a setting as possible where individuals feel an ability to and a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy. While many advances in curriculum and in pedagogy are being made, more still need to be made and *still* we may not overcome or outrun hegemonic whiteness, we may have to learn with it still sitting in the midst of our lives and classrooms but we will be better able to see it hopefully. We are not yet tooled or retooled as the case may be, as an institution, culture, or race to see our own hegemonic power position and thus we do not deal with it simply because we insist it does not exist.

As classrooms become more diverse, the politics of domination are often reproduced in the educational setting. In order to work within those classrooms, teachers and students need to at least recognize the domination and then attempt to work with it. Who will speak? Who will listen? If we follow the system of banking in our classrooms, then students will not be active consumers but passive and diminished. My strategies for pedagogy in this project can help to turn them into diverse but active consumers.

Bibliography

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Michael Holquist, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Bloom, Lynn Z. "The Great Paradigm Shift and Its Legacy for the Twenty-first Century." Eds. Lynn Z. Bloom, Donald A. Daiker, Edward M. White. *Composition Studies in the New Millennium: Rereading the Past, Rewriting the Future*. Carbondale, IL: SIUP, 2003. 31-47.
- Bush, Melanie E. L. *Breaking the Code of Good Intentions: Everyday Forms of Whiteness*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.
- Clark, Kendall. "The Global Privileges of Whiteness." <http://monkeyfist.com/articles/764>. November 11, 2004.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Robert R. Barr. New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1994.
- _____. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2003.
- Giroux, Henry. "Rewriting the Discourse of Racial Identity: Towards a Pedagogy and Politics of Whiteness." *Harvard Educational Review*. 67:2 (Summer 1997): 285-320.
- Greene, Maxine. *Landscapes of Learning*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1978.
- Harris, Muriel. Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference. Urbana: National Council of English, 1986.
- Hayward, Clarissa Rile. *De-Facing Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Heath, Shirley Brice. "Work, Class, and Categories: Dilemmas of Identity." Eds. Lynn Z. Bloom, Donald A. Daiker, Edward M. White. *Composition Studies in the New Millennium: Rereading the Past, Rewriting the Future*. Carbondale, IL: SIUP, 2003. 226-242.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- _____. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- _____. "Representations of Whiteness." *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

- Jarratt, Susan C. "Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict." *Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*. Eds. Patricia Harking and John Schilb. New York: MLA, 1991. 105-123.
- Jay, Gregory. "Whiteness Studies and the Multicultural Literature Classroom." Forthcoming, *Journal of the Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, (Spring 2005): 1-18.
- Lu, Min Zhan. "Composition's Word Work: Deliberating How to Do Language." Eds. Lynn Z. Bloom, Donald A. Daiker, Edward M. White. *Composition Studies in the New Millennium: Rereading the Past, Rewriting the Future*. Carbondale, IL: SIUP, 2003. 193-207.
- McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." *Independent School*. 49:2 (1990): 31-36.
- Minter, Deborah, and Amy M. Goodburn, eds. *Composition, Pedagogy & the Scholarship of Teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 2002.
- Olson, Gary A. "Working with Difference: Critical Race Studies and the Teaching of Composition." Eds. Lynn Z. Bloom, Donald A. Daiker, Edward M. White. *Composition Studies in the New Millennium: Rereading the Past, Rewriting the Future*. Carbondale, IL: SIUP, 2003. 208-221.
- Porter, James E. Patricia Sullivan, Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey T. Grabill, and Libby Miles. "Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change." *CCC* 51.4 (June 2000): 610-642.
- Rose, Mike. *Lives on the Boundary*. New York: Penguin Books, 1989.
- _____. *Possible Lives: The Promise of Public Education in America*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.
- Shor, Ira and Caroline Pari, eds. *Critical Literacy in Action: Writing Words, Changing Worlds: A Tribute to the Teaching of Paulo Freire*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 1999.
- Steele, Shelby. *The Content of Our Character*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990.
- Villanueva, Jr. Victor. *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1993.
- _____. "Maybe a Colony: And Still Another Critiques of the Comp Community." *JAC* 17.2.

_____. "Rhetoric is Politics," Said the Ancient. "How Much So." I wonder. Eds. John Clifford and John Schilb. *Writing Theory and Critical Theory*. New York: MLA, 1994. 327-334.