

4 CRITICAL THINKING

Writing teachers have been trained to believe in a necessary dialectic between language and thought—more particularly, in the dialectic between written language and thought. The line of thinking runs roughly from Vygotsky ([1962] 1975), through Havelock (1963) and Ong ([1982] 2000) to Berlin (1987). The gist of this literacy trope is that as you speak, so you think—and even more so, as you write. The pull of this trope is so strong that it has usually gone unquestioned among writing teachers—with the notable exception of Stuckey’s (1991) virulent attack in *The Violence of Literacy*.

The dialectic between written language and thought was the foundation of Bloom’s (1996) argument for teaching middle-class virtues by way of middle-class English. Bloom reserved as the last virtue “critical thinking,” the trump card of middle-class English. Although we may be a little unclear about what we mean by “critical thinking,” it’s what we’re all for. To say you are teaching your students how to “think critically” is like waving the flag on the 4th of July. We include it in our mission statements, in our syllabi, and in the rhetorics and readers we have our students purchase—many of which struggle to get critical something or other in their titles. It’s one of the five major objectives of the WPA outcomes statement and a guarantee of grants. The attractive feature about critical thinking is that teaching it implies you know how to do it. It’s almost unthinkable to challenge it as one of our major purposes of instruction.

But that’s what I want to do here. I at least want to challenge the critical thinking agenda as an extension of Bloom’s argument for teaching middle-class English. Critical thinking is a more subtle social class signifier than language, tricking many who think they are working on behalf of marginalized social groups into acting as agents of social reproduction—or as I have suggested in my title, going north when they are thinking west. Although teachers may hope they are teaching students how to think critically about social myths that perpetuate oppression, they

might be oblivious of the possibility that critical thinking, as it is frequently conceived and taught, is no more class neutral than middle-class English.

In my analysis of the relationship between critical thinking, writing instruction, and social class reproduction, I will divide the critical thinking agenda into cognitive and social strands. The cognitive is derived from the fields of psychology, education, and the informal logic branch of philosophy and the social from the fields of literary criticism and the socio-economic branch of philosophy. These different origins lead to different pedagogies—and consequently, to different methods of social class reproduction. I will emphasize the ways the two strands marginalize working-class students in our required writing classes. I am not arguing that all teachers who promote either strand of critical thinking in their classrooms slip into reproductive pedagogies or that we should not teach our students how to engage in middle-class critical thinking. As students need to know the middle-class language games we play, so they need to know how to play our middle-class game of “critical thinking,” but we should steer clear, as Lilia Bartolomé (1998) has argued, of a replacement pedagogy. Rather than replace, we need to give them alternative ways of thinking and writing that fit the new social situations in which they will increasingly find themselves. An additive rather than a replacement pedagogy is particularly important when we are working with students who come from marginalized social groups whose home languages and ways of thinking seem in conflict with the ones we need to promote if we expect to help our students get on.

HISTORICIZING CRITICAL THINKING

Academics have historically used “critical thinking” interchangeably with “critical inquiry.” The difference in the phrases lies mostly with who uses them. In English studies, people on the literature side tend to use “inquiry,” whereas people on the composition side more frequently use “thinking.” These differences have evolved from the histories of the terms.

“Critical inquiry” is by far the earlier term. It first appeared in a book title in 1748, *A Critical Inquiry into the Opinions and Practice of the Ancient Philosophers Concerning the Nature of the Soul and a Future State*. Subsequent books with “critical inquiry” in their titles appeared every fifty years or so with the subjects being Alexander the Great (1793), “antient armour” (1800; 1824; 1842), teeth (1846), Scottish language (1882), medieval building (1884), and Argentine Economic History (Garcia 1973).

Its use as a trope didn't gain currency until after the inauguration in 1974 of the journal, *Critical Inquiry*. Although *Critical Inquiry* was announced as an interdisciplinary journal concerned with the "theory, method, and exploration of critical principles in the fields of literature, music, visual arts, film, philosophy, and popular culture," articles in the journal lean toward literary criticism and philosophy—particularly philosophy concerned with literary production. The journal's focus on critical principles suggests a reference to Wimsatt and Beardsley's ([1946] 1971) article, "The Intentional Fallacy," in the last line of which they claimed that looking for meaning outside the text would not be "critical inquiry," by which they mean the kind of inquiry that critics do, i.e., using the tools available to critics but unavailable to those untrained in textual interpretation.

After the inauguration of *Critical Inquiry*, use of the phrase accelerated in comparison to its use in the previous three centuries. Three books from the years 1974 to 2001 included "critical inquiry" in their titles. One was about economic history (1987), one about psychoanalysis (1988), and one about politics (1993). The phrase appeared in only 11 titles in the MLA electronic database, which tracks literature-related articles, books, and dissertations from 1963. The phrase was more popular in education-related articles, books, and dissertations, appearing in 20 titles in works reported in ERIC after 1965.

Although a Johnny- or Jill-come-lately, "critical thinking" is by far the more popular phrase. It first appeared as part of a book title in 1941, *Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking*. Its author, Edward Glaser, later created with Goodwin Watson the most enduring critical thinking test in the business—the *Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal*. In 1946, Max Black published *Critical Thinking: an Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method*, territorializing philosophy and logic as the appropriate field for investigating critical thinking. After the second edition to Black's book in 1952, books with "critical thinking" in their titles began to appear every few years. From 1980 to 1983, the pace accelerated with one or two appearing every year or so. In 1984, the title appeared in 8 books, a rate that remained steady until 1989, after which the rate steadily accelerated to about 25 a year from 1995 until the present with the rate remaining strong. This increased popularity was likely stimulated by the series of conferences on critical thinking at Sonoma State University, the first of which occurred in 1980.

A scan of the references reported in ERIC since 1966 dramatizes the degree to which “critical thinking” overshadowed “critical inquiry.” To the 20 education-related publications with “critical inquiry” in their titles, there were 1072 with “critical thinking.” The burst in education-related publications occurred a few years earlier than with books, a consequence of publication lag time. Through the 60’s and 70’s, the publications including “critical thinking” in their titles occurred at the rate of 8-10 a year. But in 1983, this rate accelerated to 23 in a year. It was 24 in 1984, 41 in 1985, 58 in 1986, 72 in 1987, 65 in 1988, and reached an all-time high of 83 in 1989. Thereafter, the frequency was about 60 a year with some diminishing toward the end of the 90’s when it steadied to a rate of about 50 a year. Publications reported in MLA were more sparse—only 24 were reported in the years from 1963 on; 14 of those were dissertations. Literature specialists clearly have not bought into critical thinking. As we will see, critical thinking is more popular with progressive writing teachers when it’s coupled with social reform, and it’s a hit in education.

The meaning of the two phrases is unproblematic at a high level of generalization. But at a lower level specifying the process and the subject of the inquiry, differences emerge. The differences become more pronounced when one considers how or whether one can teach students to think or inquire critically.

Most writers who use either term agree that critical inquiry or thinking involves an informed look at something. Writers usually refer to examining available information and drawing intelligent conclusions through analyzing and synthesizing, preferably from a relatively disinterested point of view. The first catalogued book (1748) with “critical inquiry” in its title surveys the available information and takes a stance on whether the ancient philosophers believed in an afterlife and soul. The tone of the text is aggressive as the writer presses his point, but by the beginning of the 19th century, the writer assumes a more disinterested tone. The author of *A Critical Inquiry into Armour*, Samuel Rush Meyrick (1800), carefully examines old pictures, poems, and miscellaneous writings to infer what armor in a particular time and place looked like. I suspect the subsequent critical inquiries into teeth, language, economics, and so on carried forward this notion of being able to examine the available evidence and from it formulate careful conclusions.

This inquiry is the kind of scientific investigation John Dewey ([1938] 1963) theorized as the foundation of progressive education. Students

were to be taught how to investigate phenomena without prejudice, relying on what they could discover rather than on what they had been told. The reference to “critical inquiry” in Wimsatt and Beardsley’s ([1946] 1971) article, “The Intentional Fallacy,” adds to the scientific investigation a reliance on the tools of the trade. Critical inquirers had to learn how to employ the tools of critics, how to look carefully at an object (a poem) and establish through the use of critical strategies the meaning that lay in the object, the poem. Speculation and fancy about what the writer had meant were not a part of the critic’s conversation.

COGNITIVE STRAND

The cognitive strand of critical thinking theory developed from Edward Glaser’s 1941 book, and Robert Ennis’s (1962) landmark essay “A Concept of Critical Thinking.” Ennis’s thumbnail definition of critical thinking is frequently referred to as the key to critical thinking. Critical thinking, Ennis wrote, “is the correct assessing of statements” (83).

Ennis’s focus on evaluating the “correctness” of statements is a consequence of his indebtedness to a previous article, “The Improvement of Critical Thinking,” by Othanel Smith (1953). Ennis quotes Smith’s statement that “if we set about to find out what . . . [a] statement means and to determine whether to accept or reject it, we would be engaged in thinking, which, for lack of a better term, we shall call critical thinking” (83). Although Ennis acknowledges that critical thinking may apply to value statements as well, the primary subject in his essay is truth statements. Whereas Smith distinguishes between good and bad thinking, Ennis transforms the “good” into “critical” and the bad into non-critical thinking. Ennis also contributed to the nascent discussion of critical thinking by abstracting out of the multiple possibilities the following twelve-step program for assessing the correctness of statements:

1. Grasping the meaning of a statement.
2. Judging whether there is ambiguity in the line of reasoning.
3. Judging whether certain statements contradict each other.
4. Judging whether a conclusion follows necessarily.
5. Judging whether a statement is specific enough.
6. Judging whether a statement is actually the application of a certain principle.

7. Judging whether an observation statement is reliable.
8. Judging whether an inductive conclusion is warranted.
9. Judging whether the problem has been identified.
10. Judging whether a statement is an assumption.
11. Judging whether a definition is adequate.
12. Judging whether a statement made by an alleged authority is acceptable. (84)

Ennis carefully details several sub-steps for each of the steps above. He also qualifies his analysis by noting that a critical thinking program is constituted of concepts abstracted from the far messier business of real-time responses to statements. In subsequent articles on critical thinking, this qualification is usually ignored.

Black's ([1946] 1952) *Critical Thinking: An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Thinking* deserves mention in an overview of the cognitive strand. Although Black's book is rarely referred to in subsequent literature, it is a detailed precursor of Ennis's (1962) article and a logician's version of Smith's (1953) statement. Black devotes the first section of his book to a logical analysis of statements, the second to language, and the third to induction. These sections correspond to three of the important dimensions one has to consider when thinking critically about any kind of discourse. One has to consider the relationships between elements of the discourse, the language in which those relationships are expressed, and the empirical evidence supporting any claim. To these three, one might add—as later writers did—the social, historical, and field contexts.

Black, Smith, and Ennis have several criteria in common that shape later explanations of critical thinking. First, they are all concerned with the “correct” interpretation of statements—correctness here is understood as a description of a statement's truth-value, i.e., the extent to which the audience is justified in believing it. The focus on language stems from the post World War II concern with propaganda. The point of critical thinking was to guarantee that citizens would not be swayed by propaganda. The emphasis on truth statements might be a consequence of these writers' professions and social class—that is, in the working classes, speakers might be more interested in instrumental statements: “Put burlap over the cement and hose it down at the end of the work-day.” At the end of his article, Ennis includes an interesting statement

linking his explanation of critical thinking to social class issues. When predicting various correlations, he says, the “social-class status of students outside of the upper-class, is probably correlated with *critical thinking*” (108). He doesn’t elaborate on this statement, but the tenor of the article implies that with the curious exception of the elite, the higher the social class, the more critical the thinking.

This implication is interesting for two reasons. First is the exclusion of the upper-class, echoing Bloom’s (1996) interpretation of the “filthy rich” (664). Perhaps Ennis assumes that children of the upper-class don’t have to work hard to maintain their social positions; consequently, they would likely prove the exception to his prediction. Second is his speculation that working-class students don’t think as critically as middle-class students. He may be right—but only as he is defining critical thinking. Ennis implies his definition is neutral, but it is biased toward privileging the kind of thinking middle-class people do and the kind of subjects about which they argue. It is nearly a tautology to suggest that people from that social class will probably be better at demonstrating the skill that people from that social class practice.

Ennis’s description of critical thinking has defined the concept of critical thinking for cognitive strand theorists. Truth statements have become the object; and deductive logic, semantic analysis, and inductive logic have become the modes of thinking critically. Most descriptions of cognitivist-oriented critical thinking is directed at argumentative discourse to the exclusion of the many other kinds of kinds of discourse about which one could think critically. Barry Beyer collected in 1985 what he interpreted as the most authoritative descriptions of critical thinking. In addition to Ennis’s, we have the following elements in the eight lists of critical thinking skills cited:

Evaluating evidence, drawing warranted conclusions (Dressel and Mayhew 1954);

Evaluating reliability of authors, checking accuracy of data (Fraser and West 1961);

Determining . . . accuracy of inference, deducing conclusions, evaluating strength of an argument (Watson and Glaser 1980);

Determining if a statement follows from its premises, a hypothesis is warranted, a theory is warranted, an argument depends on equivocation, a reason is relevant (Ennis 1982);

Distinguishing between statements of fact and statements of opinion, determining the difficulty of the proof (Morse and McCune, revised by Brown and Cook 1971);

Separating statements of fact from statements of value, distinguishing hypothesis from evidence, recognizing logical inconsistency in arguments, distinguishing hypothesis from warranted conclusions, recognizing logical fallacies, recognizing persuading techniques (Fair 1977);

Evaluating a line of reasoning, weighing evidence, identifying ambiguous statements, identifying equivocal statements. (Hudgins 1977)

With the exception of Fraser and West's list, which is more generally directed at informative writing, argumentative writing is the assumed supra-genre. My point in this discussion has been that in spite of Ennis's caveat, the cognitive strand of critical thinking has focused on only one of the categories of the aims of writing—persuasive—as James Kinneavy (1969) has defined them. Thinking critically about writing classified according to the other three aims—expressive, referential, and literary—is entirely ignored; that is, one couldn't think critically about one's diary, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, or *All the King's Men*. And thinking critically about non-discursive reality (like music, dance, farming, or engineering) is barely a footnote in the cognitive strand.

Field Dependency

The major players in the critical thinking industry are its originators: Watson and Glaser and Ennis, who with Jason Millman developed the *Cornell Critical Thinking Tests* (first iteration in 1966). Ennis, Watson, and Glaser are certainly scholars with integrity, but their vested interest in their research must be acknowledged. Their subject positions would likely incline them to welcome and promote research that substantiates the foundations for their assessments. Many researchers seem to have uncritically adopted these tests as pre and post measures of control and experimental groups. The citations for this kind of research are overwhelming. The central assumption behind the cognitive strand is that critical thinking is a generic activity that can be abstracted from instances of thinking about something. The forms that are abstracted, i.e., the moves that constitute critical thinking, can be studied and

taught as an existential cognitive activity. John McPeck (1981) argues, however, that thinking is always thinking about something, even if one is thinking about thinking. He claims that critical thinking is field-dependent and consequently does not exist as a subject that can be abstracted, taught, and tested, undermining the foundation on which tests like the Watson-Glaser and Cornell assessments are built.

McPeck tracks the evolution from defining critical thinking as formal logic (Black [1946]1952) to defining it as informal logic. The connection between the two logics lies in their strategies of abstracting principles from contingent situations. Formal logic, notably in its rules for truth tables, attempts to evaluate arguments by reducing statements to symbols, like P or $\sim P$. Informal logic attempts to do the same thing without symbols. Informal logic, for example, attempts to catalogue all fallacies. This attempt is an act of abstraction, of finding single descriptions that apply to multiple discourse acts. The search for a concept of critical thinking is a similar attempt to find principles of critical thinking that one can apply to all instances in which thinking is required.

McPeck compares the desire to discover the principles of critical thinking to the phonics movement, and argues that because critical thinking doesn't occur in a vacuum, it cannot be taught in a vacuum any more than reading can. Reading is reading about something—and one must have an initial comprehension of the subject in order to make sense out of the words one is sounding out. Teaching phonics is teaching only the sounding out. One could very well sound out words, McPeck says, but without understanding the words, one could not call it reading. Similarly, critical thinking taught apart from critical thinking about something can lead to bad teaching—and bad testing. People end up testing something that doesn't exist—or perhaps they think they are testing one thing, but they are really testing another.

“The best assessments of arguments,” McPeck (1981) claims, “usually come from people with the most information about a subject and not from those merely skilled in argument analysis. In a world of complex facts, events and ideas there simply is no short cut to analyzing arguments apart from understanding these complexities” (93). McPeck notes Stephen Toulmin's claim that the uses and forms of argument are as varied as life. “Arguments within any field,” Toulmin writes, “can be judged by standards appropriate within that field, and some will fall short; but it must be expected that the standards will be field-dependent,

and that the merits to be demanded of an argument in one field will be found to be absent (in the nature of things) from entirely meritorious arguments in another” ([1958] 2003, 235).

I heard a striking example of the relationship between field and argument when I was researching genre acquisition in corporate environments. An executive vice president of a large Midwestern insurance company told me that when corporate executives make decisions (we were talking about an impending decision, involving millions of dollars, to switch to a new software program to track investments), they tend to value testimonials more than research. He explained that executives know how data can be manipulated, so they can't spend their time ferreting out the fudged from the unfudged data; but if they hear from X, Y, and Z that such and such policy or program has worked for their companies, those testimonials mean more than data. The vice president explained that this is because the executives know each other, so they value the word over the data. This reliance on testimonials is the flip side of what is valued in academic communities. In academic research, we discount testimonials. Presented the same evidence, then, members of the different communities would value the evidence differently. Toulmin would explain this as a difference in what counts as acceptable warrants in the different communities.

If McPeck's and Toulmin's theories of field-dependency are sound (see also Frank Smith for a critique of a field-independent theory of critical thinking), people who become expert in their version of a field-independent critical thinking may be tempted to apply the standards of critical thinking in one field to the standards of another, which could be like playing baseball in an antique shop. Richard Paul (1993), one of the leading theorists of the cognitive strand, has posted an essay, "Why Students and often Teachers Don't Reason Well," that is a ironic example of faulty assumptions based on transferring the standards of one field to the standards of another.¹

Paul, a philosopher, takes it upon himself to show how some writing experts don't know what they are talking about in their assessment of 8th grade writing skills. Paul's primary target is Charles Cooper, co-editor with Lee Odell (1977) of one of the best known books on writing assessment. Paul's evidence is an essay Cooper and other California secondary

1. It used to be posted, that is, on <http://www.criticalthinking.org>. You can now purchase it for \$5.00 from the critical thinking website.

writing teachers (including Marilyn Whirry, National Teacher of the Year 2000) chose as exemplary but that Paul argues should have been an example of failure because the student writer didn't exhibit critical thinking skills—as Paul defined them.

Paul makes several mistakes that would be immediately apparent to writing teachers but perhaps not to a philosopher, particularly one who has devoted most of his career to promoting a generic version of critical thinking. For example, he quotes the following brief vignette that the writer uses to introduce her evaluation essay (the writer is explaining why she likes pop rock music):

'Well, you're getting to the age when you have to learn to be responsible!' my mother yelled out. 'Yes, but I can't be available all the time to do my appointed chores! I'm only thirteen! I want to be with my friends, to have fun! I don't think that it is fair for me to baby-sit while you run your little errands!' I snapped back. I sprinted upstairs to my room before my mother could start another sentence.

Writing teachers will recognize in this paragraph a narrative gambit to get the reader's attention, one in fact that the writer has most likely been taught. For 8th grade writing produced in fifty minutes, most of us would probably give this writer some credit, but Paul (1993) complains, "It is clear that in this segment there is no analysis, no setting out of alternative criteria, no clarification of the question at issue, no hint at reasoning or reasoned evaluation."

Paul's failure here is that he imagines the teachers were assessing critical thinking as a field-independent, generic activity when they were in fact assessing students' abilities to write in different genres—in this case the genre of evaluation. Paul is misled into thinking that he could apply the rules of philosophic discourse to writing instruction. For his own purposes (masquerading as an objective evaluation), Paul was judging an apple rotten because it wasn't an orange. Paul's negative critique of writing teachers like Cooper and Whirry is evidence substantiating McPeck's central claim that critical thinking, like argument, is field-dependent. Someone who thinks critically in one field may try to use the same strategies in another field and demonstrate the opposite of what he or she intends. The real mistake lies in thinking that because one may be a "critical thinker" in one field—like informal logic—that he or she is a critical thinker in all fields—like evaluating 8th grade writing in specific genres.

Intersections

Having argued that critical thinking is field-dependent, I want to hedge. There are a few features that seem common to most concepts of critical thinking. McPeck states the core of critical thinking by saying

Let S = individual

Let CT = critical thinker

Let X = a field

Let E = what S knows about X

Then S is a CT in X if S can do X by imagining $\sim E$ or \sim any subset of E. (9)

The formula implies that people are thinking critically when they are suspicious of all they know on a given subject for the purpose of theorizing alternative ways of interpreting a situation. McPeck also describes critical thinking as an “appropriate use of reflective skepticism” (7). “Appropriate” and “reflective” are key words. Reflective implies a moment of stepping away from the situation to think again. This is different from knee-jerk skepticism. People who are habitually skeptical have not realized that reflective skepticism has to be appropriate: when the pitch comes and the ball is headed toward one’s head, it’s a bad time to question the material reality of the ball. McPeck points out that knowing *when* to explore alternative realities is also a function of one’s knowledge of the field, X. It then follows that the “appropriate” criterion of critical thinking is also field-dependent. Thinking critically while playing baseball is different from thinking critically as a banker. Experts in each will know when to explore alternative realities and when to act—in their own fields.

SOCIAL STRAND

The cognitive strand, with its roots in education, psychology and logic, focused primarily on argumentative discourse. The social strand, with its roots in literary criticism and socioeconomic philosophy, focuses on social structures. Influenced by literary theory, theorists in the social strand use “critical inquiry” interchangeably with “critical thinking,” referring to a disinterested, informed investigation of a subject with some implication of using the right tools for the right job. The term crosses over in several instances, sometimes within the same article or book. In “Using a Critical

Inquiry Perspective to Study Critical Thinking in Home Economics” Jane Plihal (1989) traces critical inquiry back to Hegel’s and Marx’s influence on the Frankfurt school in the 1920s. The tools and frame of mind that the literary theorists use to inquire into texts are the same tools and frame of mind the critical theorists from the Frankfurt school use to inquire about social reality. One learns to “look again” with de-socialized eyes or at least with eyes that take into account the degree of the viewer’s socialization (see also Bourdieu 1984, 12, 482; Kuhn 1970). Plihal quotes Marx on the necessary connection between criticism and desocialization:

[we] wish to find the new world through criticism of the old; . . . even though the construction of the future and its completion for all times is not our task, what we have to accomplish at this time is all the more clear: relentless criticism of all existing conditions, relentless in the sense that the criticism is not afraid of its findings and just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be. (40)

The purpose of the social strand of critical thinking is to deconstruct through “relentless criticism” social structures that naturalize the exploitation and oppression of dominated social groups. Narrowing the focus, Plihal (1989) says the “object of critique in critical inquiry is ideology” (40) because ideologies are the instruments through which social structures are naturalized.

Plihal notes the collaborative quality of critical inquiry—a Socratic feature that is strikingly absent in the cognitive strand of critical thinking. Theorists in the social strand assume one cannot think critically by oneself, because if one doesn’t communicate with others who come from different situations and necessarily have different visions, one remains trapped in the room of one’s mind. A necessary condition for critical inquiry is therefore non-distortive communication, or Habermas’s “ideal speech situation.” The features of Habermas’s ideal speech situation (comprehensibility, factuality, sincerity, and justifiability) describe an ideal scientific community in which participants verify that they understand each other’s language, that all known facts support statements, that all speakers utter only that which they believe to be true, and that only justifiable claims supported by data and appropriate warrants are entered into the discourse. Under these conditions, participants can move through dialogue toward an approximation of truth.

After setting down these conditions for critical thinking, Plihal outlines a procedure for a critical inquiry in home economics courses. The steps are as follows:

1. Identify movements or social groups whose interests are progressive.
2. Develop an interpretive understanding of the intersubjective meanings, values, and motives held by all groups of actors in the subjects' milieu.
3. Study the historical development of the social conditions and the current social structures that constrain the participants' actions and constrain their understandings.
4. Construct strands of the determinant relations between social conditions, intersubjective interpretations of those conditions, and participants' actions.
5. Elucidate the fundamental contradictions which are developing as a result of current actions based on ideologically frozen understandings.
6. Participate in a program of education with the subjects that gives them new ways of seeing their situation.
7. Participate in a theoretically grounded program of action which will change social conditions and, in addition, will engender new less alienated understandings and needs. (44)

Plihal's final step predicts the transformative agenda that drives most current critical pedagogy. The researcher and those with whom he or she is working should engage in a "continuous cycle of critique, education, and action" (45)—the final object of which is to empower both teachers and students by helping them understand they can work to transform their material conditions of existence.

Although Plihal cites D.E. Comstock's (1982) "A Method for Critical Research" as her primary source for her protocol, she could have cited Paulo Freire's ([1970] 1995) program for developing literacy among oppressed social groups. In Freire's pedagogy, critical thinking, which he calls "conscientization," is necessary for literacy development. Freire's pedagogy is generally described as critical, liberatory, or emancipatory because its purpose is to free educatees from dominated forms of consciousness. Like Plato's philosophers, they will emerge from the cave into a "more fully human" (29) condition of existence. By fully human, Freire means a condition in which people understand they have the power to transform their material conditions of existence. As in Plihal's

program, dialogism is a necessary condition for conscientization: it has to be arrived at *with* and *for* others. For the oppressed, a true literacy will necessarily lead toward social action, the purpose of which is to continuously work against all forms of social oppression based on the mythologies of individualism, democracy, and equal education.

Freire's pedagogy is a blueprint for Plihal's program of critical inquiry. Before embarking on a literacy development program, Freirean educators visit the community and investigate with progressive members of the community the specific conditions of the community. The educators write up and collaboratively evaluate with their co-investigators a report in which they try to distinguish between the real and potential knowledge of community members and identify generative themes with embedded contradictions in the people's lives. The "real" knowledge—corresponding to Marx's false consciousness—is limited by the participants' uncritical perception of their living situations, a perception that has been presented to them through dominant ideologies. The potential knowledge is the world opened up by critical thinking, which Freire defines as

thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. Critical thinking contrasts with naïve thinking, which sees "historical time as a weight, a stratification of the acquisitions and experiences of the past,"² from which the present should emerge normalized and "well-behaved." For the naïve thinker, the important thing is accommodation to this normalized "today." For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanity of [people]. (73)

Several themes are embedded in Freire's description of critical thinking: people are made by and make the world, reality/history is mutable, thinking and action are inseparable, critical thinking leads toward the continuing transformation of the world with the purpose of enabling all people to participate in that transformation. When we take from people their power to be an active part of that transformation or the continuous re-making of their conditions of existence, we are taking from them the essential feature of their humanity, which distinguishes them from

2. Freire ([1970] 1995) includes in the quotes a phrase that he cites as from a friend's letter.

animals, which, Freire claims, only respond to the world. Transforming the world, engaging in a “program of action which will change social conditions and, in addition, will engender new less alienated understandings and needs” (Plihal 1989, 44) is the ultimate purpose of the social strand of critical thinking.

Freire’s definition of critical thinking is in sharp contrast to Ennis’s (1962) “the correct assessment of statements” (83) with its focus on argumentative discourse. In part, the social strand of critical thinking is an application of the cognitive strand, but critical thinking in Freire’s philosophy is about much more than statements. It is about a way of seeing the world and one’s relationship to it. It is what one ends up with when one applies McPeck’s (1981) formula: S is a CT in X if S can do X by imagining $\sim E$ or \sim any subset of E.

To McPeck’s (1981) formula and his caution about “appropriate skepticism,” I would add that one needs to know that one is knowing, a central condition of Freire’s conscientization ([1970] 1995, 66-67). Being reflexively aware of one’s consciousness entails knowing that one is knowing from a situated position. Paul (2004), who should have been more careful practicing it, has called this “epistemological humility.” Knowing that one’s knowledge is situated is tantamount to knowing that it is shaped by one’s experiences and culture. A critical thinker should consequently be open to multiple ways of knowing. Being open to multiple perspectives must not, however, erase one’s epistemological humility—people who would like to call themselves critical thinkers tend to compliment themselves on their catholic vision, comparing themselves favorably to those with more parochial perspectives. Critical thinkers must always be aware that knowing-that-one-is-knowing is itself situated knowledge. Seduced by their social group and professional mythology, people who think they know they are knowing may be beguiled into thinking they know more than non-critical thinkers who don’t know they are knowing. I have seen this happen in English departments. What I don’t know is whether I have been able to see myself seeing.

Finally, critical thinking theorists agree that thinking critically entails a perception of the relationship between the local and global. To try to understand things as if they existed existentially is naïve—a key concept in the evaluation of social class language and thinking. Critical thinkers analyze the part and then speculate on its relationship to a larger structure. This is precisely what Jeannie Oakes and Kenneth Sirotnik

(1983) were arguing when they claimed that a productive analysis of the problems in education had to be predicated on understanding the parts schools play within the larger social structure. To analyze an educational problem existentially ensures misdiagnosis. It's like thinking that students are not learning to read well because they haven't learned how to sound out the individual phonemes—or that people haven't learned how to think critically because they haven't learned how to identify assumptions embedded in argumentative discourse.

To summarize: the cognitive strand of critical thinking, focusing on argumentative discourse, is more specific than the social. Although cognitive-oriented theorists acknowledge that the extent of one's knowledge in a field will be a factor in one's ability to think critically, they tend to proceed as if critical thinking were field-independent, a consequence of their attempt to abstract the concept of critical thinking from the act of thinking critically. Although the social strand of critical thinking is more general than the cognitive, theorists in this strand tend to assume critical thinking is field-dependent, involving a dialectic between thinking and acting, the self and the world. Members of the cognitive strand want to teach critical thinking. Members of the social strand want to remake the world.

5 ARGUING

Although I hesitate to adopt all features of critical thinking as goals in my required writing classes, I want my students to know that their knowledge is situated, which is a precondition of being able to see from multiple perspectives, allowing writers to read their texts (and themselves) with other readers' eyes. If I were asked to focus on one writing skill that marks the transition from high school to college writing, it would be this ability to see one's own text/self with others' eyes.

Linked to the ability of seeing from multiple perspectives is the ability to recognize the social context within which claims are interpreted as either self-evident (see Bartholome's [1985] notion of commonplaces, 42-43, and Skorozewski's [2000] refreshing article on academic clichés) or in need of substantiation. Because of their limited exposure to multiple perspectives, young writers tend to be locked into circumscribed social groups within which a set of claims are treated as irrefutable truths, such as "freedom is our god-given right" or "competition encourages higher achievement." At the university level, students are confronted with a kaleidoscope of social groups as well as with the new demands of various academic discourse communities, many of which bring with them new sets of assumptions. By being able to see with others' eyes, students gradually come to understand the contingent nature of assumptions they once believed were stable. Students who learn how to question their own assumptions will not only write more effectively but also learn how to accommodate diversity. In addition, the search for data and warrants substantiating challenged claims trains students to think more clearly, to require reasons for their beliefs and to require the same reasoning of others.

Because of their connection with effective writing, I make these features of critical thinking a fundamental part of our required writing courses. But I am less willing to adopt other features of critical thinking associated with argumentative writing—not because they are undesirable

but because when they are uncritically integrated into instruction, they may function as another weeding-out mechanism acting against working-class students. By uncritically, I mean adopting them as if they were class neutral rather than loaded with attributes that make them more accessible to middle-class than working-class students.

SOCIAL CLASS AND ARGUMENT

Required writing programs commonly sequence instruction by having students work in various forms of personal writing in the first semester and then “graduating” to the more impersonal argumentative writing in the second.¹ This progression is homologous to a move from the working classes, associated with the personal or subjective, to the middle and upper classes, associated with the impersonal or objective. The depersonalization of discourse demonstrates one’s distance from things, which is to say, distance from necessity—enabling, Bourdieu (1984) argues, the aesthetic disposition (53-54). One becomes distanced from one’s self—i.e., nothing is taken “personally.” By taking an impersonal stance, one is more capable of appealing to logic rather than emotion—and logic is what higher education is presumably about (Fish 2008).

Although sometimes introduced in the first semester writing courses, the controversial issue or position paper typically dominates second semester required writing courses, for which reason both the ACT and SAT have made it the model for their timed writing assessments, claiming it as the central kind of academic discourse (ACT 2003, Table 1.8; College Board 2004). The genre is reality-focused insofar as the writer is not supposed to distort information for persuasive purposes; on the other hand, the writer should carefully consider readers’ responses, arranging the information and arguments, such as putting the most significant reasons last or delaying the position statement if the writer anticipates readers who would initially be offended by the writer’s beliefs. The prototypical controversial issue essay, with its roots in

1. I looked at the Web pages of 114 universities for whom composition requirements were readily available. Seventy-four of these were non-liberal arts schools. Of these, 61, or 82%, made argument the focus of their second writing course. With 43 of these, argument was the clearly stated focus. Others described their courses in terms like writing about literature, thinking critically and backing up your arguments, or clearly stating and defending a controversial thesis; from descriptions like these, I inferred argument as the central genre. The notable exceptions were courses that emphasized discipline-based writing. Also, courses that were portfolio-based tended to be more catholic in the genres in which they had their students write.

Sheridan Baker's *The Practical Stylist* (1962), usually focuses on some issue with a thesis that is worth writing about only if the writer can imagine an antithesis that some readers would support. The essay is framed by an introduction with a specific thesis at the bottom of a triangle, a paragraph or two acknowledging oppositional points of view with rebuttal and several paragraphs presenting the writer's reasons for promoting the thesis, with each claim being supported by evidence and logic linking the evidence to the claim. The writer then restates her thesis in the conclusion and broadens out to implications or the need for further investigations. The formulaic nature of this genre, only slightly more diffused than the five-paragraph essay, is most likely the reason behind its popularity. It gives teachers and young writers something to hold on to.

Although the formulaic nature of this genre might appeal to students with working-class origins, several central features of this argumentative genre conflict with the working-class ethos. These are objectivity, multiple perspective, explicit language, stance, and dialogism. I will explore in this chapter the class biases of these features and conclude with an analysis of working-class resistance to argument, based on a misinterpretation of the genre.

Objectivity

The relationship between social class membership and objectivity is as old as Plato's parable of the cave. According to Plato's parable, the working-classes—or any colonized social group (women and slaves, in particular)—are dominated by subjectivity. They are chained to their points of view from which they can see only the stories cast on the wall. The middle classes are more likely to understand the shadows are cast by actors because members of these classes have access to the scene of manipulation. Members of these classes turn their eyes from the wall to the ledge behind them where the scenes are being staged. The higher social classes have found their way out of the cave to where they are able to see the things in themselves, the modernist *ding an sich*. These are of course the scientists and New Critics. But the truly elite social classes, dramatizing Bourdieu's (1984) thesis on distancing, are not beguiled by things, that is, by the particulars; instead they cast their eyes to the heavens, where they see the Forms. This is the paradigm of a social class hierarchy, at the upper reaches of which form is everything. Reference to the self and one's concerns—e.g., through expressive discourse—are in poor taste, a betrayal of one's lower-class heritage (Bourdieu 190-200).

The objectivity associated with the higher social classes is key to the argumentative genres that Kinneavy (1969) classifies as referential discourse with an obligation to render external reality faithfully. The best essays in these genres appeal to reasoned discourse with a balanced tone. When writers slip into pathos as an appeal, academics will be irritated by the writer's attempt to draw the reader into the emotional game. Emotional discourse, with its origins in epideictic rhetoric, may work well in political rallies but not in academic settings. The pose of objectivity, in fact, lay behind the injunction against use of the first person pronoun through the first half of the 20th century. Although the first person is now admitted in most writing classes at the college level, it must still be an objectified "I," the writer in possession of her reason, language, and stance. If Bourdieu's thesis on the relationship between social class and the distancing effect is accurate, then one's attitude toward objectivity corresponds to the social class level of the writer. Students from the higher social levels will more readily accept the objective pose because it is more a part of their ethos and language codes than it is for working-class writers.

In an analysis of his own upper-class ethos, Nelson Aldrich (1996) calls sublimation the key "operating principle of the upper-class aesthetic" (214). The upper-classes are socialized in their primary culture into sublimating their emotions, desires, and needs because they are born into the condition of being *above* it all. In their desires to be like the upper-classes, members of the middle classes pretend to the sublimation naturalized in the upper-classes. For middle-class members, the struggle for sublimation marks their primary Discourse—it is what they are born into, the *pretense* of distance through an objectified "I" (Bourdieu 1984, 253).

Academics have adopted an unnaturally naturalized tone to their objectified discourse. It's a superficially distanced tone that may seem natural to those who have been raised in the parlance, but to a working-class sensibility, the tone rings false. Here is Lynn Bloom's (1996) paradigmatic middle-class discourse:

Most of the time, the middle-class orientation of freshman composition is for the better, as we would hope in a country where 85% of the people—all but the super-rich and the very poor—identify themselves as middle class (Allen). For freshman composition, in philosophy and pedagogy, reinforces the values and virtues embodied not only in the very existence of America's

vast middle class, but in its general well-being—read promotion of the ability to think critically. (655)

Bloom's prose is a model for the tone rewarded by college teachers. Although Bloom is close to her subject here (social class and writing instruction), her tone is balanced and cool. One simply has to parse the first independent clause to see this:

Most of the time
the middle-class orientation
of freshman composition
is for the better

Her prose reads smoothly because of this control and balance—in this case, we have four lines with two strong stresses each, the second and the third lines having third secondary stresses (tá tion and sí tion) that create a rhyme. The rest of the sentence unrolls with the same balance and control to end with two dimeters

identify themselves
as middle-class

repeating her initial noun and subject with the final stress directly on the word she is emphasizing—"class." Throughout these two sentences (which I pulled almost at random from her writing—my eye having been caught by her reference to critical thinking), she uses parallel elements:

the super-rich and very poor
in philosophy and pedagogy
the values and virtues
not only in the very existence . . . but in its general well-being

She uses formal language when she has a choice: ("for" instead of "because") and the self-conscious appositive "—read promotion." This is good writing, the kind that gives academic readers confidence in the writer. But from a working-class sensibility, that appearance of control (like being carefully dressed) makes the writing and writer suspect, or as Lindquist (1999) puts it in her analysis of the barroom regulars,