RE-ENVISIONING THE FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION COURSE: A PEDAGOGY OF RECONCILIATION AND TRANSCENDENCE

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RE-ENVISIONING THE FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION COURSE: A PEDAGOGY OF RECONCILIATION AND TRANSCENDENCE

A Thesis

by

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Department of English
Abstract

of

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Statement of Problem

In the 1960s, higher education become more accessible to historically excluded groups, such as women, minorities, and the working class, forever changing the culture and population of college campuses. As a result of these changes, in 1974 the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution was passed by the membership of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Although the resolution evolved out of the growing need to address the variety of Englishes that are increasingly used at most schools, many first-year college composition instructors neglect to enact the resolution in their classrooms. Instead, many language teachers still cling to a pedagogy that favors the sole use of traditional academic discourse.

Traditional academic discourse excludes the linguistic and cultural experiences of many Americans, especially historically underrepresented groups. Its mythos is so entrenched within American learning institutions that many teachers are at a loss of how to go about teaching traditional academic discourse differently or in conjunction with other pedagogies. As a result, I developed a pedagogy that reconciles the tension and conflict between the tenets of the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution
and traditional academic discourse, a pedagogy that transcends the border and boundaries of them both, thereby creating an equitable space for the study of composition that is unfixed, experimental, and liberating while still empowering students with the necessary knowledge to gain entrance to the dominant discourse.

Sources of Data

In order to develop a pedagogy that reconciles the sometimes conflicting tenets of the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution and traditional academic discourse, I researched existing literature on composition theory, focusing mainly on the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution; the history of teaching composition and rhetoric in the United States; alternative discourses and hybrid genres; the matrix of language, power, and culture; and portfolio theory. Additionally, I developed a questionnaire, “Challenging the Traditional Discourse of the Academy: Authorizing Alternative Discourse Forms in the First Year College Composition Course” for California State University Sacramento (CSUS) teachers and students. As a result of the questionnaire, I was able to generalize about what teachers are doing in the classroom today, what students think about that, and how receptive teachers and students are to the idea of challenging traditional academic discourse.

Conclusions Reached

Based on my research, I was able to develop a pedagogy that includes the tenets of the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution and traditional academic discourse while correcting the failures of each. The Antevasinist Pedagogy, partially
derived from both Critical Pedagogy and Border Pedagogy, is a portfolio-centered, multi-discourse, multi-genre approach that includes dialectical diversity and alternative rhetorical patterns in the classroom. Antevasinist teachers and students reconcile the conflicts and gaps among the “Students’ Right” resolution and traditional academic discourse by studying the conventions of each and problem-posing their connections and disconnections, by making the conflicts and questions inherent within them visible and explicit. When a course includes the conventions of traditional academic discourse and questions of power concerning exclusive, gatekeeping discourse communities, as well as including the conventions and politics concerning alternative discourses and hybrid genres in the curriculum, writers can transcend the boundaries and limits of these pedagogies. This transcendence cultivates authentically aware, self reflective writers who are not only critically conscious of themselves and their writing, but also of the audience and the rhetorical situation.

____________________, Committee Chair
Fiona Glade, Ph.D.

____________________
Date
Dear Readers,

The purpose of this thesis is to create a pedagogy of reconciliation and transcendence—a pedagogy that moves beyond the limits and borders of traditional academic discourse and the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution. To do so, teachers of composition must create a space where experimental writing and risk taking is not only acceptable, but is encouraged and applauded. So, in order to practice what I preach, and to demonstrate one of the many possible products such a pedagogy may inspire amongst our students, I’ve done some experimenting of my own: the portions of this thesis that are in italics represent this experimentation. Some is narrative, some is something else—something I define as Antevasin. Antevasin is a term Elizabeth Gilbert uses in her popular book, *Eat, Pray, Love*. It means: “one who lives at the border,” a border in which “You can still live on that shimmering line between your old thinking and your new understanding, always in a state of learning” (203-204). The italicized portions of this thesis represent this place—a place in which I’m in a state of in-betweeness; I’m in-between learning how to write in Antevasin and mediate this with the institutional standards for a thesis and therefore my thesis and I both are somewhere in-between process and product—we’re located at a figurative border between my “old thinking and new understanding.” My “old thinking” is still present and represented in some sections of the Antevasin italicized portions as it largely resembles traditional academic discourse with just a small dash of something different, whereas other italicized
sections are ripe with difference and experimentation. I think scholar and teacher, Paulo Freire, would say that these differences—that is wavering back and forth between being able to un-indoctrinate myself from traditional academic discourse, and failing to do so—means that I, and therefore my writing in this thesis, am in the “process of becoming” (65). By insisting that my thesis represent the type of pedagogy and praxis I’m arguing for, I’m engaging in a type of education that “affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. … Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to be, it must become” (65). This thesis, and my attempts at Antevasin within it, is the becoming of the praxis—it’s education and learning in transformation. In doing so, I hope to be making a stand of inclusivity. By including alternative forms of expression, of rhetoric, of English, I’m including a piece of myself, a self that is subjective, that is comprised of culturally and materially constructed identities, a self that derives from a particular place and time in history. By doing that, I’m inviting students of composition to do the same, to express the full experience of their beings, their full identities as men and women of various cultures and experiences. Perhaps together we are in the “process of becoming” a pedagogy of transcendence.

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1 Freire’s emphasis.
DEDICATION

For Baby Honeycutt-Malekian—whose very existence is a result of this work.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was a long, challenging journey for me. I’m not sure that I would have finished it without the encouragement and support of a few special people.

First and foremost, my warmest thanks and sincerest gratitude to Dr. Fiona Glade. Thank you for your consistent guidance; for your unwavering encouragement; and for believing in me when I didn’t believe in myself. You’re a brilliant and inspiring teacher-learner-scholar.

Second, thank you to the English Teaching Associates of CSUS. Your passion and sincerity for educating your students is remarkable. Knowing you are the current and future teachers of America is truly comforting. It was an honor to have worked with you.

Finally, thank you to my family: Virginia, Hartzel, Patricia, and Mitch. You consistently inspire me to persevere, even when I feel like giving up. Thank you for putting up with me through this journey—I know it wasn’t easy for you either.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. AN INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impetus</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Rights and Awareness</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roots of Composition Theory</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Discourses</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and Pedagogy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre Studies</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio Theory</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacuna in Existing Scholarship</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. DECONSTRUCTING TRADITIONAL ACADEMIC DISCOURSE</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Traditional Academic Discourse</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. THE “STUDENTS’ RIGHT TO THEIR OWN LANGUAGE” RESOLUTION: RESISTANCE AND FAILURE</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methodology</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Analysis</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptivity to Alternatives</td>
<td>.................................................................54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Discourses/Genres</td>
<td>..................................................................................58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Solution</td>
<td>.....................................................................................59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. AN ANTEVASINIST PEDAGOGY: SHIFTING AND TRANSCENDING BORDERS ..............................................................................61

| Definition and Introduction to Antevasin | ..................................................................................61 |
| Critical and Border Pedagogies | ..................................................................................63 |
| From Intention to Practice | ..................................................................................80 |
| A Genre-based Pedagogy | ..................................................................................81 |
| From Intention to Practice | ..................................................................................91 |
| Portfolio | ......................................................................................93 |
| Critically Conscious Portfolios | ..................................................................................95 |
| Emphasizes both Process and Product | ..................................................................................97 |
| Supporting Multiple Writing Contexts/Genres | ........................................................................100 |
| Generates Student Responsibility and Investment | ........................................................................101 |
| Beneficial for Mainstream and Non-mainstream Students | ........................................................................102 |
| Portfolio Praxis | ..................................................................................104 |
| From Intention to Practice | ..................................................................................107 |
| Final Thoughts | ..................................................................................110 |
| Antevasin—the New Pedagogy | ..................................................................................112 |

Appendix A. Faculty Letter ........................................................................116

Appendix B. Informed Consent Form ................................................................117
Chapter 1

AN INTRODUCTION

The Impetus

In my third semester of teaching first-year composition, I had a revelation: maybe my students’ writing selves, the writers that live in each of them, would awaken, would spring forth like a lion and take ownership of their individual titles as kings and queens of the jungles of college composition, if they were asked to write something that didn’t fit the traditional college essay mold, and if that, ironically, would somehow release the best college essays they could write. Perhaps a special kind of assignment could free my writers from the boundaries of academic writing in a way that would empower them to write something so articulate and wonderful and liberating that it would still be accepted by university writing standards, but its differentness would serve to positively alter those standards, open them up, at the same time.

At the time, this idea of mine was murky, confusing, contradictory, and inexplicable, but sometimes that’s how our best ideas come to us: dreamlike and surreal; it’s quite difficult to articulate a nebulous idea that you don’t understand yourself into a writing assignment for students who weren’t that crazy about writing in the first place. I soon discovered my problem was that I was trying to articulate something—an assignment, a pedagogy, a genre, (who knows)—that would miraculously liberate my students from something I couldn’t define, into some writing utopia that I, you guessed it, also couldn’t define within a university system that explicitly and consistently used terms
and ideas like “challenging”, “academic discourse” and “Special attention given to effective development and support of ideas” to explain the type of writing that should take place within its confines—words and terms that didn’t appear to jive with my new, brilliant, impossible to explain idea (CSUS English Department Course Description Booklet fall 2006). So, I did what writers do—I wrote a focused free-write describing this assignment, and then after that, I did what teachers who are also graduate students and don’t have a lot of time do—I googled some of my key terms from my free-write until I found a term that would maybe work with what I was trying to do—and that term was creative nonfiction. Although creative nonfiction turned out not to be the genre I stuck with, it helped me create the assignment (see below) that was the inspiration for this thesis:

Creating Creative Nonfiction

Unit #2 is an exploration in making writing memorable by paying close attention to audience and experimenting with form, style, language, and technique. Creative nonfiction is an alternative discourse form that does just this.

Keeping in mind our readings and discussions of and about this genre, especially those ideas concerning what makes a nonfiction piece “literary” or “creative,” attempt to apply this information by creating your own creative nonfiction. Your task is to describe a scene or event (a real one) and apply the techniques of creative nonfiction such as dialogue, character development, vivid description, rhythm, etc. to your observation of this scene. This scene or event can be of or about anything as long as it is real and
happening right now. So, you can describe the scene at a nightclub that you’re visiting, or of your walk along campus, or a conversation you overhear, or a description of a public place and the actions of the people in it. The point here is to do some descriptive writing; to get some practice at using detail in your writing; to write creatively about real life.

_This assignment is informal, and should be about two pages long._

Approach this assignment from a creative writing standpoint. Consider pretending or imagining that you are writing a novel and this conversation, place, people, event are going to be included in the story. Remember though that your scene/event, whatever, must be real and something that you are witnessing.

Did you know that…fiction writers often include bits of real life dialogue, events, and/or sketches of real people in their stories? For example, some writers recreate actual conversations they have overheard or participated in, word for word, only they have their fictional characters doing the talking.

Please, take some risks with this assignment! Get really creative—yes you are reporting a nonfiction scene, but you can use any means necessary to convey this story in an interesting, new, and exciting way. You have full reign to get crazy creative here as long as you are representing the truth—the truth as you experience it.

Evaluative Criteria:

An “A” paper will:

- Be convincing that it is real
- Demonstrate the application of creative nonfiction techniques (i.e. dialogue, plot, imagery, lyrical language, etc.)
- Demonstrate vivid detail, painting a picture with words
This is a low-stakes assignment, meaning as long as I can see that you have aggressively attempted the assignment, and it has a creative nonfiction feel to it, you will do well.

*Even though the above assignment would look very different if I had written it after composing this thesis, it yielded amazing results. The writing that my students produced under what seems like a lot of constraints to me now (they must describe a real situation, they have to apply the techniques of fiction writing, etc.) was exactly what I hoped it would be—exciting, authentic, experimental, coherent and creative prose that served to break the boundaries of traditional academic discourse while still meeting the goals of academic writing such as rhetorical knowledge and knowledge of conventions (although they were using conventions not normally associated with academic writing, they were still displaying knowledge of alternative writing conventions in very effective ways); additionally, their writing demonstrated critical thinking and writing skills.*

Not only did this assignment generate great writing, but it also inspired something wonderful within my students—under my advisement they began applying this new writing self they discovered from the “Creating Creative Nonfiction” assignment to other essay assignments, and they kept reaping wonderful rewards—their writing had improved, and they had finally believed there was an effective writer within them. Also, a good percentage of my students that semester made positive comments about this assignment in the course evaluations, meaning they remembered it months later at the end of the semester. Here are some of their comments: “The most helpful part of the course was

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2 The goals I mention here are those adopted by the Writing Program Administrators’ “Outcomes Statement for First-Year composition.”
learning about and writing the creative nonfiction paper. I was able to step outside the boundaries of writing that I have learned in the past and produce a good paper”; “The creative nonfiction piece was great;” “I felt that the creative nonfiction assignment was very valuable to me. It was the best writing I have done and I was very proud with myself. That piece taught me how to use my words differently and how to be creative. I didn’t hold anything back. I let my mind flow and all my thoughts out and onto the paper. That was what I found most valuable from this class.”

I knew I was onto something once I saw the writing they produced from the creative nonfiction prompt, and their accolades for it in the course evaluations made me certain I had to explore it more. After more research, I decided creative nonfiction wasn’t the right focus for what I was trying to accomplish—it was too confining. I wanted my students to do more than apply fictional techniques to their writing, I wanted them to have the right to use their own language(s) in different forms, utilizing different genres and dialects and rhetorical strategies as they saw fit for the writing task at hand. This idea of using their own languages prompted me to remember something I hadn’t heard about since my first semester in graduate school: “The Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution. What happened to it? I remembered being ecstatic about it when I first read The Conference on College Composition and Communication’s (CCCC’s) statement on the resolution, thinking this was going to solve so many problems within the discipline of academic writing, but I hadn’t heard much about it after taking English 220A: “Teaching College Composition.” Were composition teachers practicing the
resolution? Would it be useful in developing a new pedagogy that could produce the type of liberating, well-written prose the creative nonfiction assignment had inspired? How did it connect or conflict with what many teachers appeared to be teaching in the classroom, such as the modes, formulaic writing, and an obsession with grammar correctness? Soon these questions became more focused, and my research question emerged: how can first-year composition teachers reconcile the tension and conflict between the tenets of traditional academic discourse and the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution, and in doing so, develop a pedagogy that transcends the border and boundaries of them both, thereby creating an equitable space for the study of composition that is unfixed, experimental, and liberating while still empowering students with the necessary knowledge to gain entrance to the dominant discourse? This thesis is the answer to these questions.

Literature Review

In order to create a pedagogy that would meet the aims discussed above, I researched existing literature on composition theory, focusing mainly on the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution; the history of teaching composition and rhetoric in the United States; alternative discourses and hybrid genres; the matrix of language, power, and culture; and portfolio theory.

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3 Definitions and conventions to follow in Chapter 2.
4 The “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution, passed by the Executive Committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in 1972, “affirm[ed] the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of Language” (CCC 2). The resolution is further defined and explored in the following chapters.
Language Rights and Awareness

The “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” article, written by the Committee on CCCC Language Statement, provides a “background statement” concerning misinformation about language and dialects, the assumptions underlying language education in America, the definition of key terms, and a means of providing “some suggestions for sounder, alternative approaches” (711). It also provides a thorough explanation of the resolution as well as the inspiration for it. The article, published in 1975, has been an instrumental resource for my thesis in that it confirmed for me our society’s misconceptions and ignorance regarding language usage and dialects and how these misconceptions contributed to the development of Edited American English (EAE) and the flawed and prejudiced mythos surrounding it. This article, then, was useful in terms of constructing a definition and mythos for traditional academic discourse, as it helped me construct an argument against teaching students to use traditional academic discourse exclusively. However, since the article was published thirty-five years ago, it is of course lacking in terms of current composition scholarship as well present day perceptions and effects of the resolution in the modern composition classroom, a gap my primary research (see Chapter 3) served to fill.

Geneva Smitherman’s article, “‘Students’ Right to Their Own Language’: A Retrospective” is another seminal article concerning the resolution. Smitherman gives a historical backdrop for the resolution, focusing on what was happening politically in the years leading up to it and immediately after the resolution was published. She includes
information on the National Council of Teachers of English’s (NCTE) refusal to completely support the CCCC’s resolution, choosing instead to publish their own “weaker version” of the Students’ Right resolution, and she goes on to explain the differences between the CCCC’s resolution and the resolution the NCTE created (21). Smitherman also discusses attempts by the resolution committee to provide detailed praxis ideas on how to apply the tenets of the resolution such as classroom activities, assignments, and lectures. However, much to the dismay of writing teachers everywhere, after the committee spent four years researching and compiling practical teaching materials, the CCCC decided against publishing the material (24). Smitherman credits this decision as one of the main reasons the resolution is rarely enacted and often misinterpreted; my research in Chapter 3 supports this idea. She also notes that part of the ineffectuality of the “Students’ Right” resolution was the change of political mood in CCCC and nationally into a more conservative climate. All in all, this is an informative article that has been very useful to me in my attempts to understand the intention behind the resolution and the context from which it was born.

In 2003, Geneva Smitherman and Victor Villanueva edited and published Language Diversity in the Classroom: From Intention to Practice, a wonderful book concerning the historical struggle of the “Students’ Right” resolution and how this struggle is still relevant today. It’s also a great resource for contemporary research on issues pertaining to ongoing language diversity issues as well as language diversity pedagogies and praxis. Chapter 2, “Race, Class(es), Gender, and Age: The Making of
Knowledge about Language Diversity” by Elaine Richardson is especially insightful. In it, Richardson “summarizes and speculates” on the results of the CCCC’s and NCTE’s “Language Knowledge and Awareness” survey, conducted from 1996-1998 (42). The results of this survey demonstrate that the tenets of the “Students’ Right” resolution failed to change the teaching practices of composition instructors in any significant way, while also revealing that the problems concerning language education in the 1960s and 1970s still remain. This survey inspired me to create my own questionnaire for composition instructors at my institution. I wanted to see how faculty would respond to similar questions in 2008 compared to 1998, and if a much smaller pool of respondents would yield similar results. Additionally, unlike the “Language Knowledge Awareness” survey, I included a questionnaire designed for first-year college composition students in order to gauge their thoughts on their teachers’ pedagogies and how receptive college composition students are to change; it is my contention that if student writers are encouraged to freely experiment with different types of genres, forms, styles, and Englishes, they will feel more passionate about writing which will in turn inspire and assist them in producing more effective prose.

Roots of Composition Theory

Albert R. Kitzhaber’s book, Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1850-1900 provides the most thorough history of early educational theories and practices concerning composition and rhetoric in American colleges. Kitzhaber’s retrospective accounts for the 1800s only, stopping at 1900. This early history on composition theory and praxis is
integral in understanding the mythos of traditional academic discourse \(^5\) and how much influence old and often outdated theories still carry today. Kitzhaber’s text provides only a history, but that history made it possible for me to contextualize and define traditional academic discourse. Thus, I was able to provide a contemporary analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of teaching academic discourse in the modern classroom.

*Alternative Discourses*

In recent years, alternatives to traditional academic discourse are being explored. *Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy* edited by Christopher Schroeder, Helen Fox, and Patricia Bizzell is one of the few resources on alternative discourses. Throughout the text, the authors discuss and sometimes exemplify possible alternatives to traditional academic discourse. However, the value of this text in my research has been the questions the authors ask, rather than the answers they attempt to provide. These questions, such as whether students need to continue to learn traditional academic discourse “if alternative forms are indeed emerging,” helped me to create meaningful questions for my faculty and student surveys (Preface x). They also engaged me in the process of developing my own stance on traditional academic discourse (see Chapters 2 through 4). Additionally, *Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy* provides a short definition of traditional academic discourse, which is quoted in Chapter 2; the book also discusses the complexities of trying to define alternatives to the traditional. The authors make a convincing case for blending alternative discourse forms with academic

\(^5\) I discuss the history of the mythos of traditional academic discourse in more detail in Chapter 2.
discourse, producing “mixed” or “hybrid” genres. Just as in all of the other texts discussed so far (with the exception of Kitzhaber’s work), the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution is a prevalent theme. Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy focuses on the confusion surrounding how to practice the resolution, highlighting the failure of the resolution to resolve the lack of language diversity within the academy. The editors of this text hypothesize that alternative and/or mixed forms may be a reemergence of the “Students’ Right” resolution “in a new guise” (Preface ix). Alt Dis is a fitting place to begin when researching alternatives to the mainstream.

*Power and Pedagogy*

“The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children” by Lisa Delpit, although published fourteen years prior to Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy, is especially enlightening when read as a response to the alternative discourse movement. It highlights the possible disadvantages of not teaching traditional academic discourse; it also examines how privileging alternative dialects and forms can actually hurt those very same students teachers are trying so hard to help. Delpit’s commentary on the “culture of power” and how to gain entry to that culture is a prevalent theme in my concluding chapter. Her ideas, coupled with the findings from my survey, caused me to radically change my stance on the teaching of traditional academic discourse. As a result, I’ve created my own pedagogy, Antevasin⁶, that serves to mediate the teaching of the alternative with the teaching of the traditional, thereby teaching all

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⁶ A lengthy definition of Antevasin is provided in Chapter 4.
students, border students and mainstream students, how to gain acceptance into the
culture of power while still being empowered to resist and subvert the oppressive,
gatekeeping characteristics of that same culture.

Paulo Freire’s “Chapter 2” in Pedagogy of the Oppressed is also an instrumental
piece to my argument lending much to my examination of the effects of traditional
academic discourse. I’ve used Freire’s critique of the “‘banking’ concept of education” to
contextualize the ways in which traditional academic discourse is enacted in the
contemporary classroom. Freire argues that in the process of the teacher narrating to the
students (the banking concept) the message, or the contents of what is being narrated,
become “lifeless and petrified” (57). His solution of “problem posing”—which creates a
critical consciousness among students and teachers alike—is transformative; this practice
provides a solution to the banking concept by empowering teachers and students to
narrate with each other critically, reflectively, thereby creating a praxis, not just a theory,
of liberation. His concept of reconciliation and the construction of a critical
consciousness shaped my thesis. It had me wondering what would happen if the students
filled the classroom with their narratives, as opposed to the teacher doing the narrating.
This contributed to the foundation of my Antevasinist Pedagogy.

Genre Studies

David Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University” and Amy J. Devitt’s
“Generalizing about Genre: New Conceptions of an Old Concept” were incredibly
informative in my attempts to construct an Antevasinist theory of genre. Bartholomae’s
article indirectly builds a case for using a formalist approach to genre. Bartholomae argues that students must “appropriate (or be appropriated by)” traditional academic discourse in order to be successful in academia (135). In order to assist students with the initial mimicking of this specialized discourse, I argue that they need to have a broad concept of genre, one that includes learning and being able to apply the formal elements that distinguish one genre from another. Devitt’s article explains a more contemporary conception of genre as a “dynamic and semiotic construct” (573). Building on her argument, I’ve constructed an approach to genre that includes both the formal and the rhetorical, serving to subvert the exclusivity and hegemony of traditional academic discourse while still including it in the curriculum, thereby preventing students from being denied access to the culture of power.

*Portfolio Theory*

One of the reasons the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution failed was because teachers didn’t know how to translate the tenets of the resolution into praxis—they didn’t know how to implement it. In order to prevent making that same mistake, I’ve drawn considerably from portfolio theory as a means of providing teachers with resources to use Antevasin in the classroom. *Assessing the Portfolio: Principles for Practice, Theory, and Research* by Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon is a book length study on the portfolio as it pertains to teaching and assessing composition. Hamp-Lyons and Condon provide in-depth research on what a portfolio is, what composition theories the portfolio supports, ideas on how to construct the portfolio assignment, and
how to assess portfolio writing. Their text helped me to understand exactly what a portfolio is and how it can easily be constructed to support any teaching praxis. As such, I was able to incorporate all of the tenets of Antevasin into a single theory of the portfolio method that is practical to implement in the composition classroom. The portfolio in Antevasin is the praxis.

*Lacuna in Existing Scholarship*

Although all of the above texts contributed to this thesis in significant ways, what’s missing from composition scholarship is a method for reconciling the tension and conflict between the tenets of traditional academic discourse and the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution. The next step will be to develop a pedagogy that transcends the border and boundaries of them both, creating an equitable space for the study of writing that is inclusive and liberating while still empowering students with the necessary knowledge to gain entrance to the dominant discourse. The purpose of this thesis is to create such a pedagogy. As such, in Chapter 2, Deconstructing Traditional Academic Discourse, I’ve worked first to demystify this discourse in order to develop a common definition as well as to examine its effects on the teaching of college composition. Then, in Chapter 3, The Students’ Right to Their Own Language Resolution: Resistance and Failure, I speculate as to why the resolution failed and how receptive teachers and students are to embracing the study and practice of alternative forms within the first-year college composition course. In the final chapter, Chapter 4, An Antevasinist Pedagogy: Shifting and Transcending Borders, I bridge the discoveries in
Chapters 2 and 3 to build a new pedagogy that reconciles and transcends the tenets of both traditional academic discourse and the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution. I contend that we must probe the connections and the compatibility between the two, as well as their tensions and their discontinuities, in order to overcome their shortcomings. Further, in doing so, an equitable, liberating pedagogy can be formed that will elicit passionate, authentic, effective writing from our students, just as the creative nonfiction piece did in my own first-year composition course.
Chapter 2

DECONSTRUCTING TRADITIONAL ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

The 1960s were ripe with social and political upheaval. Many movements that ran counter to the previous generation’s conservative values, such as the Women’s Movement, Black Power, and the Sexual Revolution, garnered much attention and advanced a lot of change. As a result, higher education became more accessible to historically excluded groups, such as women, minorities, and the working class, forever changing the culture and population of college campuses. Then, in 1974, one of the most significant movements for language diversity was realized—the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution, passed by the membership of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). The resolution reads as follows:

We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the
experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (CCCD 2-3)

The resolution evolved out of the growing need to address the variety of Englishes that were now increasingly used at most schools. Geneva Smitherman, one of the original resolution committee members, reveals in her article, “‘Students’ Right to Their Own Language’: A Retrospective” that the committee was using the following question as a guide when trying to develop the resolution: “Should the schools try to uphold language variety, or to modify it, or to eradicate it?” (25). As mentioned above, the doors for higher education had recently been opened to the general public; rich white men no longer comprised the entire student demographic. This new student population, which included a myriad of ethnicities and social/economic classes from a variety of locations, brought new dialects of English, as well as different rhetorical patterns and strategies of composing. These conditions necessitated a metamorphosis in the tradition of teaching composition. The mythos and foundation of traditional academic discourse (definition to follow) excluded and inferiorized all dialects and differing rhetorical forms but its own, thus marginalizing the new college population. As a result, progressive language scholars were campaigning for the legitimacy of varied dialects in the academy by creating, as Smitherman puts it, “mainstream recognition and legitimacy to the culture, history, and language of those on the margins,” which was the purpose for the resolution (21). Traditional academic discourse excludes the linguistic and cultural experiences of many Americans, especially historically underrepresented groups; the “Students’ Right”
resolution sought to include multiple discourses and dialects so that all Americans would be represented.

However, the resolution didn’t have the full support of the language scholar community. Although the CCCC committee for the resolution heavily courted the National Council of Teacher Education to endorse the resolution, they instead developed their own watered-down, or as Smitherman says, “weaker version” in 1974 (22). This less assertive resolution aligned itself with the historical tradition of privileging Edited American English by asserting that students should learn its conventions. This declaration reflects a long American tradition, or mythos, of attempting to codify and then hierarchize the writing, speaking, and rhetorical conventions of a multi-cultural, multi-lingual nation in which the dialect and rhetorical patterns of the elite were and are privileged, exiling all others to the margins. The beliefs and teaching practices that compose traditional academic discourse still permeate the profession of teaching composition, which is why the resolution is misinterpreted, misused, and often neglected in the contemporary composition classroom.

The “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution sought to undo many of the tenets of traditional academic discourse. To understand the significance of such an attempted undoing, we need a historical context in which to locate traditional academic discourse so that we have a common definition and a shared knowledge of what it is. We also need to know what implications the teaching of traditional academic discourse had, and continue to have, on the teaching of writing. However, illuminating the meaning of
traditional academic discourse is no easy feat. To do so requires an exploration in the history of teaching college composition and rhetoric. We have to look at:

- **What** (the definition of the term as well as its connotations and conventions)
- **Where** and **when** (its place in history)
- **Who** (the kind of people, education, and writing this discourse constructs as well as who is included and who is excluded from the discourse)
- **Why** (why is it important to define, historicize, and challenge tradition) in order to fully appreciate why we teach this form and why we must expand our teaching practices to include other discourses and forms.

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to arrive at a standard definition of what traditional academic discourse means, what the conventions of this discourse are, and the effects of this discourse on college composition students so that we can locate its deficiencies and harmful effects on our teaching practices, our students, and their writing. By doing so, the space for a new, more equitable, more inclusive form will emerge.

**Defining Traditional Academic Discourse**

*Rigid, non-experimental and non-experiential, non-exploratory, cautious, boring, mimicked, rational and logical, argumentative and/or persuasive, sophisticated vocabulary, usually not very clear or easy to read, but sounds impressive; not a story, Edited American English, error-free, a voice that is objective, in third person only, and sounds stuffy, and sometimes pompous, only refers to other published works, usually from the canon, and never references the writer or the reader.*
The above represents the words and ideas that I often associate with traditional academic discourse. Many people, including me, think of traditional academic discourse as formulaic writing written in a detached, third person, objective voice using only Edited American English. Traditional academic discourse also includes drawing upon others’ works (those accepted by the academy), as opposed to authorizing and even privileging the writer’s own experiences and knowledge. Additionally, it is a form that is error-centered with a focus on grammatical correctness, meaning that a student’s writing is judged primarily on perfectly correct syntax, grammar, and usage. Patricia Bizzell provides a similar, although more expansive definition in “The Intellectual Work of ‘Mixed’ Forms of Academic Discourses”:

[Traditional academic discourse] employ[s] a grapholect, the most formal and ultra-correct form of the participants’ native language, treating as “errors” usages that would be unproblematic in casual conversation. Also, traditional academic genres shape whole pieces of writing, …. Finally, the ones in power in the traditional academic community create discourses that embody a typical worldview. This worldview speaks through an academic persona who is objective, trying to prevent any emotions or prejudices from influencing the ideas in the writing. The persona is skeptical, responding with doubt and questions to any claim that something is true or good or beautiful. Not surprisingly, the persona is argumentative, favoring debate, believing that if we are going to find out
whether something is true or good or beautiful, the only way we will do that is by arguing for opposing views of it, to see who wins. In this view, only debate can produce knowledge. Knowledge is not immediately available to experience, nor is it revealed from transcendent sources. Additionally, the persona is extremely precise, exacting, rigorous—if debate is going to generate knowledge, all participants must use language carefully, demonstrate their knowledge of earlier scholarly work, argue logically and fairly, use sound evidence, and so on. (2)

In order to arrive at a standard definition, we first must understand what the word “traditional” implies when using the term “traditional academic discourse.” The word “traditional” embodies the idea of a custom that is passed down from generation to generation, hence the idea that it is older, established, and carries a history—all of which are true of traditional academic discourse. It is important to note that tradition is often accompanied by pride, heritage, and a sense of comfort derived from familiarity, which is one of the reasons it is often so difficult to stray from the traditional. For example, many professors include works by Aristotle, Shakespeare, and other educated, upper class white males in their curriculum due to the history and prestige such texts carry; the university ivory tower reveres these works and considers them to be classics, though such works, and the cultures they derive from, are not representative of the tradition of many peoples (including contemporary college students), particularly historically underrepresented and marginalized groups, such as African Americans, Chicanas/os, Asian Americans, the
economically underprivileged, and women. Yet, texts of the traditional canon are still considered seminal texts for many reasons. Certainly one of those reasons is the tradition itself of teaching them—many professors just don’t seem to know what else to teach. Additionally, when Ivy League institutions, such as Harvard and Yale, value a particular history and tradition, then other schools thus carry on the tradition. Such colleges and their curriculum are esteemed and regarded as a model for other institutions of learning. For example, Mike Rose explains in “The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University” that Harvard established the first required college composition course in 1874 in “response to the poor writing of upperclassmen” (342). From there, the idea of such a course grew and quickly became and stayed “the most consistently required course in American curriculum” (342). According to Albert R. Kitzhaber in his text, Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1850-1900, Harvard’s first course had a lasting effect on most American colleges and universities (as well as many secondary institutions):

Harvard became one of the foremost leaders (and certainly the one best publicized) in educational reform. … Harvard helped to establish the pattern that nearly all other colleges would be following by the end of the century. From 1875 to 1900, the most influential English program in America was Harvard’s. (32-3)

The focus on the study of canonical literary texts, a strict adherence to rules, grammar, and form, and the move away from rhetoric to literature as a means of studying composition permeated the country because there was a tradition of valuing and modeling
college curriculum and policy after Harvard. Hence, that past, that tradition, is seen as an authority. This perception conveys the idea that the tradition, in this case traditional academic discourse, is all-knowing. Therefore, the knowledge that tradition embodies is superior to the student’s, the writer’s, and the teacher’s own knowing and experience. Hence, traditional knowledge is privileged over personal knowledge. This shared, fictional story of traditional academic discourse creates a mythos, a cultural norm, that informs worldviews on language and power and conformity. It creates a history, a legacy that is re-enacted over and over again in college classrooms, serving to marginalize alternatives to that discourse, as well as the people who use these alternatives. How and why did this happen?

Although the history of composition studies and rhetoric is dense, what we can glean from the history is that the mythos of the dominant culture—religion and science—significantly contributed to the formation and conventions of traditional academic discourse and the teaching of writing in ways that have produced negative learning outcomes for some contemporary first-year college composition students. Initially, clergy and religious groups ruled the U.S.’s pedagogical practices and theoretical standards, which meant that it was common practice to teach school subjects in much the same way religion was practiced at the time. Christians were expected to memorize from the Bible, and not ask the preacher questions, as well as accept all words of the Bible as truths without question—all of this was a testament to one’s piousness. What those in power believed as universal truths were taught and accepted. In schools, like churches, questions
from students were discouraged, as was experimentation in teaching practices (Kitzhaber 2). Educators also “stressed generalizations thought to be universally useful” (2). This type of teaching style in modern times would translate to what Paulo Freire calls the “banking concept of education” in “Chapter 2” of his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The “banking concept” explains a system of teaching in which the teacher is the possessor of the knowledge and deposits this knowledge into the student, as opposed to the student discovering and making their own knowledge through self-reflection, experimentation, and critical analysis, even resistance (52-3). In current practice, the banking concept is manifested by a teacher-centered classroom in which the teacher is seen as the authority, the only authority in the classroom, and he or she bestows his or her superior knowledge to the students through lecture without encouraging student participation.

The advent of Darwinism in the 1800s served to decrease the clergy’s power in education, turning society’s focus from religion to science. This produced a good deal of pressure on universities and colleges to bestow more importance and “recognition” on science and the scientific (Kitzhaber 10). As a result, science became the new religion. Beth Savan, Ph.D., adjunct professor and Director of the Sustainability Office at the University of Toronto, writes: “Within our time science plays a pivotal role, comparable to the role of religion in the Middle Ages. In the contemporary setting science provides the knowledge of how to live, how to approach and solve problems, and how to understand the universe and its workings” (11). Valuing science to this degree is
reductive and biased—it excludes alternative modes of inquiry, knowledge, and experience that are just as valid, such as personal experience, emotions, and intuition. This scientistic approach\(^7\) to teaching composition is exclusionary and specious; it produces unnatural, biased, and false hierarchies and binary oppositions. In addition, to the detriment of the profession and our students, the scientistic approach served to reduce the craft of writing into a formula, placing a much greater value on the mechanics of composition, such as language correctness, over content.

Scientists are “trained to function in hierarchial structures” (Savan 12). Since scientific belief and processes are valued so highly in our culture, this need to function in hierarchial structures permeates our perception of the world so strongly that it has become the norm to view the world, including the teaching of writing, in hierarchies. As a result, traditional academic discourse is embedded with the tendency to categorize and place into hierarchies, creating dichotomies where there should be connections. In the 1850s, Herbert Spencer, “perhaps the most influential of the many spokesmen for the admission of science to academic respectability” (qtd. in Kitzhaber 10-11), was a philosopher and writer who served to spread the scientistic approach in education by placing university courses on a hierarchy. He believed that colleges should be teaching that which was most “rational” and which, according to him, were the courses and subjects that “minister most directly to the activities of existence” (11). Kitzhaber explains that Spencer arranged such subjects into a hierarchy in which the most valuable courses “(those which contribute

\(^7\) Kenneth Burke originated this term.
directly to self-preservation)’ were on the top and ‘(those ‘ornamental’ activities which help to occupy one’s leisure time)’ were placed on the bottom (11). Spencer argued that too much time and study was being devoted to the arts, a non-necessity, while not nearly enough curriculum was being devoted to science, an absolute (11). As such, the craft of writing, an art, had to be re-conceptualized as a science in order to keep it alive as a worthy course of study in the college system. This meant that the types of writing that could be seen as more scientific, such as scientific reports and research essays, were valued more than those types of writing that some perceive as more closely aligned with artistic impulses such as narrative and poetry. Compounding this was the popularity of Herbart’s Theory of Apperception, developed in 1885 (qtd. in Kitzhaber), in which students are lead from what they know or are familiar with, to what they don’t know or are unfamiliar with, providing that the unfamiliar material is related to what the student already knows (5). This theory is still found today, often in the college composition classroom. For example, many composition professors assign a personal narrative essay at the start of the semester—students write about their own lives, something familiar to them. Gradually, the students are weaned from the narrative and move on to what is viewed by many as not only less familiar, but more difficult as well, the persuasive essay, the research essay, and other modes. Although Herbart’s Theory of Apperception can be an effective teaching tool as it introduces new concepts by building on the familiar, using it to place modes of writing in a hierarchy has negative effects. As stated above, the narrative is seen as something familiar for students since they’re writing about their own
experiences. Since the Theory of Apperception is part of the mythos of traditional academic discourse, and the narrative is one of the modes teachers start with, narrative is viewed as something that is less difficult to write. This creates a false hierarchy of composition genres, while simultaneously creating a false binary between narrative and non-narrative forms. The narrative or personal is perceived as easier and therefore, less scholarly; it’s also perceived as non-scientific and “ornamental” and therefore, as inferior to the impersonal and scientific (non-narrative forms) (Kitzhaber 11).

The idea that narrative is non-scientific, and thus expendable, devalues the importance of the knowledge that is gained from personal experiences and the ability and necessity to create meaningful prose from those experiences. Additionally, valuing specific modes or genres more than others creates a literary chain of being so to speak, which serves to marginalize and discriminate against those discourse communities and cultures that value the types of experiences and communication that are associated with those genres on the bottom of the chain. For example, the masculine/feminine dichotomy is another binary construction placed on this hierarchy, with the masculine being far more privileged than the feminine, resulting in the marginalization of the female community. Since personal experience, emotional knowledge, and intuition are often associated with the feminine principal, the masculine or patriarchal principle (which dominates traditional academic discourse) is placed on the top of the hierarchy. According to Lois

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8 The culture and history that comprises traditional academic discourse produces numerous false dichotomies. I mention only a few in this thesis to illustrate the exclusionary conventions and characteristics of this discourse; too many exist to include in their entirety here.
Tyson in her text, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, patriarchal discourses, and thus traditional academic discourse, “require prescribed, ‘correct’ methods of organization, rationalist rules of logic” (92). These rules rely on “narrow definitions of cognitive experience” while “discrediting many kinds of emotional and intuitive experience, and linear thinking….” Therefore, as Tyson explains, “patriarchal ideology is often based on the false opposition of categories,” hence the same kind of thinking valued by science (92-3). The types of talking, writing, and expressing oneself that are associated with the feminine are thereby excluded, serving to marginalize a variety of useful approaches to writing, as well as to define erroneously, I might add the essence of being female as emotional, irrational, and non-linear. These fallacious and biased hierarchies cause the illusion of binary constructions—good, scientific, or academic on the one side, and bad, irrational, or non-academic on the other side.

The scientistic approach of traditional academic discourse has significantly contributed to the practice of teaching writing as a formula, and although this practice originated many years ago, as Rose explains, “Despite the fact that such assumptions began to be challenged by the late 1930s, the paraphernalia and the approach of the scientific era were destined to remain with us” (345). Ain’t that the truth! Although current composition theory and scholarship generally decry this method of teaching composition, it is still popular: many composition instructors still view the essay and academic writing as a science in which students can write a good essay if they just master the formula. The five-paragraph essay and the modes of discourse are two of the more
prevalent formulas in which students are taught to write an essay. In the five-paragraph essay approach, the first paragraph is the introduction in which the last sentence of the introductory paragraph is reserved for an explicit thesis statement that usually contains three explicit ideas or reasons. The following three paragraphs outline said reasons, and the fifth paragraph is reserved for the conclusion, which restates the thesis statement but uses different verbiage. Every college student I have taught and/or tutored has been familiar with the five-paragraph essay, and, alarmingly, most students enter college believing that the five-paragraph approach is the correct way to write an essay.

The modes of discourse are another formulaic approach in which forms of writing are classified into different types. As Robert J. Connors explains in his article, “The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse” these types are generally Narration, Description, Exposition, and Argument (444). Connors comments that in 1860, the focus of composition and rhetorical studies transformed from a focus on the classical, to a focus on the modes: “analysis of argument, eloquence, style, and taste into a discipline much more concerned with forms” (446). The modes were widely accepted as gospel from the mid-1890s until the mid-1930s in which the popularity of the modes was largely replaced with a focus on theme writing (448). However, the modes are still popular in some composition classrooms today. Many teachers organize the teaching of their courses based on the modes, teaching each of the forms sequentially, despite the fact that the modes have been “stripped of their theoretical validity and much of their practical usefulness …” (453).
Of course, the five-paragraph essay, the modes of discourse, or any formulaic approach to writing has its benefits. It gives students an easy-to-follow model, helping them to structure their content and identify a narrow topic or form on which to focus. However, there are far more negatives to formulaic writing than positives.

First, formulas limit the amount of thought that should go into composing. In “Unteaching the Five-Paragraph Essay” by Marie Foley, she writes, “instead of generating thinking, the formula deters it” (231). Once students have met their “quota of three body paragraphs, they are free to stop thinking about their topic,” resulting in underdeveloped, unsophisticated essays that deprive students of becoming critical thinkers and writers (231-32). By limiting students’ thinking process, these essay formats do not allow students to probe connections and relationships among ideas, or identify conflicts and contradictions; formulas prevent student writers from engaging in scholarly, academic thinking and therefore, prevent the type of writing that is generated from such thinking.

Secondly, formulas oppose authentic, self-expression and creativity in writing: “My experience has been that students training in the five-paragraph method regard essay writing as an alien, unnatural enterprise. Filling in the structure with the requisite 500 words, they go through the motions of writing, but they seldom create something authentically theirs” (Foley 232). Albert R. Kitzhaber offers another commentary on the negative learning outcomes produced by formulaic writing, explaining that the modes of discourse “represent an unrealistic view of the writing process, a view that assumes
writing is done by formula and in a social vacuum. They turn the attention of both teacher and student toward an academic exercise instead of toward a meaningful act of communication in a social context” (220-1). Adherence to any type of rigid formula deprives writers of playing with language, of writing their thoughts and ideas freely, of discovering who they are—all through the act of composing. The types of texts formulaic writing produces then are lifeless, static, boring things that fail to achieve the goal of rhetoric—they don’t move the reader, they’re not persuasive, and, as Kitzhaber points out, they fail to acknowledge the rhetorical situation by ignoring the social context of writing. Perhaps most important, formulaic teaching methods espouse fallacious rules about writing that are in direct opposition to the actual practice of professional writers.

The scientistic approach of creating biased hierarchies, false dichotomies, and formulaic writing has significantly contributed to the exclusionary nature of traditional academic discourse. However, none of these has contributed more to the marginalization of large numbers of students than the privileging of one English dialect over another, creating a detrimental focus on language “correctness.” Kitzhaber writes, “Running beneath all these theories, however, and stronger than any of them, was the doctrine of mechanical correctness” (222). Although researchers in linguistics and composition have made great strides in proving that one dialect or language cannot be inferior or superior to another, and as Arnetha F. Ball and Rashidah Jaami` Muhammad explain in “Language Diversity in Teacher Education and in the Classroom” that “language is dynamic and ever changing …there are no permanent or absolute standards,” the privileging of Edited
American English and its correct usage are still alarmingly prevalent (78). This false myth that one dialect is more correct or more civilized than another began long ago. The Committee on CCCC Language Statement explains: “Since the eighteenth century, English grammar has come to mean for most people the rules telling one how to speak and write in the best society” (717).

The Committee Statement on the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution outlines American history on choosing and privileging one discourse over another. The Committee explains that initially, differences in dialect were common and were not looked down upon. Gradually, London became a political and commercial power, and soon after, the dialect spoken and written there became dominant. As America became colonized, and the social classes became stratified, “America sought to achieve linguistic marks of success as exemplified in what they regarded as proper, cultivated usage. Thus the dialect used by prestigious New England speakers became the ‘standard’ the schools attempted to teach” (713). Education systems still propagate the idea that one dialect, Edited American English, is more “correct” than others. The standardization of dialect lead to an obsession with language correctness. Kitzhaber writes that by the 1890s, “grammar, punctuation, and capitalization had begun to take up an increasing amount of space in rhetorics, and books” (223-24). During this era, American colleges believed that teaching grammar was the responsibility of the primary school; however, since students were still making grammatical and mechanical mistakes on their college entrance exams, and “‘bad’ (that is incorrect) English” was a “national
issue,” the college English course “soon gave less attention to rhetoric and more to grammar and mechanics” (223-24). Kitzhaber goes on to document that about 40% of rhetoric texts in 1900 through 1915 were focused purely on grammar. In fact, as Kitzhaber explains, one of the most widely used rhetorics of the 20th century, Edwin C. Woolley’s Handbook of Composition, “consisted of 350 numbered rules covering grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation and capitals, spelling, manuscript form, etc. … The tone throughout was negative and dogmatic” (224-225). This focus on grammar correctness misrepresents the writing process:

> It has been a powerful force in perpetuating that distorted view of the true nature and function of grammar that the over-prescriptive approach necessarily brings with it. It has encouraged an unreal conception of the writing process by exalting to the highest place what is, after all, only a subordinate part of composition: correctness in details. And finally, it has helped to entrench the view of writing as something that is done well if only it is done by rule. (Kitzhaber 225)

This focus on “correct” or “standard” usage, grammar, punctuation, and spelling is still prevalent in the teaching of composition. Even though by the 1960s and 1970s linguists and sociologists had established that no dialect is superior to another, and that mastery of grammar was not a sign of intellect, it was and still is a huge concern for students, teachers, and the public alike. Ironically, it’s this distorted concern that prevents students from excelling in composition:
The most serious difficulty facing ‘non-standard’ dialect speakers in developing writing ability derives from their exaggerated concern of the least serious aspects of writing. If we can convince our students that spelling, punctuation, and usage are less important than content, we have removed a major obstacle in their developing the ability to write.

(Committee on CCCC Language Statement 8)

This “exaggerated concern” for standard grammar usage is counterproductive; it doesn’t reflect the actual written and spoken dialects of our pluralistic society. Our students need to know how to effectively communicate within a global society, rather than with only one portion of society that systematically works to marginalize those very same students. Additionally, this focus on mechanical correctness defines the composing process in very limited, distorted ways, leaving out the rhetorical complexity of effective writing, and the connections between power, identity, and language.

Traditional academic discourse is a scientistic approach to teaching writing. It prescribes formulas; it creates unnatural, biased hierarchies; and it values one dialect over all others, excluding other forms of language practices. Although educators and scholars have made great strides in how the mind works and how this can best benefit the teaching of composition, too many college instructors are still teaching traditional academic discourse. Composition instructors must find a way to help students gain access to the language of the academy without reducing the craft of composing to a mere scientific
calculation, and most importantly, without sacrificing students’ cultural and linguistic identities.
Chapter 3

THE “STUDENTS’ RIGHT TO THEIR OWN LANGUAGE” RESOLUTION:
RESISTANCE AND FAILURE

The “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution was an important historical event in the teaching of composition: it foregrounded the changing population of college campuses and the necessary curricular changes that needed to be made in order to meet the needs of this new college population. Additionally, it was the biggest impetus for creating awareness within academic institutions of dialectal diversity, and it legitimized non-standard Englishes. Despite its historical significance, far too many composition instructors are not enacting the resolution in their classrooms. As Geneva Smitherman and Victor Villanueva point out in their book, Language Diversity in the Classroom: From Intention to Practice, “Students’ Right to Their Own Language Resolution and the CCCC National Language Policy were [and are still] no longer recognized” (Introduction 3). In this chapter, I “summarize and speculate”9 about the responses to my questionnaire, “Challenging the Traditional Discourse of the Academy: Authorizing Alternative Discourse Forms in the First-Year College Composition Course,” which concerns composition pedagogical techniques and beliefs and the reception of such techniques by teachers and students alike. My goal was to learn what teachers are doing in the classroom today, what students think about that, and how receptive teachers and students are to the idea of challenging traditional academic

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9 Elaine Richardson uses this term in her essay, “Race, Class(es), Gender, and Age” when referencing the Language and Awareness Survey (42).
discourse. Their responses, coupled with additional research by composition scholars, have made it possible for me to speculate about why the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution has so far failed.

Research Methodology

My research design is a qualitative approach comprised of open-ended questionnaires regarding pedagogical techniques and beliefs within the English Studies discipline. My goal was to get an impression of faculty thoughts on the “Students’ Right” resolution, what they’re doing in their classrooms, what students think about that, and how receptive teachers and students are to the idea of challenging traditional academic discourse forms. My research package to participants included the following: a cover letter to CSUS English Department faculty that explained the topic and purpose of my research (see Appendix A); informed consent forms explaining that all participation in the research was voluntary (see Appendix B)\(^\text{10}\); a call for submissions directed to professors asking for syllabi, course assignments, classroom activities and discussion ideas concerning alternative methods of teaching first-year composition (see Appendix C); a faculty questionnaire (see Appendix D); and student questionnaires (see Appendix E)\(^\text{11}\).

I dispersed my questionnaire packets among the CSUS English Department faculty population, totaling eighty-two teachers\(^\text{12}\), by placing the questionnaires in faculty

\(^{10}\) Informed consent forms were signed by all participants.

\(^{11}\) All of my research documents are included in Appendix A, B, C, D, E.

\(^{12}\) These teachers were a mix of full-time, tenured professors, lecturers, part-time teachers, and Teaching Associates. I dispersed questionnaires to all English faculty, including teachers of Composition, Literature,
mailboxes. Of those eighty-two, five professors provided responses. No professors replied to my call for submissions. I provided student questionnaires to every odd numbered\textsuperscript{13} “Introduction to College Composition” course for a total of fourteen courses. Seventeen students responded. My sample size was much smaller than I anticipated; therefore, my results are limited in terms of how much I can generalize about the CSUS English Department. However, those who did respond provided useful and interesting data worthy of consideration.

My questionnaire, “Challenging the Traditional Discourse of the Academy: Authorizing Alternative Discourse Forms in the First-Year College Composition Course” called for open-ended, subjective responses based on personal teaching and writing practices, beliefs, and experiences. My analysis of the responses is content-centered; I’ve narrowed in on themes and trends among the responses. Characteristics of those responses, through the use of direct quotes and paraphrases, are included in my research narrative below. My research questionnaire package was approved by the Sacramento State University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Research Analysis

Responses to my questionnaire along with additional information and research by the Language Policy Committee of CCCC, Patricia Bizzell, Kim Brian Lovejoy, Elaine Richardson, Geneva Smitherman, Victor Villanueva, and others provide further insight and Creative Writing. Responses to the sample consisted of 3 full-time tenure-track professors and two part-time lecturers.

\textsuperscript{13} I chose every odd numbered course in order to produce a random sample.
into why the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution failed. These reasons are as follows:

- Many teachers and scholars misinterpreted the resolution as a total replacement of traditional academic discourse and Edited American English. Society’s attachment to the mythos of traditional academic discourse and penchant for grammar correctness is still so compelling that the mere mention of alternatives often causes a collective and perhaps intentional misreading.

- Many faculty feel conflicted and perhaps resistant about the resolution (namely because it is widely misinterpreted).

- Very few teachers receive any guidance or training in how to implement the resolution or other alternatives to traditional academic discourse in their classrooms; they understand the theory, but they are uncertain as to how to translate that theory to praxis.

1.) Many teachers and scholars misinterpreted the resolution as a total replacement of traditional academic discourse and Edited American English.

Unfortunately, too many writing teachers misunderstood the “Students’ Right” resolution as a proclamation to abandon the teaching of traditional academic discourse and its counterpart, Standard English, or Edited American English (EAE). According to “Practical Pedagogy for Composition” by Kim Brian Lovejoy, “Many teachers interpreted the resolution to mean that they should let their students speak and write any way they want” (92). This misunderstanding, or perhaps purposeful misreading, is
widespread. Responses to my questionnaire demonstrate that faculty are concerned about how the resolution might affect the teaching of Edited American English (EAE) in their classrooms, and they seem to place a greater value on EAE, or “correct grammar” as some of them referred to it, than they do on other Englishes. One respondent writes, “How do we allow different dialects and, at the same time, teach the grammatical rules of Standard English?” Concerns regarding the resolution, and about upholding the tradition of EAE, are common and powerful. Current scholarship often presents the idea of formal grammar instruction as an antiquated notion, but the reality is that a large percentage of teachers, and our society, still believe in teaching it formally, or at least placing it relatively high on the hierarchy of valuing and assessing essays. In fact, many of the respondents to my questionnaire indicated that they require most of their assignments to be written in EAE, calling it “the currency of the academy” (faculty respondent). It often seems that the majority of American society tends to place great importance on the instruction and application of Edited American English: “We tend to hold to the belief that there is but one tongue that must be mastered if those students before us are to succeed, the standardized American English, the conventions of an universalized Edited American English. It doesn’t sit well, but there it is, we say” (Smitherman and Villanueva, Introduction 2). Thus, a contradiction arises between the resolution and the values of American society and writing professionals. On the one hand, affirming students’ rights to use the language of their nurture feels like the politically correct thing to do, and many language scholars, including the respondents to my questionnaire,
support this aspect of the resolution (in theory). But, on the other hand, practicing the resolution and truly accepting the type of writing, voice, dialect and grammar it can produce disrupts a powerful tradition. This disruption confuses and angers the public and writing instructors alike, which serves to undermine the principles set forth in the resolution. This situation leads to the non-practice of the resolution’s principles.

This great concern regarding the conventions of Edited American English is still a primary concern for most language instructors, not just the instructors who responded to my survey at CSU Sacramento. A 1996-1998 study comparable to mine found similar results. The “Language Knowledge and Awareness Survey” commissioned by the Conference on College Composition and Communication and the National Council of Teachers of English, and conducted by the Language Policy Committee of the CCCC to gauge the “state of knowledge, training, and attitudes about linguistic diversity of the membership of the leading organization of language arts professionals” found that 96.1% of the respondents agreed with the following statement: “Students need to master standard English for upward mobility” (Richardson 45). Only 3.9% disagreed (42, 45). In addition, the 89.5% of the respondents agreed that “Students who use nonstandard dialects should be taught in standard English,” yet 80.1% agreed that “There are valid reasons for using nonstandard dialects,” which, like my findings, suggests a contradiction (46). Most composition instructors share the idea that students need to master Edited American English as opposed to other Englishes, even though they acknowledge that there are good reasons to use nonstandard English. This contradiction is directly related
to the second reason the resolution failed—teachers are conflicted. Many may feel obligated to teach the traditional for the sake of their students as the academy, and society at large, value it. Others simply feel attached to the mythos of traditional academic discourse even while acknowledging the value and necessity of making room for other discourses. In order to actually practice both the traditional and untraditional, this conflict needs to be reconciled in a way that acknowledges the powerful currency of being able to apply the conventions and grammar of traditional academic discourse while doing the same for marginalized discourses. Without this reconciliation, our students’ writing is not only negatively affected (as described in Chapter 2), but teachers are unintentionally supporting hegemony as well:

Ideologies that follow from and support people in positions of power, wealth, and status, consciously or unconsciously, uphold systems of inequity. Arguments such as “students need access to the mainstream” and “students need access to standardized varieties of English” do more to uphold the idea of a monolithic “correct” English and the system that it supports than they do to benefit the subordinated, stigmatized, or least preferred social groups. (Richardson 53)

As one faculty respondent so eloquently puts it, “At the very least, faculty should be aware of the grammars of all dialects—that they are not random variations from the ‘standard,’ but they follow their own grammatical system of rules.”\[14] The resolution

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\[14\] Respondent’s emphasis.
sought to bring this understanding to light, but did so in a way that made it easy for composition instructors to misconstrue it as either/or—traditional academic discourse and Edited American English, OR nonstandard Englishes and genres; opposed to one and all—both traditional academic discourse AND other discourses. As Lovejoy explains, the former was a horrible misconception: “The ‘Students’ Right’ policy was never intended to diminish the importance of EAE; rather, it was a call for teachers to teach EAE within the context of other Englishes” (92). However, since the resolution was widely misinterpreted as a policy that sought to eradicate Edited American English, and teachers were at a loss as to how this idea would affect classroom practice, many teachers didn’t attempt it. As a result, the resolution failed (92).

Unfortunately, instructors’ misinterpretation of the resolution and their subsequent preferential treatment of Edited American English and traditional academic discourse negatively affects their students’ perception of college writing. As evidenced in the students’ responses to my questionnaire, too many students emerge from the writing classroom believing “that there is really only one right way\textsuperscript{15} to use written language—and that’s to use EAE” (Lovejoy 92). In fact, the students’ responses to my questionnaire demonstrate that they define academic writing in much the same way that I define traditional academic discourse in the previous chapter. The common adjectives they use to define academic writing are: “hard, boring, and persuasive,” and most of their

\textsuperscript{15} Lovejoy’s emphasis.
descriptions referred to specific formatting and structuring techniques as well as the formal elements of an essay.

What I noticed here, and I think is especially telling, is what was lacking in these definitions of academic writing. They didn’t mention audience awareness, coherence, clarity, or the expression of passion and/or creativity. I speculate that the reasons these important writing elements were missing from the teachers in my sample is because most of them are still teaching traditional academic discourse exclusively, without exposing students to other Englishes and alternative discourses. This may be because they’re focusing far too much on mechanical correctness and format, rather than on content. Traditional academic discourse is the default button—it’s so closely tied to the American traditional mythos that, when in doubt, teachers simply teach the tradition, which is what they were taught. Therefore, they feel comfortable teaching it. In fact, when I asked teachers, “When you ask your students to write using academic discourse, what kinds of assignments do they write? For example, formal academic essays, informal narratives, poetry, journals, or other genres?” The term “formal academic essays” was used by almost all of the respondents when answering this question. It is a broad genre with various connotations for various people, but the term is often closely tied to a product demonstrating traditional academic discourse. Perhaps for some, the formal academic essay is synonymous with Aristotelian argumentation, or simply an argument essay, whereas for others perhaps this term means any essay that is non-narrative and written in Edited American English.
The problem here is that it isn’t clear what this term really means, and because I used this term as an example of academic discourse in my question, no one attempted to hint at what this genre included, except for one faculty respondent, who categorized her assignments by the headings of “informal” and “formal.” What made this response so interesting is that she included “informal” as part of academic discourse. The “informal” genre we often see in composition classes isn’t always viewed as academic discourse per se. It is often looked at as something teachers assign students to prepare them for formal writing—the real academic discourse. Hence, informal is often interpreted by students (and many teachers) as easier, less relevant to university writing, and less important to include in instruction and writing practice. Therefore, it is placed on the bottom of the writing hierarchy. Everyone included the language “formal academic” in relationship to the word “essay.” So perhaps one can deduce that many feel that an essay should always be, or is always, “formal” and “academic” in order to be called an essay, and that the “formal academic essay” is a permanent fixture in every composition classroom. It is difficult to attempt to argue what this means because I am uncertain as to what specifically these respondents mean when they use this term. What are the conventions of a “formal academic essay”? My feeling is that this term produces a shared meaning that is closely linked to the genre that comprises traditional academic discourse as I have defined it, with the occasional divergence. Hence, a formal academic essay is written in a way that utilizes the following characteristics: Edited American English; the third person voice (occasionally narrative is permitted); critical analysis; standard or traditional
organization methods; sourced information used as support; few to no errors; and sophisticated language choices.

My research indicates that far too many scholars do not fully comprehend the resolution, and what people don’t fully understand, they can’t fully practice. Is the problem here that the resolution isn’t written clearly enough and explained thoroughly enough? Or, is it an intentional, yet subconscious misreading—some refuse to accept other grammars, other genres, or any rhetorical strategies other than traditional academic discourse, whether they realize it or not. What is needed then is an explicit new way of teaching writing that embraces the tenets of the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution but still allows for an exploration of traditional academic discourse and EAE, as well as experimentation with other discourses and genres. That way the goal of the resolution to “struggle for the wider social legitimacy of all languages and dialects and to struggle, whenever one had a shot at being effective, to bring about mainstream recognition and acceptance of the culture, history, and language of those on the margins” could still be met (Smitherman 18).

#2.) Many faculty are conflicted and perhaps resistant about the resolution.

All faculty responses to my questionnaire claimed to be supportive of the resolution, but then expressed skepticism and resistance towards alternative discourse forms and non-standard grammars. So this begs the question: Are some teachers pretending to support these ideas when secretly they disagree with them, or are they
genuinely confused, conflicted, and unprepared to truly practice the tenets set forth in the resolution? Or could it somehow be a combination of all of the above?

Based on the student responses to my questionnaire, this dilemma seems to manifest itself when teachers fall back on teaching exclusively the traditional i.e., modes, formal grammar instruction, and formulaic techniques. One student writes, “I expected to learn more about styles of writing. … It was more—Here are WRITING RULES, Now Go Do It [sic].” Another student wrote, “These courses should be called Grammer [sic] and Punctuation 101. I mean that’s what the classes are all about.” Very few of the student respondents felt that their English 1A course necessitated any type of writing or thinking that was “outside the box” (this is the term they used, and they used it frequently), which was contrary to what many expected to learn: “College professors try to teach the fundamentals too much. I expected to be taught to think outside the box in college, not just the fundamentals of writing.” One student even argued that professors engage in a kind of charade, feigning an open stance, but then not exercising this sense of openness when a written work strays from traditional academic discourse. For example, in response to the following question: “In your experience, are college instructors open to students writing in creative and/or alternative ways? Explain.” A student wrote, “I think the instructors pretend to be open, but they are not prepared when an essay surprises them….”

So even though all faculty respondents reported that they support the resolution, there is a subtle, yet definite contradiction regarding their alleged support. Very few of
the faculty respondents were explicit in their support without being contradictory, confused, or including the words, “Yes [I support the resolution] but.” The implication is that the faculty respondents support the resolution, kind of: “In principle [I support the resolution], yes! But I am unclear about what is meant by dialect—simple stylistic differences? Conversational vs. academic? How does grammar fit in?” And, “Yes. But at the same time I recognize the need for some standard of writing, at least within each University discipline.” Many support the principles of the resolution in theory, but they are conflicted about its practicality and usefulness in academic writing. And again, we see more confusion regarding the resolution and Edited American English grammar and dialect. One faculty respondent wrote, “How, why, what will this do to grammar education, how will the students make it in the university?” So they do support the resolution in theory, but when it comes to implementation, they start to question the resolution they say they support. A second respondent wrote the following to explain how she demonstrates her support of the resolution in the classroom: “I do not penalize students for language/dialect/verbiage/etc. that they may use in their writing so long as it is grammatically correct and/or I am able to understand what the student is trying to convey.” This response/issue connects back to the first reason the resolution failed: misinterpretation of the resolution and attachment to EAE as well as a lack of training. It also demonstrates the issue of confliction and resistance. Even the professor’s answer is conflicted. So which is it—if it isn’t grammatically correct, does the professor penalize the students? Does she only penalize them if it isn’t grammatically correct and she can’t
determine what the student is trying to do? Her response indicates that she is quite concerned about grammar, leading me to believe that her perception of the resolution is focused primarily, or perhaps entirely, on that one issue. It appears as though some teachers are paying lip service to the idea of accepting and promoting diversity, yet when it comes to actually practicing diversity, there is a conflict. Why is this the case? Perhaps we feel obligated to say we support it?

Another display of conflict surfaced on the following question: “How many assignments do you think students should write in Standard Academic English?” Most of the responses to this category were non-answers, meaning the respondents did not provide any kind of definite, declarative answer, or they left it blank or didn’t feel confident that they understood what “Standard Academic English” meant. I interpret these non-answers as a form of resistance. It appears faculty do not want to deal with the politics that surround Standard Academic English/Edited American English and traditional academic discourse and the genres these traditions perpetuate. It’s possible that they think answering this question clearly indicates where they stand on the issue, which is that they think most academic writing should be in EAE, which, of course, seems to contradict their earlier claims that they support the CCCC’s resolution.

Similarly, Smitherman and Villanueva share in their Introduction to Language Diversity in the Classroom: From Intention to Practice that “What the researchers discovered is that appearing16 racist is the taboo, not racism itself” (Smitherman and Villanueva, 2017).
Introduction 3). Perhaps subconsciously, or even consciously, their resistance and non-answers are racist notions cloaked in ignorance. Appearing politically correct is a powerful force in academia, and by outwardly supporting the resolution, teachers and scholars look the part.

Even though many language scholars publicly support including the language practices of marginalized students into their classes, one-third of the CCCC’s members “[do] not appear to be in accordance with these policies and principles” (Richardson 48). Elaine Richardson speculates that this “might be due to the dominance of the ideology of English monolingualism in America, the belief that it is not normal for citizens to be bilingual or multilingual and that once one learns English, it should be spoken all the time given the superpower status of English worldwide” (48-9). Although the “superpower status of English” is pervasive, as are racism and ethnocentricity, these are only small reasons for the conflict. Based on the findings of my questionnaire, I speculate that the real crux of the issue for most composition instructors is this: How do teachers uphold the principles set forth in the resolution while still successfully preparing students for the university and their future careers, places that do not always recognize anything but Edited American English and traditional academic discourse?

There were only two respondents who did not demonstrate any conflict or doubt about their support and their interpretation of the resolution; they were the same respondents who provided a thorough and confident explanation as to why they support it. Following is an example: “Yes. I support it because it allows for comp classes to be a
gateway rather than gatekeepers. Honoring a range of discourses and dialects in the classroom helps serve as a bridge between students’ prior experience and the arena of academic discourse.” This “gateway” is an important metaphor. Perhaps if more teachers could see the resolution as a gateway into other discourses, including traditional academic discourse, the resolution would be less contentious.

3.) Very few teachers receive any guidance or training in how to implement the resolution or other alternatives to traditional academic discourse in their classrooms; they understand the theory, but they are uncertain on how to translate that theory to praxis.

Geneva Smitherman succinctly determines one of the problems plaguing the “Students’ Right” resolution: “To be sure, there was high interest and enthusiasm, but unfortunately, there was also lingering confusion—you know, ‘Well, what they want me to do?’” (“Student’s Right” 24). The Resolution and the background document the CCCC published in support of the resolution was “informative in terms of theory, [yet] it did not go far enough in praxis” (24). The resolution’s committee sought to determine what schools should “do about the language habits of students who come from a wide variety of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds,” which it answered quite beautifully in theory (Committee on CCCC Language Statement 709). They did a superb job of advancing their argument about why teachers needed to address this question and why it was a political question concerning equity, yet they didn’t address how to accomplish it. This omission was significant—it caused the resolution to fail.
In my questionnaire, I asked three questions concerning training in order to gauge the level of explicit training teachers received on this issue as well as the level of support for such training:

- Are you clear on how to implement and practice the principles set forth in the resolution in the writing courses you teach? Please explain.
- What training, if any, have you received on how to implement the resolution in your classroom?
- Do you think training should be provided to faculty? Why or why not?

Although every single faculty response I received supports the idea of receiving training in how to implement the resolution in their classrooms, many indicate that they have received little to no training whatsoever. The little training that some faculty have received is not really training, but rather instruction on the theory of the resolution. For example, one respondent had studied Ethics of Composition Administration, which incorporated dialogue and discussion regarding “access and comfort in the classroom,” while another indicated that he had read “theoretical articles on the subject during graduate school.” Most responses, however, confirmed that they received “None specifically.” In fact, none of the respondents indicated they had received explicit instruction on the praxis of the resolution.

This is a significant problem—theory is useful and important to any teacher’s education, but educating teachers in theory alone is not enough. One responder explains this idea quite succinctly: “I think we all need training … because it is easy to get on
board philosophically, but hard to dream up ways to implement it.” All of the respondents reflected this same view—they thought they understand the theory behind the resolution, but were not educated on how to enact the theory in their classrooms and assignments. Only one faculty member expressed confidence and solid knowledge in how to enact the ideas of the resolution, but this was a result of her own research. She wrote that her coursework did address the ideas of the resolution “explicitly,” but she had not received any resolution-specific training on implementation. Explicit praxis ideas are just as important as theory, yet praxis is glaringly absent: This produces under-prepared writing instructors. They are aware of the important issues surrounding language instruction, but they don’t know how to meaningfully address any of these issues, nor do they know how to include the writing and rhetorical strategies of marginalized students into their classroom. Again, the theory exists, but the praxis is absent.

The CCCC “Language Knowledge and Awareness Survey” found that “over a fourth of the respondents had had no course in language diversity in college, yet 95.5 percent agreed that such a course was necessary for teacher preparation today” (Richardson 55). My questionnaire supports this finding. Generally, faculty responses indicate that graduate school does not provide the necessary education on how to enact these ideas in the classroom and that explicit praxis training is needed. This lack of explicit training, coupled with the misinterpretation of the resolution’s stance on grammar and genre education, and the resulting conflict this misconception produces in teachers, are why the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution failed.
Receptivity to Alternatives

Despite the failure of the resolution, some teachers are receptive to the idea of challenging traditional academic discourse by being open to asking their students to write in alternative ways. As Christopher Schroeder, Helen Fox, and Patricia Bizzell point out in their Preface to Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy, the alternative discourse movement includes those forms that refuse to “follow all the conventions of traditional academic discourse and may therefore provoke disapproval in some academic readers” (Preface ix). Specifically, alternative forms include hybrid genres (combing traditional academic discourse with nontraditional elements such as mixing prose with poetry); using nonstandard dialects in conjunction with or in contrast to EAE; and utilizing creative fiction techniques in a nonfiction essay (just to name a few).

The respondents to my questionnaire who invite their students to practice alternative discourse forms in the classroom do so by letting students respond to traditional assignments in the alternative ways mentioned above or by creating assignments that call for alternative discourse forms. These same respondents believe alternative discourses have a positive effect on student writers because they enable and encourage the practice of “all kinds of composing so that they [students] can discover their fortes.” Such methods also help to “foster critical/creative thinking” and push “students to think about themselves as composers/writers more broadly, which couldn’t be accomplished w/ academic discourse alone.” Another respondent wrote that if she

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17 Respondent’s emphasis.
didn’t participate or incorporate alternative discourses into their curriculum, or at least allow students to practice them, that she would be “underserving an already underserved univ. [university] population.” This is an excellent point—not only does the invitation to alternative discourse forms help manifest the resolution in the classroom and create opportunities for “all kinds of composing,” but it also serves students who are often marginalized from university writing, especially students whose home discourse and rhetorical strategies often conflict with those of EAE and scientistic epistemologies.

Others have mixed feelings. They are open to the idea of alternative discourse forms, but only to a certain degree. They have requirements. They’re conflicted. They’re somewhat supportive. They have concerns. For example, one respondent in particular said he allows students to practice writing in alternative genres, but he still “enforce[s] the grammar of Standard English.” Also, he is concerned about responding to and grading such assignments because of “grammar issues.” Respondents also express a concern about rigor and audience awareness. Some feel narrative (a genre that many people assign to the alternative category) is “easier than argument” and seem worried that students will engage in some kind of mysterious writing free-for-all in which they avoid analysis and appropriate audience awareness. However, these same teachers want their students to understand “that there is more than one way to write.” Some, however, counter this with the idea that the legitimacy of alternative discourse is discipline-dependent.
Then there are those who are simply unsupportive and resistant to all non-standard approaches to writing in the composition classroom. They don’t believe that it has any benefit to the student, and/or they worry that including alternative discourse forms will “confuse students when they are expected [to practice] different forms and standards in other classes.” There is also the fear that the student’s opportunity for success in the university will be negatively affected: “I want students to succeed in the university environment that is slow to move away from accepted standards of writing.” This is a valid concern. Not only has the university been slow to accept alternative dialects and discourses, but so has society as a whole. Many students who cannot apply traditional academic discourse conventions to their writing fail their courses and may be even perceived by some as less intelligent.

Although the teachers I surveyed had mixed feelings about alternatives to traditional academic discourse, the students who responded to my questionnaire were very receptive to alternatives. Almost all of the students were open and excited about the idea of experimenting with other forms and more creatively based, alternative composition techniques and assignments, styles, and genres. The most common reason is that most students felt that exposure to different and various writing situations created better writers and broadens their horizons. Additionally, they found alternative and creative writing genres more interesting; thus, it has been my experience that the more interested students are in the style or topic of writing, the more effective their prose. However, the vast majority expressed a grave concern about these ideas in relationship to
their grade and the expectations of their professors. Many students mentioned that they feared such experimentation would negatively affect their grade, and therefore they don’t attempt it. In response to a question I asked about whether or not students felt that their writing was ever censored, one student respondent wrote, “Students are forced to write only what they believe will achieve a high grade.” Additionally, one particular student made a very interesting comment regarding the standards of the university in reference to a question concerning the level of freedom students feel in experimenting in their writing courses: “Not really [do I feel free to experiment with my writing], because there are standards to follow.” The standards for a writing class should be context, or essay, specific. That’s what writing is—it is audience, writer, context, genre, purpose-specific; therefore, the “standards” differ as these situations differ. University blanket standards are unproductive and confusing for students because they unrealistically represent the aims and process of writing. This comment also raises the concern that the students are lead to believe that there are universal college writing standards. Perhaps there are a few shared standards such as clarity and original work, but the idea that all college writing standards are the same burdens the writer with unnecessary restrictions. This misconception also creates false hierarchies of what is most effective and valuable when accessing a finished piece of writing: “I tend to worry about the format of my essays not the content. Teachers prefer structure not creativity.” Student respondents also express a fondness for free-writes and creative writing, and they enjoy practicing or responding to a variety of writing assignments—they like composing in different genres. One particular
teacher of the students who responded to my survey assigned a narrative, a book review, a research essay, and an analytical essay, which almost all the students thought was effective in that it gave them the opportunity to do something a little bit different each time. However, the student respondents still overwhelmingly expressed a feeling of university restrictions even within this variety of assignments.

Alternative Discourses/Genres

Only a small percentage of the respondents used what I deem as alternative discourse forms under the “academic discourse” heading: letters, flyers, presentations, journals, and free-writes. What I learned from this question is that the concept of academic discourse, or the definitions/conventions associated with it, certainly affect the way we see genre—how it does so varies a bit, but not much. Most faculty respondents still associate the term with the modes of writing such as analysis, argument, and narrative, while only a few seem to view it as any writing done in the college classroom (informal, formal, scripted, free). More teachers might be willing to utilize alternative discourses if they were aware of the possibilities these alternatives create. As Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell point out, alternative forms “enable kinds of rigorous academic work that simply cannot be done within the traditional discourse. If this is so, then writing teachers need to know about the new forms so that they can help their students deal with the full range of discursive practices they will need to succeed in college and beyond” (Preface ix-x). “New forms,” that is, alternative discourses, utilize all types of knowledge, genres, and modes of expression. These discourses allow writers to make use
of personal knowledge derived from experience, as well as academic knowledge gained from the research of scholars and published authors. Essentially, alternative discourses combine characteristics of traditional academic discourse with characteristics from other discourse communities, using standard and non-standard dialects.

The Solution

Suresh Canagarajah discusses the ongoing necessity for pedagogical reform: “language rights issues are still vexing and controversial. … The scope of language issues emphasizes the ongoing presence of multiple versions of English in all our classrooms, linked to real issues of personal and ethnic identity” (ix). Even though many students fail to succeed in the university (Lovejoy 90), the profession of language arts does little to address the writing and literacy needs of a diverse student body. Bonnie Lisle and Sandra Mano write, “A glance at current textbooks, which offer a rough measure of what goes on in most composition classrooms, suggests that, while the profession celebrates heteroglossia and difference, most rhetoric instruction remains monologic and ethnocentric” (12). As noted above, my research also supports the lack of efficacy of the resolution.

Since the “Students’ Right” resolution isn’t working yet, we need a pedagogy that honors the tenets of the resolution, is accessible to students and teachers alike, and that also recognizes the need to continue instruction in traditional academic discourse and Edited American English, as well as the need to include dialectical diversity and alternative rhetorical patterns in the classroom. It is imperative that this new pedagogy
corrects the failures of the resolution by including traditional academic discourse in order to prevent faculty misinterpretation and conflict, and by including explicit praxis ideas so that faculty will know how to implement the pedagogy into their own contexts and curriculum.
AN ANTEVASINIST PEDAGOGY: SHIFTING AND TRANSCENDING BORDERS

Antevasin. It means ‘one who lives at the border.’ … an in-betweener. … a border-dweller. He lived in sight of both worlds, but he looked toward the unknown. And he was a scholar. … You can still live there. You can still live on that shimmering line between your old thinking and your new understanding, always in a state of learning. In the figurative sense, this is a border that is always moving. (Gilbert 203-204)

Definition and Introduction to Antevasin

Elizabeth Gilbert’s definition of the Sanskrit term “Antevasin” in her book, Eat, Pray, Love creates a beautiful image for a new and necessary pedagogy for the modern college composition classroom. The images of borders, in-betweeners, and the intersection of old and new perceptions invoke a liminal space in which the binary constructions of the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution and traditional academic discourse, as well as alternative/traditional genres and discourses, create a threshold in which conflicts and boundaries between these theories can be made explicit.

This nonfixed space (i.e., the “border that is always moving”) is moving between the boundaries erected between these binary constructions; these boundaries can be pushed and pulled, manifesting a hybrid, liminal space. This new space allows us to operate within the borders, rather than merely focusing on the borders themselves. As such, the Antevasinist Pedagogy, partially derived from both Critical Pedagogy and Border
Pedagogy, is a portfolio-centered, multi-discourse, multi-genre approach that includes the techniques, conventions and tenets set forth by traditional academic discourse and the “Students’ Right” resolution.

Antevasinist teachers and students reconcile the conflicts and gaps among these pedagogies by studying the conventions of each and problem-posing their connections and disconnections, by making the conflicts and questions inherent within them visible and explicit. When a course includes the conventions of traditional academic discourse and questions of power concerning exclusive, gate-keeping discourse communities, as well as including the conventions and politics concerning alternative discourses and hybrid genres in the curriculum, writers can transcend the boundaries and limits of these pedagogies. This transcendence cultivates authentically aware, self-reflective writers who are not only critically conscious of themselves and their writing, but also of the audience and the rhetorical situation. Antevasinist writers seek to narrate in concert with their audience, producing a critically conscious communication that embodies both self-expression and an acute awareness of the reader. This pedagogy is unfixed, encouraging students to explore both the traditional and the alternative, while simultaneously exploring themselves and their writing in connection to the external. The power and politics of language, as well as the various conventions, genres, and discourses of both traditional academic discourse and alternative discourses are explicitly and critically analyzed. Risk-taking and experimentation are explicitly encouraged and built into the curriculum in order to promote self-expression and audience awareness.
Said more simply, the Antevasinist pedagogy presents students with a collection of different tools for writing. These tools develop through critical analysis and problem-posing of an assortment of conventions, techniques, and genres, while encouraging student writers to use these tools to experiment in their own writing by operating within the borders created by the multitude of discourses, rhetorical practices, and genres of a global world. Through Antevasin, writers are always in a state of learning and exploring, and their process and products are allowed to demonstrate this state. It caters to border-dwellers and mainstream students alike by authenticating and vocalizing their constant movement between worlds: their academic world, their private world, their linguistic world(s) as writers, readers, artists, and students.

Critical and Border Pedagogies

In Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness, Patricia Bizzell poses the question as to whether or not academic discourse can be taught in a Freireian, “liberating way” when the overarching goal most colleges posit for their writing programs is to equip students with the conventions and knowledge of academic writing (129). As Bizzell and I agree, this is generally expected to entail the conventions of traditional academic discourse and Edited American English. Bizzell writes,

In general, commitment to the official goal presumes the resolution of an issue that concerned writing teachers not so long ago—namely, the tension\textsuperscript{18} between the individual student, with his or her own cultural

\textsuperscript{18} My emphasis.
identity and creative potential, and the conventional requirements of
standardized writing instruction. (129)

The presumed resolution Bizzell refers to highlights the lack of assistance
composition teachers and their students receive on actually resolving this issue. The
assumption that there is a resolution, when there clearly isn’t, only increases the
ambivalence and conflict many college composition professors experience as a result.
This conflict manifests itself when some teachers choose to meet the official goal by
teaching traditional academic discourse, while others struggle to find a reconciliation
between the two—meeting the standards of academic discourse in a way that embraces
all students (mainstream and border) and their individual linguistic and cultural histories.

The struggle to do both, or what Bizzell calls “the tension,” is what I want to
emphasize because the tension is where Antevasin is located. Antevasin lives in, or
embodies, that space of tension between writing teachers and their desire to meet the
official goal of the institution but also to encourage the authentic writing self of the
students. Antevasin is also the tension between the student and his or her home discourse,
personal and educational experiences, and the exclusive, gate-keeping conventions of
traditional academic discourse and Edited American English. In this way, the “tension” is
a border between the tenets of the Student’s Right to Their Own Language Resolution
and traditional academic discourse. Antevasin, then, is the space between the two borders
that is always moving, pushing the borders around, working within them and through
them, creating a liminal space that highlights that tension. Once that tension is made
explicit and offered to the students for their critique, reconciliation between the binaries of traditional academic discourse and the “Students’ Right” resolution and what Bizzell describes as “the tension between the individual student, with his or her own cultural identity and creative potential, and the conventional requirements of standardized writing instruction” can be achieved (Academic Discourse 129). This reconciliation is only possible through an explicit acknowledgement of the conflict. Once students and writing teachers have a venue in which to explore and critique this tension, transcendence of the traditional and the alternative can be reached. It all begins with awareness.

Critical pedagogy is central to the Antevasinist position as it makes the development of an explicit awareness, or a critical consciousness, central and necessary. The formation of a critical consciousness is necessary in Antevasin because it is the vehicle through which a thorough investigation of the tenets of the Antevasinist pedagogy and other theories can be made. This investigation is highly significant and necessary when working with theories that appear to be binary oppositions of one another—in this case, traditional academic discourse and the “Student’s Right to Their Own Language” resolution. A critical pedagogy provides the platform for the development of a critical conscious and the ensuing critique of these educational practices, making the connections and disconnections among these practices explicit and bridge building possible.

Critical theory in Antevasin, then, focuses on critical consciousness (explicit awareness), as well as what Richard E. Miller describes as the “interrelationship of word and world, language and power” in his article, “The Arts of Complicity: Pragmatism and
the Culture of Schooling” (11). One of the principles of the Antevasinist pedagogy is that self-awareness leads to language awareness which leads to improved writing. As Gail Y. Okawa explains in “‘Resurfacing Roots’: Developing a Pedagogy of Language Awareness from Two Views,” our goal as writing teachers should be to help our students “have the means to make their own informed, humane decisions in life and in the classroom. Self-awareness may be one path to language awareness” (112). A critical awareness that leads to language awareness promotes the exegesis of the self, the word, and the world (see Miller above) in a way that is authentic and meaningful, prompting deep thought and effective communication: “Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality\textsuperscript{19}, does not take place in an ivory tower of isolation, but only in communication” (Freire 58). Communication, as well as the aforementioned focus on the “interrelationship of word, and world, language and power,” inevitably leads to the politics surrounding language and composition instruction. Since the Antevasinist position is one of critical awareness, a critique of relevant educational and linguistic practices and politics as they pertain to the act of composing is necessary and beneficial for Antevasin teachers and students alike. This critique leads to communication between writer, reader, teacher, and beyond, readying the student for any social action he or she feels impassioned to engage in: “Hence, the teacher-student and the student-teacher reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action” (Freire 64).

\textsuperscript{19} Freire’s emphasis.
Action complements thought in a critically conscious course, but this action is student-centered, deriving from the interests of each individual student as opposed to providing the teacher with the opportunity to propagandize his or her personal political platform; a teacher of Antevasin is most interested in the critically conscious thoughts and actions related to the composition classroom, or more specifically, how they affect and shape the writer, their writing, and the reader. All politics, such as resistance and liberatory education, is always refocused back on the craft of writing itself and how the writing itself connects back to politics, the self, and the community.

In the Antevasininist classroom, critical pedagogy is manifested through the critique and investigation of various discourse communities and their written conventions and how this information is culturally relevant. These issues are examined for their effects on written discourse; they always center on what is relevant to increase the student’s rhetorical repertoire, not on the study of culture just for culture’s sake. The purpose of critical pedagogy in the Antevasininist course is to improve students’ ability to analyze and think for themselves and to be rhetorically savvy, thereby empowering them to communicate effectively, to excel in academia and in their social and professional worlds. Since this type of critical pedagogy investigates borders and boundaries explicitly, Antevasin uses Critical Pedagogy to operate within Border Pedagogy, each informing the other.

Although Border Pedagogy is often traditionally defined as educational practices that seek to bring attention to the many cultural, social, and political differences in
student populations that exist “within 100 miles of an international border” (Zulmara, de la Luz Reyes, and Necocchea 149) in which the demographics are composed of a great number of both immigrants and locals, Antevasin conceives of border pedagogy in a much broader sense, as do Cline Zulmara, Maria de la Luz Reyes, and Juan Necocchea do in their article, “Educational Lives on the Border” in which the lines of demarcation that construct borders are metaphysical rather than, or in addition to, physical, geographical borders:

The term *border*\(^{20}\) is an acknowledgement that there are ideological, epistemological, political, social, and cultural margins that make up the language of power, history, and difference. This ‘politics of difference’ attempts to tear down physical as well as conceptual boundaries that limit the potential of individuals who are different (e.g. racially, ethnically, socially, etc.) from those in power. (149)

The student demographics of many college campuses are diverse socially, economically, ethnically, and linguistically. As a result, students straddle many different lives or “conceptual boundaries” their learning/academic life, home life, work life (149). They vacillate between different discourses (the discourse of their nurture, technological discourse i.e., text messaging, blogging, emailing) and academic discourse. Students inhabit all of these different worlds, often residing somewhere inbetween the borders these different worlds create. Antevasin acknowledges and teaches to the in-between by

\(^{20}\) Cline Zulmara, et al’s emphasis.
making the college composition classroom a flexible space in which differences among these worlds are acknowledged, made explicit, and explored in way that the students can see, use, appreciate, and interrogate the many discursive borders available to them.

Critical pedagogy + border pedagogy = liberatory education. Paulo Freire defines a liberatory pedagogy as “Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination ...” (Freire 62). Antevasin is a liberatory pedagogy that discovers the means of liberation through writing and the study of writing. “Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire 60). Composition instructors can subvert the exclusionary nature of traditional academic discourse, while still teaching its conventions, as long as it is taught within the framework of a critical border pedagogy.

Border pedagogy creates the necessary space for the questioning and critique of both traditional academic discourse and the “Student’s Right to Their Own Language” resolution as well as other genres and discourses, making the conventions of each explicit. In an Antevasin classroom, students practice this critique by writing in a myriad of ways, experimenting with different conventions and discourses while publicly (written and verbal) acknowledging the crossings, connections/disconnections and distributions of power in each kind of discourse and genre. A Critical border pedagogy operates within Antevasin by creating a space in which we—students, teachers, and writers—are “learning to think differently about ourselves in a border context, making crossings and connections, reflecting on our own positions and power, and articulating a vision of
social justice” (Romo 193). In Antevasin, “articulating a vision of social justice” is an act of liberation, made possible by the act of composing with a critically consciousness, self-aware, audience aware lens. Students deliberate and reflect on what the significance of position and power within language and rhetoric mean for themselves, their writing, and the act of composing.

The act of composing itself can be an act of liberation, subverting and resisting hegemony. Antevasin is a rally cry for first-year composition students to use, maintain, and grow their home discourses, personal identities, and passionate, authentic writing; at the same time it encourages academic success by utilizing the principles of a critical border pedagogy. Border pedagogy makes crossings and connections, producing more critically conscious students who are aware of all the many rhetorical and linguistic choices available to them while composing and communicating. This, in turn, produces more informed and more effective writers. Traditional academic discourse creates borders; Antevasin acknowledges these borders and works within them, pushing them around, creating a space for the tenets of the “Students’ Rights” resolution and for an interrogation of those borders.

In order for critical border pedagogy to be effective, it has to tear down the exclusionary borders of traditional academic discourse and invest students with the means of composing in a way that is liberatory. In order to do so, a narration reconciliation must occur. The nature of narrative is fundamentally about power and control. Paulo Freire explains the narrative character of the institution, and the problems
it produces, this way: “A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)” (52). Freire argues, “Education is suffering from narration sickness” (52).

Educational institutions are consumed by their impulse to narrate and they do so in a totalizing, all-encompassing method, prohibiting the learner from authentic, empowered self-expression and earnest inquiry. In the process of the teacher narrating to the students, the contents of what is narrated becomes “lifeless and petrified” (57). This petrifaction occurs because the students are disconnected and disembodied from the act of narrating. They are being spoken to, instead of in dialogue with. As a result, the mythos of traditional academic discourse, and the master narrative the mythos creates, is enacted over and over again.

Middle class, white students are familiar with the master narrative if they are born into the master narrative discourse community; therefore, they may be more prepared to use it in a way that is condoned by academic institutions and the dominant culture.

However, as in “Crossing the Boundaries of Educational Discourse: Modernism, Post Modernism, and Feminism,” Henry A. Giroux explains that “individuals from minority persuasions come into contact and must interact with the ‘master narrative,’” even though they are not members of this particular discourse community, giving mainstream students an advantage (68). The master narrative then is a gatekeeper for students unfamiliar with

21 Freire’s emphasis.
its codes and conventions while simultaneously serving to maintain hegemony by reinforcing the status quo for those in power.

An Antevasinist uses critical border pedagogy to highlight the master narrative and those it excludes by disrupting the totality of the master narrative. Traditional academic discourse’s borders and exclusions, its limits and drawbacks, aren’t made visible if its narrative isn’t disrupted. In order to disrupt the narrative, Antevasin empowers all students, mainstreamers and border students, to narrate in their own language, from their subject position. It’s not enough to assign readings from border authors and to explain to students what a critical consciousness is if they aren’t called to act on it. So the narrative power must be shared between the teacher and the students; students are empowered to participate in their own liberation only if they can claim a stake in the classroom narrative. In order to do so, the students and teachers must engage in a dialectic—they must communicate openly and authentically about the topics raised in the classroom, specifically the borders and power constructs of traditional academic discourse, with the teacher and each student reflecting again and again on their perceptions, questioning the self and one another in the pursuit of inquiry thus “reconciling” the “teacher-student contradiction … so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire 53). To control the act of narration, to deprive students of the ability to narrate their own narratives is “to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (Freire 66). The objectification of teacher-students into student-objects stifles their own narratives and renders their writing
and their education lifeless and meaningless. This objectification affects their prose, their ability and comfort in expressing themselves, and their education as a whole. By reconciling the narrative imbalance within a critical border pedagogy, by voicing the voiceless, an alternative to the master narrative perpetuated by the mythos of traditional academic discourse can be fostered.

Critical border pedagogy within Antevasin allows for the construction of an alternative to the master narrative—a liberatory, plural narrative, which serves to demythologize the traditional academic discourse mythos. The “master narrative,” generated by the mythos of traditional academic discourse, works to exclude other, divergent narratives. What’s the alternative? “A language that allows for competing solidarities and political vocabularies that do not reduce the issues of power, justice, struggle, and equality to a single script, a master narrative that suppresses the contingent, the historical, and the everyday as serious objects of study” (Giroux 68). Students and teachers of Antevasin co-narrate divergent, plural narratives and highlight the “issues of power, justice and struggle,” thereby creating inclusionary narratives (Giroux 68).

Students write their whole selves into history, becoming historical subjects: “A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation” (Freire 66). By studying and then subverting the master narrative by including narratives of their own making, students are empowered to become rhetorically savvy, effective writers who are self-writing themselves into academic existence, creating new narratives of equity, as explained by Jaime Romo in his
article, “Border Pedagogy From the Inside Out: An Autoethnographic Study”: “In short, border pedagogy engages students in the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages that help students to construct their own narratives and histories and revise democracy through sociocultural negotiation” (194).

Antevasin border pedagogy explicitly analyzes the linguistic borders of position and power as well as the teacher-student role and location within these borders. Doing so empowers students to “[articulate] a vision of social justice” through language, in their own voices, making the very act of composing subversive to the master narrative, creating a path to liberation (Romo 193). Explicitly critiquing how traditional academic discourse produces the master narrative and how it oppresses some and keeps others in a power of position makes it possible for students to write themselves out of the master narrative and into a narrative of inclusiveness and resistance.

“I don’t speak of how I wish things to be but of how they are” (Delpit 292).

An Antevasinist pedagogue doesn’t deny the pervasiveness of the master narrative. To participate fully and successfully in academia and beyond means that students will have to be fluent in the codes and conventions of the dominant discourse, the “culture of power.” In “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children” Lisa Delpit explains:

There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a ‘culture of power’. … I suggest that students must be taught 22 the codes

22 Delpit’s emphasis.
needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life …; that they must be allowed the resource of the teacher’s expert knowledge, while being helped to acknowledge their own ‘expertness’ as well; and that even while students are assisted in learning the culture of power, they must also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent. (282, 296)

When we explicitly teach traditional academic discourse and its conventions while simultaneously acknowledging the borders and roadblocks it creates, nonmainstream students are initiated, not indoctrinated, into the culture of power. This means they enter the culture with an awareness of its exclusivity and hegemony while actively working to undo said oppression from the inside. By cultivating an Antevasinist praxis, initiation into the culture of power is made liberatory by the critical investigation of its tenets; this happens when writers compose narratives of multiple cultural and linguistic identities.

We need to teach the rules of participating in the culture of power not only so students can succeed, but also so that they can engage in, disrupt, and resist the culture of power—transform it.

In order for students to gain access to the culture of power, they need access to the teacher’s knowledge and experience. This means that teachers have to exhibit their power and authority in the classroom:

The students I have spoken of seem to be saying that the teacher has denied them access to herself as the source of knowledge necessary to
learn the forms they need to succeed. Again, I tentatively attribute the problem to teachers’ resistance to exhibiting power in the classroom. Somehow, to exhibit one’s personal power as expert source is viewed as disempowering one’s students. (Delpit 288)

What Delpit refers to here is a side effect of Freire’s narration “reconciliation” in which instructors may misconstrue the sharing of authority, of narration, as the call to abandon or even to deny teacher authority in the classroom. This often results in implicit or indirect teaching in which the class sessions for the entire semester become student-led discussions and work groups only. Let’s be honest: In the United States, and many other places all over the globe, the teacher is still the authority, whether she pretends to strip herself of that title or not. We teachers issue the grades, develop the class material, assign homework—we are the experts of the subjects we teach. We are the authority. To deny this by never teaching explicitly or directly is not only unproductive, but harmful. Too many students walk away from the first-year composition class feeling that the teacher didn’t do anything. For example, Delpit writes that a doctoral student that she knew was taking a writing class to improve his writing skills and felt that the teacher’s process-oriented, liberal approach was depriving him of learning what he needed to know to write effective academic papers: “I don’t feel she was teaching us anything. She wanted us to correct each other’s papers and we were there to learn from her. She didn’t teach anything, absolutely nothing. … I’m looking for structure, the more formal language” (Delpit 287). Many students feel this way; when teachers try to “lessen the power
differential” by being “indirect” in an attempt to prevent a teacher-centered, banking method praxis, border students are prevented from gaining access to the culture of power because they’re not being directly and explicitly taught the conventions and codes for entry (284).

Academic and societal expectations on what is considered effective, college-level writing is “based on the specific codes of a particular culture,” the culture of traditional academic discourse, and succeeding in academia and the business world, which is controlled by the culture of power, means being able to produce traditional academic discourse that “is more readily produced when the directives of how to produce it are made explicit” (Delpit 287). If the students don’t know how to produce it, and many don’t, then the teacher needs to draw from her expertise, and teach them how—that isn’t a usurpation of power and authority, it’s just good teaching. However, and this is imperative, direct teaching, and establishing the teacher as expert, must be balanced with student centeredness and co-narration. Otherwise direct teaching serves to enact the banking method, keeping the culture of power in power and those who are outside of it powerless. We must have both—direct, explicit teaching and narrating, student-teachers: “The teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom. To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them” (288). Teachers should express their power while allowing students to express theirs—that is, we should acknowledge and encourage both: “I prefer to be honest with my students. Tell them that their language and cultural

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23 Delpit’s emphasis.
style is unique and wonderful but that there is a political power game that is also being
played, and if they want to be in on that game there are certain games that they too must
play” (292). Yes, students must play the traditional academic discourse game if they want
to be allowed entry into the culture of power, but there are ways to work within that game
so that you can play it but also subvert it. By teaching traditional academic discourse
explicitly through a critical border lens, by incorporating multiple forms and Englishes
and styles, and looking at them all with a critical border lens, and by engaging students as
students-teachers and teachers as teachers-students, by constructing an alternative
narrative, you can play the game while subverting it—you can get in those protected
borders and start moving them around, widening their entrances, pushing the gates open
bit by bit. In order to do this, teachers must discuss the issues of language and power
openly and honestly with the students’ participation, opinions, and expertise. Students
engage in language, in various discourse communities, daily. As a result, teachers should
never deny the authority and power of their students’ narratives, yet we also shouldn’t
deny our students access to our education and experiences either.

Critical border pedagogy within Antevasin acknowledges the conventions of the
culture of power and is honest and forthcoming about who has it, who doesn’t, and how
to get it. Explicit teaching, balanced with student centeredness, helps all students not only
gain entrance into the culture of power but also to break down those exclusive barriers for
themselves and for future generations.
Unfortunately, sometimes border studies and its message of cultural diversity is pushed so much that the topic of the course is forgotten, morphing writing courses into cultural studies courses. The focus in Antevasin is always on writing. Cultural studies, differences in politics, values, language, are always viewed through the writer’s perspective. This is important because too many students are leaving composition courses without much more knowledge about writing than they had entered the class—simply writing more than usual has many benefits, but it doesn’t take the place of actual writing instruction.

The writers of “Introduction to the Special Issue: Educational Lives on the Border” highlight the importance of institutions ensuring that border dwellers and marginalized students “must see a reflection of themselves when they look into mainstream institutions such as schools” by schools promoting the value of diversity (Zulmara, de la Reyes, and Necochea 151). The university should reflect the actual lives and languages of its students. All students cross borders of some kind. Denying this or failing to acknowledge it in curricula is a disservice to our students, and it negatively impacts their education. It ignores the connection between real life (or home life) and school life. These ideas must be balanced with traditional academic discourse. If we view borders through the critical lens of genre theory and border theory, we can create a balance between teaching to border students and mainstream students alike without excluding the codes of the dominant discourse—we can make the borders visible and

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24 Genre theory is addressed later in this chapter.
then move them around as needed; we can’t ignore either side of the border. If we teach the rules of participating in the culture of power so students can engage in, disrupt, and resist it, then ultimately it can be transformed to be inclusive.

*From Intention to Practice*²⁵

As noted in Chapter 3, one of the main reasons the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution failed was a result of the lack of explicit praxis ideas available to teachers. In order to protect Antevasin from the same fate, I’ve included practical teaching illustrations and/or sample assignments for each of the major pedagogical component of Antevasin: Critical border pedagogy, genre studies, and portfolio theory. Please feel free to use the praxis segments as they are presented here or as a means of generating your own ideas.

The concepts of a critical consciousness and border theory are central to enacting Antevasin in the classroom. As such, the activities that follow should assist students in conceiving of and defining these ideas and relating them to their own lives and writing practice:

**A Critical Consciousness and Border Crossing: Liberating Wild Tongues**

1. Read Chapter 2 of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, paying special attention to his use of the term “critical consciousness.”

2. Write a one page, focused free-write about how you define a critical consciousness.

²⁵ I am borrowing this term from the text, *Language and Diversity in the Classroom: From Intention to Practice*, edited by Geneva Smitherman and Victor Villanueva.
3. Class discussion: how does Freire define a critical consciousness? How do you define this term? How is the concept of a critical consciousness useful to the study of composition?

4. Using your critical consciousness, read Gloria Anzaldua’s, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue.” Next, answer the following questions:
   - What are your “‘home’ tongues” and to whom do you speak/write in your home tongue (Anzaldua 56)?
   - What borders do you cross each day? What language(s) do you use in those contexts and why? Who dictates how you speak and write in these different discourse communities/linguistic borders?
   - How are language and power connected?

5. Class discussion: What are your responses to the questions above? (Share and discuss). Do borders prescribe language use? How is your writing prescribed within the college environment? Can we liberate “wild tongues?” If so, how? If not, why?

6. Use the last question above, “Can we liberate ‘wild tongues’? If so, how? If not, why?” as the topic for a 15 minute focused free-write.

A Genre-based Pedagogy

Genre studies have gone through many changes over the years, from Structuralism to hybrid forms and genre as social action. What’s often missing in the genre studies debate are the benefits of combining the applications of these theories
within the first-year composition course. Instead of seeing them in opposition to each other, we can study them critically in relation to one another, thereby gaining a much larger understanding of language and how our students can write themselves into that language in meaningful, successful ways. Using a broad and varied genre-based pedagogy that focuses on formal generic conventions, socio-rhetoric, and hybrid forms can serve to subvert the exclusivity and hegemony of traditional academic discourse, thereby creating a space for Antevasin. It’s important to note that Antevasinist Pedagogy doesn’t negate traditional academic discourse, rather it uses genre to examine traditional and alternative forms critically, probing their limits and their possibilities.

Amy J. Devitt explains in her article, “Integrating Rhetorical and Literary Theories of Genre” that traditional academic discourse views genre as “formalistic classification of types of texts” (697). A formalist approach to genre is harmful to new writers if not tempered with diverging perspectives of genre, but if the formalist approach is balanced with a more rhetorical concept of genre, it is quite beneficial. Using the formalist approach of “how something operates within the overall meaning of the text” (Tyson 125) benefits both border and mainstream students because it helps them gain entry into academic discourse, it provides students with a common language to discuss writing, and it equips students with a variety of linguistic devices and conventions.

In order to gain entry into academic discourse, David Bartholomae explains in “Inventing the University” that a student has to:
Appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy …; he has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other hand. He must learn to speak our language. (135)

This appropriation that Bartholomae refers to is first made possible by the students’ ability to model or “mimic” traditional academic discourse. Appropriation is enabled, and more effective, when students actually learn the conventions, nuances, and forms of the academy. This is best done by having students study traditional generic conventions and then use them in their own writing. Doing so simultaneously empowers students with the ability to communicate with the specialized audiences of the university, or as Bartholomae puts it, “speak our language,” while also providing a shared language in which to talk about the composing process with their fellow students (135). By learning the formal linguistic devices that are often used in academic writing, such as theme, metaphor, and unity, students are given a starting place to talk about the composing process in a language they are all learning and using. A shared, common language about composition means that students can participate in their education more fully and communicate more effectively with their academic audience. A student-centered, problem-posing approach to classical genre analysis engages students in the process of
demystifying discourse conventions for themselves in collaboration with one another. Thus, they have a better idea of how to write like an “insider.” “I think that all writers, in order to write, must imagine for themselves the privilege of being ‘insiders’ —that is, the privilege both of being inside an established and powerful discourse and of being granted a special right to speak” (Bartholomae 631). Formal genre analysis enables students to more effectively approximate how an “insider” writes and sounds; they are thus better able to truly engage in academic discourse as opposed to merely modeling or mimicking academic discourse.

Sunny Hyon writes in “Genre in Three Traditions: Implications for ESL,” that analyzing text structure, organization, and formal devices are especially useful to border and nonnative speakers: “Genre-based applications can help nonnative speakers of English master the functions and linguistic conventions of texts that they need to read and write in their disciplines and professions” (698). When we explicitly determine the conventions of academic discourse and learn to write with them, those conventions are not only demystified, but are also made useful when applied by the students in their own writing, enabling them to participate in the culture of power:

There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a ‘culture of power’. … If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier. … The codes or rules I’m speaking of relate to linguistic
forms, communicative strategies, …; that is ways of talking, ways of writing. (Delpit 283)

As Delpit explains, knowing the discourse rules or conventions of academic discourse opens the gate for marginalized writers (border and nonnative students), enabling them to join the culture of power.

As previously mentioned, a formalist approach of genre is harmful to first-year composition writers if not tempered with diverging perspectives of genre. If students are taught to mimic traditional academic discourse without also being taught that there are other alternative theories of genre, style, discourse, and form and that such writing choices have a sociopolitical and personal impact on the writer and reader, then a formalist approach to genre studies only serves to reinforce those aspects of traditional academic discourse that are constraining, biased, and static.

“It may very well be that some students will need to learn to crudely mimic the ‘distinctive register’ of academic discourse before they are prepared to actually and legitimately do the work of the discourse, and before they are sophisticated enough with the refinement of tone and gesture to do it with grace and elegance” (Bartholomae 162). Is this what we/me/teachers striving for a liberatory pedagogy want? Mimicking of an already exclusive, marginalizing tradition? Antevasin teaches to look for and identify linguistic devices as a means of enabling students to join the culture of power and as a topic for critical inquiry. By problem-posing generic studies of traditional academic discourse in a critical way, that is considering what the mimicking of those conventions
means for the writer and for the reader, as well as how those conventions relate to the
conventions of other, alterative discourse communities transforms classical genre studies
into Antevasin genre studies. Therefore, formalistic genre studies and mimicking of
traditional academic discourse conventions can only be productive, meaning they can
only serve to reconcile the tenets of traditional academic discourse with the tenets of the
“Students’ Right” resolution in a way that is liberating, if done consciously, with
discussions concerning what the implications for mimicking traditional academic
discourse are and the possible ramifications it may have on the writer, reader, and
beyond.

A lack of familiarity with traditional academic discourse generic conventions, and
being unable to successfully apply those conventions, often results in the inability to join
the culture of power, resulting in failing grades and fewer opportunities for success and
advancement. However, since traditional academic discourse excludes alternative forms
of writing, therefore excluding many individuals/students, it is equally important to be
able to make changes in traditional academic discourse from within the academy. Such
changes are enabled by incorporating a socio-rhetorical analysis of genre and hybrid
forms.

In a rhetoric-centered course, the study of genres is less focused on formal
conventions and instead is centered on their “rhetorical actions” (Devitt, “Integrating”
698). As Amy J. Devitt explains, “Basically, the new conception of genre shifts the focus
from effects (formal features, text classifications) to sources of those effects”
(“Generalizing about Genre” 573). Ultimately, what this means is that students are encouraged to think about the writer’s choices and the context or situation in which those choices were made as well as how each specific context affects, and potentially prescribes, some or all of those choices. Instead of genre being viewed simply as a category of text type identified by its formal conventions, it is seen as an action; the action occurs by the ability to select, from a multitude of choices, a genre that is most suitable for the particular writing situation. Thus, a rhetorical approach to genre is beneficial for first-year composition writers because it contributes to the creation of more informed, more socially aware writers, enabling initiation into various discourse communities, and it assists students in producing effective, well written texts.

Lisa Delpit has stated that the culture of power does indeed use language as a means of including some and excluding others; the study of genre makes this visible. In “Locating Genre Studies: Antecedents and Prospects,” Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway explain, “other researchers have pointed to the social consequences of textual creation: how discourse communities use mastery of writing to enroll and initiate new members, as well as to exclude others; and how texts themselves reshape the social and even material environments in which they are produced” (2). In order to give students the best chance of success, teachers have to give them the skills to be initiated into the culture of power. Therefore, the Antevasinist pedagogue uses a rhetoric-centered approach to genre so that students become skilled in the ability to select the appropriate genre for any rhetorical situation, and write effectively in that genre. As a result, students
are empowered to join various discourse communities, including the discourse
community inhabited by the culture of power—traditional academic discourse: “Studies
of particular genres and of particular genre sets... can reveal a great deal about the
communities which construct and use those genres, and studies of particular texts within
those genres can reveal a great deal about the choices writers make” (Devitt,
“Generalizing about Genre” 581). A rhetorical analysis of texts assists writers by helping
them think like writers; in Antevasin, students discover and discuss why the writer made
specific rhetorical choices and how the discourse community they’re writing for, the
rhetorical situation, calls for specific choices. This teaches students (and teachers) that
how we judge effective writing should never be based on some universal standard.
Instead, judgment should be based on how well the writer’s choice of genre and
rhetorical devices meets the expectations or codes of the particular discourse community
they’re writing for. Students then learn that different cultures have different codes for
effective communication—genre helps us learn those codes:

Knowing the genre, therefore, means knowing such things as appropriate
subject matter, level of detail, tone, and approach as well as the usual
layout and organization. Knowing the genre means knowing not only, or
even most of all, how to conform to genre conventions but also how to
respond appropriately to a given situation. (Devitt, “Generalizing about
Genre” 577)
Knowing various genres means students then know the various codes needed to gain acceptance within various discourse communities, empowering students to participate in those cultures while simultaneously improving their writing skills.

Bartholomae notes that while students appropriate academic discourse by mimicking that discourse, students have to balance this with “some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history” (135). This “personal history” that Bartholomae mentions is integral in de-marginalizing marginalized students and providing all students, mainstream and border, with the opportunity to explore all of the possibilities of communication and self expression that language provides. The study and practice of alternative forms or hybrid genres, that is, the use of conventions that stray from the traditional forms accepted by the academy, and/or mixing traditional generic conventions with untraditional generic conventions and dialects, provides writers/students with the opportunity to reflect their multiple identities and their participation in multiple discourse communities: “Rhetorical genre theorists have argued for the need to embrace a definition of genre that encompasses difference as well as similarity, variation as well as standardization, and creativity as well as conformity” (Devitt, “Integrating” 705).

Encouraging the study and use of alternatives to traditional genres is therefore integral in creating a space that meets the tenets of the “Students’ Right to their Own Language” resolution—the right for students to learn and practice the conventions and dialects of the language of their nurture without attaching negative stigma to those languages. In an Antevasinist classroom, creativity, divergence from the traditional, and the study and
practice of multiple discourse forms are valued and encouraged. This practice, however, does not signify the exclusion of traditional academic discourse and edited American English. Antevasin encourages the critical study of the formal generic conventions of traditional academic discourse as well.

Using a formal and rhetorical approach to genre in conjunction with a hybrid genre pedagogy, teachers can re-conceptualize the academy in such a way that there is room for both the standards and deviations from those standards: “With a shared understanding of what genre is and how it operates, teachers in English departments could help students read and write flexibly, with an eye to the rhetorical function of discourse but without becoming fixed in a single genre or single set of formal conventions” (Devitt, “Integrating” 714). Since Antevasin also uses a rhetorical approach to genres, students become familiar with the generic codes required for acceptance into an assortment of discourse communities. Once students have acquired this knowledge, they are then prepared to resist and subvert those codes by using alternative forms or hybrid genres.

The aim of the Antevasinist genre pedagogy is to help students become effective readers and writers; to succeed in academia, in social situations, and professional environments; to flourish in various discourse communities; and to resist and subvert the exclusivity of the standard forms as they see fit.
From Intention to Practice

When developing a pedagogy for genre study, it’s important to remember that an Antevasinist uses a broad and varied genre-based pedagogy that focuses on formal generic conventions, socio-rhetoric, and hybrid forms. As such, I’ve included teaching illustrations for each of these categories.

Genre

Sequence #1:

1. Reading: Assign students a reading or ask them to choose one for themselves. Then ask students to determine the text’s genre, noting key generic features/conventions of the text.

2. Class discussion: Have students share their findings from above.

3. Group work: Place students into groups of 3 or 4. Hand out copies of Letters to the Editor from different periodicals. Then, ask students to work together to identify the textual conventions of the best letters. What makes some letters better or more relatable than others? Discuss.

4. Assignment: Once the class has arrived at some kind of consensus on successful generic conventions for Letters to the Editor assign students the task of using those conventions to create their own letter to the editor. Students should respond to an actual article and go through the process of submitting them for publication. (This gives students real writing experience outside of the university).
Sequence #2:

1. Instructor: Give a mini lecture on the different forms of genre studies, focusing namely on socio-rhetorical studies\(^26\). Be sure to thoroughly teach the concepts of the rhetorical situation and discourse communities. Encourage student participation by problem-posing and asking for questions and comments.

2. Group work: Students work in small groups to analyze the rhetorical situation in different types of advertisements.

3. Assignment: Write a two-three page essay that analyzes the rhetorical situation of one of the class readings.

4. Class discussion: Discuss students’ findings from their essays (above).

Sequence #3:

1. Focused free-write: What do you think the term “hybrid genre” means? What kind of writing do you think occurs in this genre?

2. Class discussion: Discuss students’ responses to the above.

3. Reading: Assign a hybrid text for students to read.

4. Class discussion: What makes this text hybrid? What is the rhetorical situation? What are the aims of the writer and how do these aims influence his or her rhetorical choices? What did you think of the text?

\(^{26}\) Genre and the New Rhetoric by Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway is a good resource for teachers. Bibliographic information is provided on the Works Cited page.
5. Essay: Write a two-to three-page hybrid piece of your own. Feel free to juxtapose some of your journal entries, poetry, free-writes, etc., with sections from other essays you’ve written in the class, but be sure to produce a unified piece.

**Portfolio**

*Locating Antevasin in theory is all well and good, but how does one practice it and assess it in a way that supports its tenets? Portfolio, portfolio, portfolio.*

Portfolio theory is the best approach for teaching and supporting the principles of Antevasin as well as the best method for assessing the thinking, reflecting, and writing that occurs in an Antevasinist classroom. For the purposes of Antevasinist Pedagogy, a portfolio is a compilation of “a multiplicity of texts” that demonstrates the tenets of portfolio theory: “Collection, reflection, and selection” (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 118).

**Collection**—pieces of paper. “Collection” is a compilation of writings that are representative of the writer’s work in the class. However, “collection” does not mean gathering all of the writer’s work and throwing it together into a folder. The act of collecting and selecting (see more on selection below) is done with thorough reflection in which specific pieces are chosen for specific reasons with specific intentions.

**Process + collection.** In Antevasin, collection references both finished products and the writer’s process or drafts, free-writes, and notes leading up to those finished products. This collection, as opposed to one or two essays, is necessary to demonstrate the “multiplicity of texts” (118), that is, the various kinds and styles of texts that are produced when writers write for different occasions, different audiences, in different
genres, styles, and forms. Since one writing assignment and/or one sequence of similar writing assignments isn’t indicative of how effective or ineffective a writer is, or of how much or how little the student/writer has learned and progressed, a wide collection serves to demonstrate a breadth of writing performances, therefore allowing for multiple opportunities for the student to succeed as opposed to basing the student’s success on one high stakes assignment.

Reflection—thinking about which pieces of paper to include and why. As Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon point out in their text, Assessing the Portfolio: Principles for Practice, Theory, and Research, “without reflection all we have is simply a pile, or large folder ...” (119). Students need to ruminate on all of their various writing processes and products they experienced and completed over the semester in order to begin the process of determining what their writing strengths are, what their weaknesses are, how to improve their weaknesses, and how they are going to apply the knowledge they’ve learned in this course to their future writing endeavors. The reflection portion engages these mental processes and makes the next step of meaningful selection possible: “Reflection starts the deliberative process, recognizes strength and need, places pieces together mentally, relates them to each other, engages in a host of mental processes” (119). This “deliberative process” is essential to choosing a collection that best represents the writer and their strongest pieces.

Selection—making a conscious decision about which pieces of paper to include. Selection is the conscious choice of selecting specific pieces to demonstrate the students’
writing journey, and their writing performance, over the semester. Selection can only be accomplished with thorough reflection, choosing specific pieces for specific reasons; otherwise, the portfolio becomes merely a collection without purpose, without personality, without investment and without personal responsibility: “Without selection, the writer would be unable to present the work of which he or she is most proud, would be unable to shape the portfolio as a conscious exhibit of what has been done, what has been learned, what is there to be understood about the individual as a writer” (120).

Many first-year composition instructors use the portfolio method, but for the portfolio to be a reflection of Antevasin principles, as well as an effective means of teaching writing, and a tool in assessing students’ writing fairly, it must do the following: demand a critical consciousness or awareness (for both teacher and students); emphasize both process and product; support multiple writing contexts/genres; generate student responsibility and investment; benefit both mainstream and non-mainstream students.

**Critically Conscious Portfolios**

Earlier in this chapter, I explained that a critical consciousness—that is, an explicit awareness of the self, the word, and the world—provides the platform for a critique of the various genres, dialects, and writing practices discussed and experimented within the Antevasin classroom. The portfolio is the written exploration of this critique. The documents showcased in the portfolio may or may not address these concepts explicitly; however, the students’ experimentation with these ideas in their writing and their attempt to apply the outcomes of their ideas in a way that improves their writing will
be apparent if the teacher requires that reflective pieces are included in the portfolio. In order to compose these reflective pieces and to choose the work that the students feel best represents who they are as writers and best communicates with their reader requires self-aware, self-reflection, or what Freire calls “consciousness as consciousness of consciousness” (60). This means that students are aware of their own consciousness and can mentally step back and critique their own reflexivity. Students are required to compose critically conscious writing in an Antevasin portfolio by demonstrating a reading of the self, the authentic, self-reflective writerly self of multiple contexts. To do so requires an exegesis: that is, the ability to analyze the production of one’s writerly self. But it isn’t only about the self—it’s self reflection combined with audience awareness. An Antevasinist exegesis of the writing self is the examination of the “interrelationship of word and world, language and power” (Miller 11). Antevasin stresses audience awareness in terms of how the “word,” or the language of the writer, connects to the “world,” or the readers, and how this connection, or communication, between the writer and the reader is powerful.

Building both critical reflection and self-assessment into the portfolio assignment lends itself to eliciting audience-aware writer authenticity from the students, enabling communication: “Selection engages self-assessment, and it encourages writers to make conscious, deliberate choices regarding the quality of their writings, as well as the relative importance of the different features of good writing that their collection exhibits” (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 5). When students engage in serious reflection in order to
make their selection for their portfolio, they must consider what constitutes good writing, which is effective, successful communication with their audience. Therefore, students are not only thoroughly analyzing the features of effective writing/communication, but also how well their writing measures up to this ideal and deciding how to revise their writing to meet that. They’ve come far enough in the writing process to determine for themselves how to go about improving their writing and are well equipped to do so.

The portfolio creates not only a venue for the student’s self-reflection process, but also an opportunity for the teacher’s reflection. By reading and assessing portfolios, teachers can learn a great deal about their own teaching practice as well as the success of the course material: “Portfolio assessment moves teachers beyond judgments about students’ competence, leading them to make judgments about the effectiveness of their course(s) as a whole” (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 34). This way, the teacher can “continually reconsider their theory and practice …” by judging whether or not the assignments assisted the student in achieving the goals of Antevasin (34). When teachers use the portfolio to reflect on their pedagogy, they are clearly able to discern any necessary changes to their curriculum; the portfolio invokes this necessary teacher reflection.

*Emphasizes both Process and Product*

Composition instructors have long debated the benefits of emphasizing the writer’s process versus the end result, or the writer’s product. Since the 1970s, Process Theory has long been advocated. However, “Teachers do students no service to suggest,
even implicitly, that ‘product’ is not important. In this country, students will be judged on their product regardless of the process they utilized to achieve it” (Delpit 287). As Lisa Delpit points out, very few people in society are going to care about a student’s writing process; what they will care about is the finished text itself. Regardless of this fact, many colleges explicitly refer to the writing process as part of the curriculum in the first-year composition course: “[Course] Concentrates on prewriting, drafting, and rewriting processes that address a variety of rhetorical and academic tasks” (California State University, Sacramento 1). So there appears to be a contradiction—instiutions tend to teach process theory, even though society values product. The Antevasinist portfolio method reconciles this contradiction by including an emphasis on both process and product. Focusing on both is necessary in order to teach students how to write effectively because writing assignments i.e., the portfolio, as well as how teachers assess the writing in a composition class, should reflect what’s true about writing. Writing is recursive; it’s often very challenging; it’s time consuming; it demands reflection; it requires multiple drafts to compose a well-written piece; discussion and feedback are extremely useful, if not critical, for a clear, strong piece; and the product itself will be valued just as much, if not more than, the process the student utilized to achieve that product. Portfolio theory dictates that students include drafts of their work in their portfolio, and the Antevasinportfolio is no different. Evidence of the drafting process is required; students turn in their drafts/process with their final product. By building the actual process into the
assignment, the portfolio reinforces the writing process, which, in turn, produces a better product.

Antevasin teachers require students to start the portfolio in advance, and they teach it as an on-going, semester-long project, allowing many opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and revision prior to final submission: “Many writing teachers have realized that the most effective way for students to learn how to write better is by making their writing better—by revising pieces of writing to make them better …” (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 36). The Antevasin portfolio promotes revision by allowing students the time and the opportunity to revise, and it also provides the motive to revise—if students don’t work to rewrite their portfolio selections into a product that is representative of their best effort, that will be negatively reflected in their portfolio and thus negatively reflected in their grade. By collecting the process the students undertook to arrive at that polished piece, the students gain a very important lesson: They experience firsthand that they can make their own writing better by rewriting and revising—using process.

The process approach is mediated by an equal focus on product. The students in an Antevasin class aren’t under any delusions that the writing process extends for an infinite amount of time, nor that a thorough process guarantees a perfect product. Process and product are valued equally. Antevasin students include their evidence of their process and various drafts, as well as final, polished products, all strung together by the writer’s

27 Author’s emphasis.
audience aware, self-reflection about the transition from draft to final. This method internalizes effective writing habits—consistently engaging in composition, reflection, rethinking, rewriting, and giving and receiving valuable feedback—while explicitly acknowledging process and product as necessary elements to effective writing.

**Supporting Multiple Writing Contexts/Genres**

Assessing the Portfolio uses the term “multiplicity of texts” to reference what should be included in the first-year composition portfolio. In Antevasin, this “multiplicity of texts” comprises different types of writing—that is, writing in different genres, writing for various audiences in various discourses, and writing with various purposes (118). A “multiplicity of texts” is a requirement of the Antevasinist portfolio; otherwise, it isn’t an Antevasinist course.

Both portfolio theory and Antevasinist pedagogy explicitly teach the value of utilizing a wide variety of writing practices, processes, forms, dialects, and assignments. Creating a portfolio assignment that represents a multiplicity of texts is significant because it enacts the real world experience of writing. The type of writing students will engage in within the academy and in the outside world will vary in that students have to write for different classes, different jobs, in different genres, for different audiences, under different conditions for different purposes. An Antevasin portfolio should then exhibit this reality.
Generates Student Responsibility and Investment

The Antevasin portfolio encourages students to accept their own responsibility for their education and more specifically, their writing:

[T]he greater thrust toward involving the learner in every phase of the learning experience acts as an encouragement for learners to accept more responsibility for their own learning and to take a more active role in that learning. The more active the learner, this reasoning goes, the more invested he or she will be in the writing, and the more he or she will learn.

(Hamp-Lyons and Condon xiii)

The students are required to select the items to include in the portfolio, thereby investing students with the responsibility of picking what they feel is their best work and best represents who they are as a writer. Freedom to perform the selection gives the students control over how they are represented in the portfolio and contributes to how they are graded.

Students must be able to ‘own’ their portfolio, to see it as their own. Students who see that they have control over their portfolios will also perceive that they can to some degree control their own fates—grades, placements, and so on. That kind of ownership leads to greater investment in learning, which in turn leads students to spend more time and effort and heap more care on their writing. (162)
In Antevasin, students also have a considerable amount of control on how they respond to writing assignments. Antevasin students are able to use their own audience aware, critically conscious writing knowledge to choose which dialects, forms, genre, style, and rhetorical strategies they think best represent who they are and are most appropriate for the particular assignment, their individual purposes, and the audience. This level of student participation requires the students to take responsibility for engaging in the course material and the writing process, generating control over their own portfolios and placing each individual student in the driver’s seat of their education.

**Beneficial for Mainstream and Non-mainstream Students**

The portfolio method offers advantages to all students—mainstream and non-mainstream alike. In *Assessing the Portfolio*, Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon write,

> [P]ortfolios as an assessment offer the potential for teachers to decide to value a wider range of writing styles and voices than are privileged in an essay test. Thus, as assessment they potentially offer a great opportunity to nonnative writers and members of minority groups, to show what they can truly do in writing. (111)

Hamp-Lyons and Condon point out that both mainstream students and non-mainstream or non-native/border students are often at a disadvantage when it comes to essay assessment because many composition instructors don’t offer enough revision opportunities over an extended amount of time (111). Also, many composition instructors
teach students, especially non-mainstream students, to value correct grammar and traditional academic discourse more than self-expression, clear prose, and well-developed ideas in multiple discourses by not explicitly encouraging the use and value of “a wider range of writing styles and voices” (111). Due to the delayed grading or judgment of a portfolio, students are encouraged to continuously revise and rewrite. In doing so, they are afforded both the time and the responsibility to find their own errors.

The portfolio method of scoring encourages writers to focus on what truly matters most in writing, which is another important benefit to multilingual or nonmainstream writers:

> In the portfolio assessment context, ESL [multilingual] writers can be convinced that concentrating on ideas, on content, support, text structure, and so on, are worthwhile because they need not fear the cost of such attention to achieving technically correct language—which most of them have been conditioned to believe teachers value first and foremost.

(Hamp-Lyons and Condon 61)

The Antevasin portfolio teacher addresses correct grammar only in regard to the proofreading process for final, polished products after several rewriting workshops. Grammar usage is improved through peer workshops and mini direct teaching lessons near the end of the semester when students’ portfolio pieces are nearing the end of their process. The Antevasin portfolio method gives non-native/border students who often struggle with conventional grammar usage the opportunity to excel in writing since it
stresses experimentation, a wide range of writing, encourages multiple revisions over a long period of time, and stresses content and development first and foremost. As a result, both mainstream and non-mainstream students are set up to succeed in college composition.

**Portfolio Praxis**

*Following is a list of praxis qualities that constitute an Antevasin Portfolio. Without meeting the following conditions, the portfolio method employed will not be representative of Antevasinist Pedagogy.*

1. The portfolio is context driven with a large range of writing, meaning that several samples of the students’ writing, generated under various circumstances (in-class, out of class, experimental pieces, and those pieces more in line with traditional academic discourse), are represented.

2. A collection of work, meaning several texts (at least three pieces) must be included in order to demonstrate the students’ range of writing. This gives both the teacher and the student an assessment advantage: The teacher is able to see how the student performs in different writing situations allowing the teacher to discover where the particular student’s talents lie, as well as where he or she needs improvement, making the decision to pass or fail the student much more fair and accurate. The benefit for the students is that they are not only afforded the opportunity to write in different genres, dialects, and discourses for a variety of purposes, but this means that they also have several opportunities to succeed, as
opposed to one final essay, which restricts them to just one opportunity for success or failure.

3. Freedom of selection: The writer chooses the pieces to include in his or her collection. This gives the writer control over his/her writing and performance: “He or she chooses which pieces to submit for judgment, in part, at least, according to the writer’s criteria. The act of making the selection leads writers to implicit—and often explicit—decisions about quality. Thus, selection promotes self-assessment” (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 35). Self-assessment promotes self-awareness, audience awareness, and personal investment in students’ composing process and grades.

4. Reflective pieces are required. The Antevasinist portfolio requires a self-reflective piece or letter of some kind that introduces the selection. Through the reflective piece, “students are able to show most clearly their growth as writers, their sense of themselves as individuals who write, who use writing for personal purposes, as individuals and as members of the academic community” (72). Not only does this piece explicitly identify their growth for the teacher, but it also enables the student to be more aware of their own progress. It assists them when engaging in selection because it prompts them to seriously consider what they’re including and why. Additionally, “The reflective letter has tremendous potential to reveal the student’s own voice, to let the reader through into what is really important to the writer” (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 72). It empowers the student in a way that
is different than the parameters of their regular essays by generating explicit exploration about who they are as a writer and what that means in the context of language and power.

5. The teacher provides assessment on other writing assignments prior to the due date for the portfolios. Students need an idea of what the teacher expects, in addition to reading rubrics and discussing expectations in class. They need to experience the teacher’s grading style firsthand prior to final portfolio grades.

6. There must be clear criteria and guidelines. The students must know early on what types of items are to be included in the portfolio—i.e., process, reflective letters, etc., so that they can adequately prepare. Also, explicit grading rubrics need to be given to the students early and used on other graded assignments so that they know what is expected of them and how they can earn a grade they will be happy with. I recommend that the students and the teacher collaborate on generating the rubric and criteria. Collectively, students and the teacher should decide what tools need to be learned in order to create a successful portfolio and how the portfolio should be assessed. This approach gives the students a clear picture of how to succeed and more control over their grades.

7. The Antevasinist teacher can have the expectations for clear and concise prose, well-developed ideas, a clear purpose throughout, and the additional usual criteria for what is generally considered effective writing in the academy, but the writing that is produced under those expectations in an Antevasin class might look
different than the formalist, traditional academic discourse texts that many composition teachers are accustomed to seeing. These “different” pieces are never to be poorly graded simply because they’re different. If they meet the expectations, then the writer was successful and his or her grade must reflect that.

The Antevasinist Portfolio is incredibly useful to teachers and students alike. It reflects good writing habits (revision, self-reflection, collaboration, etc.), which produces better writing and more competent writers. Also, portfolios open the possibilities for more growth and improvement as a writer. In their article, “Portfolios and a Substitute for Proficiency Examinations,” Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff explain that “giving students more time and more chance for help, and by letting them choose their best writing, the system is a way to ask for better\textsuperscript{28} writing and push more\textsuperscript{29} students to provide it” (337). Portfolios give students the time to critically evaluate their own work, to seek the assistance they feel they need, and to consistently rewrite in order to provide their best work possible. The Antevasin portfolio uses the portfolio method to benefit mainstream and non-mainstream students alike by allowing all students the opportunity to experiment with writing in all different genres and dialects, creating an environment that supports creativity and self-expression.

From Intention to Practice

Following is the end-of-semester portfolio assignment I give to my students:

\textsuperscript{28} Elbow and Belanoff’s emphasis.
\textsuperscript{29} Elbow and Belanoff’s emphasis.
Final Project: Course Portfolio

As we’ve discussed in class many times, writing is a process. This process includes (but is not limited to) prewriting, writing or drafting, and rewriting/revising. Writing also includes complex thought, critical analysis, and self-reflection. It is a way to communicate, to make meaning, to entertain, and perhaps most importantly, to discover. The course portfolio is an opportunity to bring all of these ideas together; it is also an opportunity to seriously reflect on who you are as a writer and what you’ve discovered about writing. The portfolio is your chance to present fully revised, polished prose and to demonstrate just how much your writing skills have improved as a result of this course.

Assignment:

In a three ring binder, submit the following:

Title Page

Table of Contents

Narrative Cover Letter

Three rewritten, polished writing pieces (I am looking for a “multiplicity of texts” comprised of different types of writing—that is, writing in different genres, writing for various audiences in various discourses, and writing with various purposes).

Revision process narrative for one of the writing pieces

Process
Narrative Cover Letter: This is a personal letter to me that addresses your experience as a whole in the class. It should be a holistic summary that reflects your writing journey throughout the semester. I want to know what you have learned from this course as a whole, who you think you are as a writer and why, as well as the rationale for the assignments you selected to revise and include in your portfolio. This rationale should be a reflection of, or provide a connection to, your letter as a whole. Why did you choose these particular assignments to revise, and how does this decision relate to what else you’ve written about in your letter? How is it a reflection of you, your writing, your improvement, etc.?

Rewritten assignments: Please note that I am looking for substantial, serious revision. Small editing changes or rewriting one or two paragraphs is not substantial. To revise is to re-see, meaning that you must reconsider your entire piece of writing and rewrite the work accordingly. This means that each idea, each paragraph, each sentence, and each word choice has to be considered again. Do these elements represent exactly what you are meaning to say? Is each word the perfect word—does it represent exactly what you mean it to? Is this the best piece of work you can produce? Also, I am looking for polished work, meaning no spelling or grammar errors.

What to submit:
You can choose any writing pieces to revise and include in your portfolio, providing that I have given you written feedback on the piece, meaning you can’t include an essay that hasn’t been graded by me and returned to you.
Revision Narrative: (Please choose one of your writing pieces/essays to include a revision narrative for). This is a brief account (1-2 pages) of why you made the choices you made in revision. How did my feedback affect your choices? How did your peers’ feedback affect your choices? Why did you do what you did, and how do you feel about the result?

Process: This is proof of your writing and learning process in the class. Provide every draft of your revised assignments, including prewriting and any peer responses. You must include the draft you submitted to me (the one that includes my written comments and grade). Also, include anything else (such as free-writes, prewriting, etc.) to support your narrative letter and revision narrative as well.

**Everything, except perhaps some of your process, should be typed, double spaced, in Times New Roman 12-point font, and pages must be numbered.

Final Thoughts

So how can first-year composition teachers reconcile the tension and conflict between the tenets of traditional academic discourse and the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution, and in doing so, develop a pedagogy that transcends the border and boundaries of them both, thereby creating an equitable space for the study of composition that is unfixed, experimental, and liberating, while still empowering students with the necessary knowledge to gain entrance to the dominant discourse? The first step is to understand the tenets of both traditional academic discourse and the “Students’ Right” resolution.
Traditional academic discourse is formulaic writing written in a detached, third person, objective voice using only Edited American English. This form privileges traditional knowledge over personal knowledge; it marginalizes alternative discourse forms, thereby marginalizing the many different people who use these alternatives; it creates biased hierarchies and constructs false binaries serving to produce negative learning outcomes for some, if not most, contemporary first-year college composition students. However, regardless of the many faults associated with teaching traditional academic discourse, students will have to be fluent in its codes and conventions in order to participate fully and successfully in academia and beyond.

Unlike traditional academic discourse, the “Students’ Right” resolution legitimizes and includes multiple discourses and dialects within the college classroom, serving to break-down boundaries and bridge connections. However, few composition instructors are utilizing the resolution in their classrooms. Although most students and professors are receptive to embracing the study and practice of alternative forms within the first-year college composition course, the resolution has so far failed for the following reasons:

- Many teachers have misinterpreted the resolution as a total replacement of traditional academic discourse and Edited American English.
- Many faculty feel conflicted and perhaps resistant about the resolution itself (namely because it is widely misinterpreted).
• Very few teachers receive any guidance or training in how to implement the resolution or other alternatives to traditional academic discourse in their classrooms.

Since the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution hasn’t gained widespread acceptance, we need a pedagogy that will be accepted and implemented within the first-year composition course. It is imperative that this new pedagogy corrects the failures of the resolution by including traditional academic discourse in order to prevent faculty misinterpretation and conflict. It must also include explicit praxis ideas so that faculty will know how to implement the pedagogy into their own contexts and curriculum, and it must honor the tenets of the resolution by including dialectical diversity and alternative rhetorical patterns in the classroom.

Antevasin—the New Pedagogy

If we find anything that we have to change—and we do—we know that we are touching something that goes deep into [our students’] past and spreads wide in his personal life. We will seek not to dislodge one habit in favor of another but to provide alternative choices for freer social mobility. We seek to enrich, not to correct …. By respecting their traditions and the people from whom they come, we teach them to respect and to hold tight to what they have as they reach for more. (Lloyd 42)

Antevasin transcends the borders and boundaries between traditional academic discourse and the “Students’ Right” resolution by creating an equitable space for the
study of writing that is inclusive and liberating while still empowering students with the necessary knowledge to gain entrance to the dominant discourse. An Antevasinist pedagogy enriches students’ linguistic dexterity by working within the conceptual borders created by these seemingly dichotomous pedagogies; by encouraging students to experiment; by honoring the students’ individual artistic/creative impulses, their own dialect and the dialects of others; and by honoring the expression of their authentic self within their writing. When we seek to change our students’ writing, we must seek to broaden it, not stifle and marginalize it: “We seek to enrich not to correct” (Lloyd 42). First-year composition instructors can work within the borders while simultaneously blasting the gates wide open.

My grandmother was a quilter who used leftover scraps of fabric from various quilts to create something she called a “crazy quilt.” Of the hundreds of quilts she created over her lifetime, she had made one in particular that was my favorite. It was a masterpiece created from disparate scraps with a crimson border outlining each one of the conflicting patterns of material. It was silky and mesmerizing. Each square was completely different in look, feel, color, each separate and unique; wild, unrestrained, yet always under the watchful eye of the crafter. The squares clashed with each other if viewed separately, yet together, these individual squares somehow came together in this magical, unified way. Somehow each square was an individual, but each contributed to the whole. There’s something about the harmony within the disharmony of different fabrics, colors, textures that’s beautiful and telling—crazy quilts teach us that working
within the borders of difference serves to illuminate the beautiful whole just waiting to emerge.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Faculty Letter

Dear Professor,

I am researching alternative methods in teaching the first-year college composition course for my master’s thesis; as such, I am studying the ways in which students are invited, and can be invited, to experiment with writing in different English dialects (as opposed to only Standard Academic Edited English) and in alternative styles and genres. It is not my intention to dismiss traditional academic discourse, but rather to collaboratively experiment with new and mixed forms as a means of improving our teaching, improving our students’ writing, and improving and maintaining equity in the academy.

An integral part of my research includes what writing teachers are doing in the classroom, why, and what their students make of it. Attached are questionnaires for faculty and students regarding college writing as well as a “Call for Submissions” form. Please consider responding to the faculty questionnaire and call for submissions, as well as encouraging your students to respond to the student questionnaire. I realize your time is quite limited, so please feel free to provide what information you can even if that means not responding to everything.

Included in this packet are the following:

1.) Informed Consent (this form must be signed by all faculty participants)
2.) Call for Submissions
3.) Faculty Questionnaire
4.) Student Questionnaires (including an informed consent explanation)—If you’re teaching multiple sections, please see Bev Reed’s assistant, Aaron, for additional copies (Calaveras Hall, Rm. 111).

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at choney77@yahoo.com. Additionally, if you prefer to respond to this information electronically, please notify me so I may email you all of the necessary documents.

Please submit completed data no later than May 16th, 2008 in my faculty mailbox, Calaveras Hall, Rm. 103 (or electronically at choney77@yahoo.com).

**There is no foreseeable harm or discomfort associated with these activities. This study has been approved by the CSUS Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.**

Sincerely,

Christina Honeycutt

California State University, Sacramento
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form, 2008
Christina Honeycutt
California State University, Sacramento
Department of English

Challenging the Traditional Discourse of the Academy: Authorizing Alternative Discourse Forms in the First-Year College Composition Course

I am conducting research regarding college composition teaching and writing practices, beliefs, and experiences. Some of my research requires the participation of professional writers, teachers of writing, and student writers. Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary as some questions may elicit answers that may be perceived as sensitive (i.e. sharing personal experiences, and/or sharing teaching/writing practices that are unpopular or perceived as “radical”). As a result, your participation in this research is confidential. Please be aware that your comments may be published, although your identity will be protected unless you indicate otherwise.

There is no foreseeable harm or discomfort associated with these activities. This research has been approved by the CSUS Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Below, there are two different options in how to handle your identity. If you want your identity to be confidential, please sign in the corresponding area. If you want your name released with your comments, please sign in the second signature area. By signing this form, you are indicating that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research. You may decline to be a participant in this study without any consequences.

I require that my identity is protected.

(Signature of Research Participant) (Date)

____________________________
(Print Name)

OR

I require that my identity is revealed if my comments are published. (Professionals who are responding to the Call for Submission form may want to consider releasing their identity).
Yes, I am open to being interviewed about my views on this topic.

Please direct any questions about this research to Christina Honeycutt at: choney77@yahoo.com.
Call for Submissions

Challenging the Traditional Discourse of the Academy: Authorizing Alternative Discourse Forms in the First-Year College Composition Course

Dear teachers and scholars of writing:

I am researching alternative methods in teaching the first-year college composition course for my master’s thesis; as such, I am studying the ways in which students *are* invited, and *can be* invited, to experiment with writing in different English dialects (as opposed to only Standard Academic Edited English) and in alternative styles and genres. My hope is that by doing so, the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s 1974 resolution, “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” will be enacted. As a result, I am looking for helpful models that illustrate ways to make this possible; thus I am calling for submissions of syllabi, course assignments, classroom activities and discussion ideas, as well as any other types of praxis-related models/suggestions. Should you wish to participate, please include the following:

*Description*: Describe or provide a summary of your submission, i.e. how to enact the activity, or a synopsis of the assignment.

*Purpose/Rationale*: The purpose of, or the reason for, the reading/assignment/discussion.

*Scaffolding*: Ways to introduce and/or prepare the students for the activity/assignment.

*Assessment (optional)*: If you submitted an assignment idea, please provide any suggestions you have on how to assess the assignment or measure student success.

*Additional Sources (optional)*: Please provide any additional sources you consider relevant.

*(If you’re submitting a syllabus, all of the above are optional).*

Please send electronic submissions to choney77@yahoo.com. All other submissions may be placed in my mailbox located in the English Department faculty mailroom, Calaveras Hall, Rm.103, CSUS.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

**There is no foreseeable harm or discomfort associated with these activities. This study has been approved by the CSUS Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.**
APPENDIX D

Faculty Questionnaire

Challenging the Traditional Discourse of the Academy: Authorizing Alternative Discourse Forms in the First-Year College Composition Course

Please note that the following questions involve both alternative dialects:

- Dialects that resist or are different from Standard Academic English

AND alternative ways of writing, such as:

- creative nonfiction
- narrative
- mixed discourses/forms

Questions:

The “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” 1974 CCCC Resolution reads as follows:

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (CCC 2-3)

1.) Are you clear on how to implement and practice the principles set forth in the above resolution in the writing courses you teach? Please explain.
2.) What training, if any, have you received on how to implement the resolution in your classroom?
3.) Do you think training should be provided to faculty? Why or why not?
4.) Do you support the CCCC’s 1974 resolution on “Students’ Right to Their Own Language”? Why or why not?
5.) If you do support the CCCC’s resolution, how do you demonstrate this support?
6.) When you ask your students to write using academic discourse, what kinds of assignments do they write? For example, formal academic essays, informal narratives, poetry, journals, or other genres?
7.) How many assignments do you think students should write in Standard Academic English? (All, most, some, none, etc.). Explain.
8.) How do you define “alternative discourse forms”? What attributes do you assign to such discourses?
9.) How open are you to students writing in alternative ways for your assignments? Why?
10.) Have you taught any writing techniques that you consider alternative? What are these techniques?
11.) If you do assign alternative assignments, or allow your students to write in alternative forms, are there ways in which you see this as having a positive effect?
12.) In what ways do these assignments serve the goals of first-year composition?
13.) Why do you, or do you not, assign or participate in the above?
14.) If you do give students assignments that call for or allow unconventional forms and/or dialects, do you have more of a concern about how to respond to and grade these assignments than you do when assigning something considered more conventional?
15.) Do you think alternative discourse forms can offer, or do offer, legitimate and rigorous academic work? Why or why not?
16.) Can alternative discourse forms offer certain kinds of rigorous academic work that traditional academic discourse cannot accomplish? Please explain.
17.) Do you think there are connections between academic writing and nonacademic writing that might be instructive and valuable to the teaching of, and learning of, college composition?
18.) Are you open to exploring the possibilities or potential of teaching and/or inviting alternative discourse forms into the first-year college composition course? Why or why not?
19.) Do you or others perceive your own writing as alternative to traditional academic discourse? Explain.
20.) Are there any ways in which your personal writing practices connect/contradict/support/resist the way you teach writing and the types of writing conventions and discourses higher education encourages?
APPENDIX E

Student Questionnaire

Challenging the Traditional Discourse of the Academy: Authorizing Alternative Discourse Forms in the First-Year College Composition Course

What college/university are you attending? ___________________
What English course(s) are you currently enrolled in: _________________________

1.) What is your favorite kind of writing and/or your favorite kind of writing to read? Why?
2.) Do you get the opportunity to practice (or receive instruction on) your favorite type of reading and writing in your first-year college composition course?
3.) If you do **not** get the opportunity to practice or learn about your favorite type of reading and writing, do you think this has affected your writing ability? Was this effect positive or negative?
4.) What is your all-time favorite writing assignment and why? What class and school was this assignment in?
5.) What did you expect to learn in your first-year college composition course? Was this expectation met? Explain.
6.) Finish the following two sentences in your own words as they pertain to this class:
   - I like it when
   - I hate it when
7.) What are your impressions of college academic writing?
8.) Do you ever feel that your writing is censored?
9.) What type of writing assignments does your professor assign?
10.) Do you like these assignments? Why or why not?
11.) Do you feel the types of writing assignments your professor requires help you to improve your writing? Why or why not?
12.) Do you think that open-genre assignments (assignments in which you choose the topic and the style of writing) would be more enjoyable to write? Why?
13.) If you had more freedom in how to craft your writing assignments/essays, do you think your writing would improve? Would you enjoy writing more? Why?
14.) Do you feel free to experiment with your writing in college writing classes? Why or why not?
15.) Should writing classes encourage experimentation and risk-taking in writing? Why or why not?
16.) What are some of your ideas on how teachers can encourage experimentation and creativity in the writing classroom? [Try to give specific examples].
17.) In your experience, are college instructors open to students writing in creative and/or alternative ways? Explain.
18.) How do your college writing experiences compare/contrast to your writing experiences in high school?
19.) Do you think writing in the personal voice (using your own experiences, and/or using “I”) is appropriate for college writing? Why?
20.) How do you define academic writing?
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