TRANSFORMING MULTICULTURALISM:
STRIVING FOR HUMANISM IN THE CLASSROOM

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Randeep Kaur Hothi

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iii
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Department of English
Abstract

of

TRANSFORMING MULTICULTURALISM:

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by

Randeep Kaur Hothi

Prominent theorist and compositionists such as Paulo Freire and Edward Said argue for a
more liberatory and humanistic approach in the classroom. There have been many
pedagogical responses to the actualization of Freire’s liberatory pedagogy,
multiculturalism being one of them. However, many times, the efforts of instructors to
incorporate this framework into their classrooms have resulted in superficial and
sometimes damaging modes of reinforcing existing stereotypes and promoting binary
worldviews. Therefore, I argue that it is important to look at multiculturalism as a way of
subverting existing authoritative views of the Other and enabling the Othered to
reconstruct and formulate their own identities grounded in their historical and cultural
experiences. And second, it is an effective way of dismantling the false authority and
privilege that is placed on academic or “standard” dialogue by placing all cultures,
including the culture of whiteness, under scrutiny so that one culture, language, form of
communication is not seen as a default or neutral while others seen as the outsiders,
unnatural, different. I argue that it is essentially through these things that teachers can begin to meet the essential goals of helping students gain rhetorical awareness and critical thinking skills in the composition classroom.

_______________________, Committee Chair
Fiona Glade, Ph.D.

_______________________
Date
DEDICATION

To my parents and siblings. And to the special new person who has brought so much love and happiness into my life. I have a deep appreciation for the unconditional love, care, strength, and understanding you have given me. I love you.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication .................................................................................................................. vii

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................. viii

Chapter

1. MULTICULTURALISM AND THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM ........ 1

2. DEVELOPING ASSIGNMENTS THAT PROMOTE MULTICULTURALISM ......................................................... 20

Work Cited .................................................................................................................. 35
Chapter 1: Multiculturalism and the Composition Classroom

“Certainly I think it is incumbent upon us to complicate and/or dismantle the reductive formulae and the abstract but potent kind of thought that leads the mind away from concrete human history and experience and into the realms of ideological fiction, metaphysical confrontation, and collective passion. This is not to say that we cannot speak about issues of injustice and suffering, but that we need to do so always within context that is amply situated in history, culture, and socio-economic reality. Our role is to widen the field of discussion, not to set limits in accord with the prevailing authority.”


“To establish a new framework, we need to begin with a frank acknowledgement of the basic humanness and Americanness of each of us.”

~Cornel West, Race Matters.

It has been over 40 years since Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published. Since then, there has been considerable focus in the field of Composition in applying critical pedagogy in the classroom in practical and accessible ways. Much of what Freire argues for in his book is based on things that should be taken for granted, such as providing the opportunity for all human beings to have a voice in their own lives and education. This does not seem like a revolutionary idea. The desire that Freire expressed was one for a world full of conscientious, self-reflective human beings who participated in dialogue and action to help diminish injustice and unfairness in the world, and to change or transform it for the better. However, the resistance to this idea seems to be ingrained in society and the education system in frighteningly inextricable ways. In many instances, the patriarchal, dominating culture of the academic world has excluded certain groups of people in one way or another, and it has been the work of many Compositionists for some time now to eradicate these exclusionary practices in order to provide a more inclusive environment for all students who come into the classroom.
The use of multiculturalism as a pedagogical approach has been one of the many ways Composition instructors have tried to address the elitist ideologies of the academic discourse community. In “Orientalism Once Again,” Edward Said states that “Humanism is centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and approved authority” (878). Ideally, this is what the multicultural approach should promote: individual agency, diverse cultural values, and authenticity of multiple ways of communication. In reality, the term multiculturalism has become a much overused and rarely well-defined, superficial homage to the desire to overcome the culture of silence in the academy. It does not provide the type of critical pedagogy Freire advocates in his book. And it is also something that Lisa Delpit argues against in “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children.” She states that:

Teachers are in an ideal position to play [the role of ethnographers], to attempt to get all of the issues on the table in order to initiate true dialogue. This can only be done, however, by seeking out those whose perspectives may differ most, by learning to give their words complete attention, by understanding one’s own power, even if that power stems merely from being in the majority, by being unafraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of color, and to listen, no, to hear what they say. (297)

The type of teacher that Delpit advocates for clearly moves away from the superficiality of many current methods of incorporating multiculturalism, and moves toward the
Freirean ideal of achieving a problem-posing classroom. This is a classroom where no one is silenced and all participants are allowed a voice in developing their own identities.

In order to apply a truly multicultural approach in the classroom, it is essential to understand the complexities of this term. The current approaches to applying a multicultural framework in the classroom may or may not focus on helping students understand the complex ways rhetoric plays a role in the creation and application of certain identities, cultures, and stereotypes. By trying to understand these complexities, Composition instructors can develop an awareness for how to engage in an investigation of these complexities with their students in the classroom in effective and non-binary ways. According to AnaLouise Keating, the view many instructors have of multiculturalism and how to use it in the classroom comes from the way this term has been defined in scholarship in the past. In her book *Teaching Transformation: Transcultural Classroom Dialogues*, Keating argues that the traditional ways multiculturalism has been defined in scholarship does not account for the ways various discourse communities are linked and interconnected with one another. Jay Jordan also makes a valid point in “Rereading the Multicultural Reader: Toward More ‘Infectious’ Practices in Multicultural Composition,” stating that many times, instructors’ only introduction to multiculturalism and multicultural texts comes from textbooks or readers that claim to be multicultural. However, he argues that these readers “have been singled out as perpetuators of a dominant (read white, middle-class, largely male, standardized-English-speaking and -writing) pedagogy that recognizes a lot of different languages and cultural practices but continues to admit only a few as academically acceptable” (Jordan
This can be especially true if instructors are not aware of the way multiculturalism should be used in the classroom or that it can become a tool in perpetuating current dominant modes of thinking about language and cultures.

The issue, however, does not rest in the fact that instructors do not employ the multicultural framework or that they are not aware of it. The issue resides in the misunderstanding of what this term entails, and how to appropriately and practically apply it in the classroom without promoting the same binary, stereotypical points of view that many students and instructors can unintentionally bring to the classroom. One of the ways instructors can begin to work to incorporate a multicultural framework in the classroom is to connect the somewhat evasive and nebulous idea of multiculturalism with the concrete composition goals dictated by the Writing Programs Association’s (WPA) Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition. Though outcomes for any class are usually meant as a resource for instructors to understand what they should help students achieve once they complete the class, the WPA outcomes can also be viewed as a document that informs Composition programs (Yancey 322). The reason it is important to look at these outcomes documents is because they provide a way for the instructor to adapt the multicultural framework in practical and accessible ways. The use of a multicultural framework can accomplish goals such as gaining rhetorical awareness and critical thinking skills, which are important goals for the students to accomplish in a composition classroom.

The main debates in response to multiculturalism that have been happening within the Composition field have centered around the lack of this framework to promote
diversity without any focus on the potential of this framework to promote course outcomes. The debates have also centered on the need to move away from the separation that many stereotypical views of the different cultures can foster. And many theorists also discuss the dangers of shifting toward a theory of color blindness, which does not allow for the diverse experiences of people to be counted toward their circumstances. Instead, this theory discounts the struggles of various groups of people and places the blame of the lack of success on the very people who are struggling to survive. These theorists bring up good points. However, few make suggestions for practical ways of implementing these ideas. In order for that to happen, it is important to focus on the ways that the goals of the Composition classroom can connect with the goals of promoting diversity.

In the quest to provide a diverse experience for the students, many times what ends up happening is that the classroom setting promotes a more dominant, patriarchal view by fostering what Keating calls melting-pot analogies and separatist ideologies in the name of multiculturalism. She argues that this term has been used to promote the false ideology that all people are treated equally and fairly with the use of melting-pot analogies that “deny the roles power plays in constructing literary values and traditions” (11). She also states that it is dangerous to define multiculturalism using unbending, stereotypical views of certain groups of people where the focus in on how separate they are rather than how they intersect with each other. Although this may not be the intention when many instructors incorporate multiculturalism, this type of multiculturalism—which presents the other in terms of how the oppressors have defined them—can be easy to incorporate into the classroom unintentionally.
Said’s discussion on Orientalism provides a clear perspective on the ways in which those in positions of power construct the identities of the other, limiting or silencing their perspectives and experiences by “making statements about” them, “authorizing views of” them, describing, teaching, settling, and ruling over them as a way of “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over” them (Orientalism 5). Dualistic and binary views of the world come into existence when only those in power are allowed to participate in the construction of everyone’s identity with no grounding in the actual experiences of the people. Said pushes for a humanistic critique where the construction of “knowledge of other peoples and other times… is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes [rather than] knowledge—if that is what it is—that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency, and outright war” (“Once More” 872). This support for a move away from binary and exclusionary views of others is essential, along with a shift to a focus on the type of practices that enable the careful study and analysis of multiple communities and perspectives.

The integration of the separatist multiculturalism exists especially in classrooms where very few opportunities are provided for students to engage in questioning standard ways of viewing the world as Said argues students should be able to do. This reinforces the “dominant-cultural worldview” like the melting-pot multiculturalism rather than focusing on common grounds (Keating 12). Keating calls this the separatist multiculturalism, which is the “rhetoric of narrowly defined authenticity that supports the ‘common sense’ belief that self-contained social identities are permanent, unchanging
categories of meaning based on biology, family, history, and tradition” (12). Therefore, it is not possible to foster critical thinking and rhetorical awareness of the ways various groups of people communicate and how they are interrelated with each other, if instructors use texts that only profess to be multicultural.

One way to foster a genuine multicultural approach in the classroom is to make sure that the texts being used are not merely promoting sensitivity training, but that they engage students in conversations about the shifting tensions and the complexities of various groups. This is what E. Shelley Reid also argues in “Starting Somewhere Better: Revisiting Multiculturalism in First-Year Composition.” However, like Jordan, she states that current anthologies “do a poor job of focusing students’ attention on the liveliness of the tensions between diversity and unity, division and integration, individual and group identities” (74). This, therefore, reinforces a separatist multicultural ideology, where students are not able to understand how various communities, groups, individuals, and histories are all interconnected in complex ways. When students are not provided with classroom activities and readings that help them understand how reality is always changing and shifting, the instructor is only reinforcing the existing stereotypes. Rather than accomplishing the goal of diminishing differences, this can lead to the creation of even more differences. Therefore, to achieve the humanistic approach that Said argues for, it is important to incorporate self-created knowledge and identity that considers the perspectives and historical contexts of the groups being studied. Thus, the use of these texts and this way of thinking of multiculturalism does not help promote the values of the
humanistic classroom that instructors might wish to promote. And so it becomes important to connect this approach to the WPA outcomes.

In many ways, the melting-pot and separatist views of multiculturalism are similar to what Nelson M. Rodriguez calls color blindness in his text, “Projects of Whiteness in Critical Pedagogy.” He argues that there have been attempts to address the connections between “whiteness” and “race privilege and its structured invisibility” as “an important counter-discursive marking of whiteness” (9). This shift from solely studying cultures who are traditionally marginalized to an inclusive study of multiple cultures including the study of whiteness marks an important move in critical pedagogy. This is essential in order to analyze the ways that a dominant culture influences and at times defines the less dominant or marginalized. However, the push to further the study of dominant and non-dominant cultures and perspectives alike has led to attempts to further a dangerous ideology of color blindness, where the assumption is that “all people are the same under the skin and that [they] all have the same equal chances of making it…[and] if a minority person fails to achieve, then the blame lies solely with the individual” can prove limiting and counter to the humanistic goals of a multicultural classroom (9). This color blind ideology is dangerous in the same way melting-pot analogies are. Instead of focusing on how various power structures actually prevent certain groups of people from succeeding, this type of ideology blames these groups for not succeeding; such a paradigm assumes that since all people have equal rights and similar experiences then their failures are their own fault. Thus, it conceals the unfair power structures and systems that denied people of color and other historically marginalized groups access to certain modes of achieving
success. Bringing this type of approach in the classroom might look seductive since instructors can assign texts from various authors of different backgrounds who have been able to achieve success in this world, however, these cases might be the exceptions to the norm rather than the reality of what many marginalized groups of people go through. Therefore, this does not address the ways language and power play a significant role in the success of a certain groups of people, unless the struggles that these authors have had to face in order to achieve success is also a focus of the classroom discussions.

It is clear that defining multiculturalism in a way that gets rid of the damaging views many instructors have of this term is essential to promoting a more humanistic and liberatory classroom. But it is also important to clarify how this abstract term can be practically applied in the classroom to achieve the goals of gaining rhetorical awareness and critical thinking skills as the WPA outcomes statement asserts. Once the link between these goals and multiculturalism is examined carefully, the connections to how the multicultural framework can work to promote these goals becomes clearer and understandable. According to the Outcomes Statement, the first two goals of a Composition classroom are to increase students’ rhetorical awareness and critical thinking skills. If instructors are able to see the benefit of using a multicultural approach as one that acts as a bridge toward rhetoric and critical thinking, then it becomes apparent why the need for this approach is essential in the classroom. As stated in the WPA Outcomes Statement, understanding the relational nature of power, language, and knowledge, as well as being aware of the various backgrounds and languages that students bring to the classroom, are important goals for Composition Studies (Yancey
Another document that asks Composition instructors to address language usage in various contexts is the College Composition and Communications’ Committee (CCC), who has developed a position statement on Students’ Right to Their Own Language. This position statement asks Composition instructors to provide students with the type of instruction that will enable them to understand the rhetorical complexities that exist in the ways various discourse communities communicate, and to think critically about how these complexities shape the language used by each community and the values held by each community.

As a major goal of the CCCs Position Statement, enabling students to view their ways of communicating as valid along with understanding other ways of communication is important. Here is what the Position Statement claims:

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 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. (4)
Not only does the instruction of the mythical standard American dialect suppress certain students and their historical contexts, but it also hinders the teacher’s ability to promote a humanistic classroom. This is because it promotes the false ideology that one way of communicating is the most important or valid. As Min-Zahn Lu and Bruce Horner point out “At the heart of these dilemmas lies the problematic of experience: what it is, who represents it to whom to what ends, in what manner, and whether and how such representations change that experience” (258). Here Lu and Horner are discussing the problematic and conflicting nature of the teacher and researcher. However, this dilemma they set up for teacher/researcher also applies to the classroom and the use of multiculturalism. If the questions that Lu and Horner pose are not addressed in the classroom, the result can be the promotion of false ideologies. Rather than focusing on how to view or define multiculturalism, the focus instead should be on how to use it in the classroom in ways that enable the instructor to help students engage in the practice of analyzing various discourse communities. But what is also important to understand is how multiculturalism is connected to critical thinking and rhetorical awareness so that this abstract term can be used and applied in practical ways in the classroom.

One of the main arguments made for the connection between rhetoric and culture is by Kenneth Burke. If Burke’s definition of rhetoric is carefully examined, the interconnectedness of rhetoric and culture is apparent. However, unfamiliarity with the ways these are linked may lead to some issues in grounding the multicultural approach in the practical. In *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke argues that
Whereas many other animals seem sensitive in a rudimentary way to the motivating force of symbols, they seem to lack the “second-level” aspect of symbolicity that is characteristically human, the “reflexive” capacity to develop highly complex symbol systems about symbol systems, the pattern of which is indicated in Aristotle’s definition of God as “thought of thought,” or in Hegel’s dialectics of “self-consciousness.” (24)

It is this very self-consciousness that connects rhetoric to culture. The human ability to be reflective about the world and the ways humans make meaning in the world is the study of rhetoric. In “Defining Rhetoric—and Us,” Richard Coe provides insightful commentary on the relational nature of rhetoric, culture, language, and discourse communities based on Burke’s definition of humanity. Coe argues that according to Burke, defining humanness and rhetoric are not separate tasks. He claims that “What makes us human is our culture, which is founded in our unique forms of symbolizing, our languaging, which is in its very nature rhetorical as it goads/gods us, moves/motivates us, makes us social, cultural (non-) animals, allows us to compose ourselves humanly” (Coe 47). The study of rhetoric, then, becomes the study of culture, discourse communities, languages, societies, economic classes, educational differences, gender differences, sexual orientation, and the conscious or unconscious meaning-making in which all these groups are involved. The study of the contexts surrounding these groups of people enables students and teachers to engage in the type of critical inquiry that Freire advocates, fostering the development of a critical consciousness. This is what the multicultural approach embodies. When instructors allow students to approach learning
about rhetoric and engage in critical thinking, not only must students examine cultural and social contexts, they must simultaneously analyze the rhetorical choices being made within those contexts. Part of this analysis must also include an analysis of the perspectives and historical contexts students themselves bring to the classroom. Since the CCC’s position statement explicitly states there must be an effort made by the instructors to enable students to see the validity of their own methods of communication, this analysis is essential to the multicultural classroom. The Composition classroom then becomes the humanistic classroom for which Freire and Said argue because it allows students to assess the communication methods of various groups of people by taking into account the historical contexts that go along with their ways of speaking and communicating. Few other methods offer instructors this type of an opportunity to effectively enable students to achieve the larger goals of affirming their own discourses as outlined in the CCCs Position Statement while also helping them achieve the goals of the classroom.

One thing that is apparent in both of the previous ways multiculturalism has been defined—melting-pot and separatist multiculturalism—is that it does not allow for students to construct knowledge and identity in the classroom. It also does not allow for students to interject and intervene in the dominant views of their own identities in order to create ones that are specific and meaningful to their own experiences. And this is what should be used to define multiculturalism. Keating defines such a way of viewing multiculturalism as critical multiculturalism. This type of multiculturalism is one which “intervenes in the dominant-cultural” ideologies thus challenging “narrow assumptions
about authenticity… [and demonstrating] that cultural identities are created, not discovered” (13). One of the arguments against a multicultural approach comes from Maxine Hairston’s “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing.” Hairston argues that the “cultural left” has “claimed writing courses as their political territory” and that they use these courses to promote their own political ideologies rather than teaching students to become better writers (183). For her, developing a low-risk environment where students write about what they care about or wish to know more about is an important aspect of the classroom. In the model Hairston puts forth, students do not engage in the creation of their own identities as Keating argues they should. Since the purpose of a multicultural approach in the classroom is to enable students to see the world from a variety of perspectives, asking them to only write about things they are concerned about does not help them ascertain the ways in which various other discourses or languages shape who they are. It also does not promote engagement in dialogue about the ways in which language is political and promotes the ideologies of various dominant groups of people. This form of teaching Composition also does not ask students or teachers to “look at how the language we use constitutes the world we live in, the differences that separate us” as John Trimbur argues in his response to Hairston’s argument (248). Students are asked to engage in dialogue and are sharing their differences but not engaging in “the rhetorical art of negotiation” (Trimbur 249). And Robert G. Wood states in response to Hairston’s argument that the liberal instructors she argues are promoting their own political views would not
suggest that as teachers we should coerce our students into adopting our political views or that we should use the classroom to proselytize. Doing this would conflict with the most fundamental premise of liberatory pedagogy, which is to empower students and give them genuine voices of resistance to the very same ‘banking concept’ of teaching of which Hairston appears so critical. (250)

A truly multicultural approach should enable students to validate their own ways of communication, and give them the tools to succeed in the dominant power structures of the academic discourse, no matter which discourse they identify with the most. It also enables them to analyze the ways in which language is used as a way of exerting power over others.

Though it might be easy to focus on trends that are happening in textbooks, a careful analysis and evaluation of the best practices is essential for the use of multiculturalism in the classroom. Jordan’s discussion on the misuse of the term multiculturalism and how this is affecting the way composition is taught in first year classrooms illustrates how harmful it can be to rely solely on textbooks to understand and then apply a multicultural approach. He states that it has become a trend for publishers to print what they consider to be “multicultural” texts or readers. However, these texts seem to assume there is a very clearly defined boundary between cultures when they should “view the teaching and learning not as initiation into ‘reading’ generally or as a clear break from illiteracy or orality, but rather as contextually grounded abilities to engage and negotiate discourses, whether oral, written, or mixed” (Jordan 171). These contexts are ignored by many teachers that claim to teach multiculturalism because either they are
unaware of the fact these issues should be addressed or because they do not know how to address them. In “Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness,” Patricia Bizzell also argues that “Our very examination of discourse, of course, takes place in a historical context circumscribed by tradition and current group and individual needs” (138). Since the ways of communicating and the differences in language in various discourse communities emerged from contexts that were very specific to each community, understanding these contexts, discussing them, and clearly making connections to the ways oppressive and authoritative forces play a role in the creation of particular contexts is important in the classroom. Doing so with superficial assignments in which students only compare and contrast surface level differences in language or dialect without getting to the underlying conflicts just serves to promote stereotypes. Freire’s advocacy for being life-long learners and critically reflective, as well as critically conscious, beings is not possible if all contexts are not considered. This is because the examination then becomes a one-dimensional reading of the views of the dominant groups, therefore “othering” the marginalized groups even more.

In addition, the multicultural approach should also enable those students who might be members of certain dominant power structures to analyze their own historical contexts and gain better awareness of the ways in which this discourse might unintentionally be contributing to the oppression of others. This is not to say that all of those who are traditionally in positions of power are likely to participate in the oppression of others. This type of thinking also falls under the stereotypical views that the multicultural approach should work against. San Juanita Garza argues similarly in “‘As if
bereav’d of light’: Decoding Whiteness in My Academia” that all people are capable of the type of thinking that oppresses others. Garza defines whiteness as the oppressiveness of others with the intention to define them without giving “them the opportunity to define themselves” (61). She provides various examples from her interactions with people of different backgrounds to illustrate that whiteness is not necessarily “an attribute of any one particular race” (60). It would then be counter-productive toward the multicultural approach to view all students who are members of a dominant discourse community as the oppressors and all students who are members of the non-dominant groups as the victims with no part in the oppression of others. This adds another responsibility on the instructor to make sure this type of stereotypical thinking does not happen in the class because it is easy to blame certain groups of people based on stereotypes that might not apply to all members of that group. Rodriguez also argues that instructors should “invite (white) students to critically engage with inequalities and asymmetrical relations of power so as to challenge and transform them” (9). Therefore, the instructor’s responsibility is not to move away from teaching academic dialect but to “activate the student’s competence” in this form of communication (CCC’s Position Statement 9). Simultaneously, they should also empower students to resist the ways a more dominant discourse, especially one such as the academic discourse, can lead to the overwhelming and overpowering of other forms of communication (CCC’s Position Statement 9).

There are many ways of addressing the need to raise rhetorical awareness and critical thinking, including assigning essays that ask students to rhetorically analyze a persuasive text, doing a visual rhetorical analysis or even asking students to discuss texts
written by multicultural writers. While these are wonderful ways of helping students understand rhetoric and become aware of particular appeals or fallacies that are sometimes used to persuade an audience, these assignments do not necessarily build critical thinking skills in ways that the WPA Outcomes Statement argues that they should. This is because these types of assignments might not ask students to discuss or write about the “relationships among language, knowledge, and power” among different discourse communities (WPA Statement 324). And though students may understand the way reader expectations shape writing or language in general, they may only be focusing on traditional academic texts when conducting their analyses in most situations. Therefore, they are not being asked to discuss and write about texts from other cultures and discourse communities. And most likely, they are also not being asked to discuss the influences of elitist discourses on specific language usage and meaning-making of other groups of people. The interrelatedness that Keating argues is important to address in a truly multicultural approach is not necessarily addressed in an assignment that only focuses on superficial analyses of an author’s use of ethos, pathos, and logos in a particular text. Asking students to rhetorically analyze an advertisement, for example, would enable them to understand the ways that viewers’ expectations shape the rhetorical appeals the advertisers may use. This assignment may not, however, allow students to go through the process of analyzing and understanding the larger societal beliefs, expectations, or assumptions that are present in the advertisement. Many times, this type assignment can force students into making those same stereotypical assumptions about the values and beliefs of the target audience that in no way enable them to look critically
at why the appeals used within the text or advertisement are effective at persuading that particular audience. Students also do not get the opportunity to address the ways the advertisement might be constructing a particular identity about certain groups of people unless specified by the instructor.

It is only when students are asked to move beyond rhetorical appeals to a more social analysis in the way that Burke and Coe outline that students can begin to work toward being more conscious in their thinking and writing. As Coe states, “Without our ability to abstract, theorize, consider the distant past (historicize) and not-yet existent future (plan), to hypothesize and to weigh alternatives, we are not human” (43). Part of critical thinking is being able to make these connections from the past to present to future and assess how the contexts of each time may change the way societies think about and respond to certain situations or people both within and outside the academic setting. Another part of defining critical thinking links back to Freire’s idea of conscientiousness. His argument that all human beings must actively reflect on the world and be able to understand the ways in which the society has been set with the underlying values that exist in many of the ways of thinking and acting is part of defining and understanding what critical thinking should be. And it is through the reading, discussing, and writing about multiple discourse communities that students can effectively make connections to the power struggles between academic and non-academic discourses. This is also where they can begin to form an understanding of why certain groups might be regarded highly or given certain privileges based on the language they speak and the type of knowledge they possess.
Chapter 2: Developing Assignments that Promote Multiculturalism

Before moving on to discuss the multicultural framework application, it is first essential to understand what rhetorical awareness and critical thinking mean for the Composition classroom. Part of gaining rhetorical knowledge according to the WPA Outcomes Statement is being able to respond to the “needs of various audiences,” respond to “different kinds of rhetorical situations,” understand the “conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation” and “understand how genres shape reading and writing” (323-24). Achieving these goals with the rhetorical analyses that only ask students to focus on dominant genres does not enable them to communicate effectively in various rhetorical situations. Instead, asking students to read texts from various discourse communities and comparing these texts to standard academic texts and genres will enable students to understand and value the reasons for the differences that exist in the ways people communicate in different situations. This type of rhetorical analysis promotes the investigation of the social contexts surrounding the texts. Therefore, an assignment that does these things is more likely to promote the type of critical inquiry that Freire advocates. This is not to say that a rhetorical analysis assignment cannot be included or should only focus on analyzing texts from what are usually considered multicultural authors. What this means is that the assignments should push students to conduct a deeper and fuller analysis of the contexts within society. This can happen just as well with an analysis of an advertisement as well as an academic text. However, students must be provided with appropriate scaffolding for the assignment that will enable them to look beyond the surface level things and look thoroughly at the
underlying assumptions, values, and goals of the authors of the texts or contexts they are analyzing. One way to do this is discussed in the heuristic below. Asking specific questions that help students to uncover and form opinions about the underlying values of the texts they are analyzing is very important.

As Keating and Rodriguez argue, it is not necessarily effective or desirable to exclude all standard or canonized texts from the classroom. This is because a variety of texts and races should be examined, including whiteness. When the examination of a dominant community is excluded from the classroom, the unnamed race or group of people may be viewed as the normalized group or the default way of thinking and being. However, according to the CCC’s position statement, “dialects are developed in response to many kinds of communication needs” and many times, by focusing on the traditional “standard” writing when assigning essays or doing other activities, Composition instructors inadvertently ignore and devalue the dialects or languages of other communities that have been established to respond to different kinds of rhetorical situations (5). The role of the teacher, then, is not just to teach the vocabulary associated with rhetoric in relation to texts from one, albeit dominant, discourse community, it is to help students understand rhetoric in the way Burke defines it. Instructors must enable students to clearly see how rhetoric shapes the lives of people across discourse communities. The inclusion of multiculturalism then, becomes an important aspect of this type of classroom because of the ease with which it provides the teachers and students the opportunities to delve into the complexities of language, power, and knowledge—though the adequate inclusion of such an approach is anything but easy.
Assigning texts written by writers who discuss such things as the dichotomy between the academic and non-academic world, or the differences between the experiences of people within and outside privileged communities due to race, economic status, education, or gender allows instructors the opportunity to engage students in analyzing their own assumptions. Students can then move toward the critical self-reflection that will enable them to see whether or not they wish to keep these assumptions, add to them, or move past them. Students can respond to problem-posing questions which will enable them to discuss their responses freely within the classroom in a safe and friendly environment. Texts such as Paulo Freire’s chapter on problem-posing versus banking methods of education can be an eye-opening experience to students who have not thought about the ways in which the educational system has been set up in a way that is likely to oppress many people. A discussion on how the educational system works against the needs of students may provide them with the stepping stone to making further analysis of the way the academic language can be given privilege and force other forms of communication to be devalued or considered invalid. But along with including and discussing these types of texts that explain or exemplify the dichotomous way the current modes of thinking have set up the academic world against the non-academic world, it is also important for teachers to model and participate in the type of critical self-reflection that will enable the whole class to gain more from multiple perspectives.

Engagement in critical self-reflection for instructors is essential to understanding the assumptions they bring to the classroom before they can expect students to do so. Lil Brannon points out in “The Teacher as a Philosopher: The Madness Behind our Method,”
that “Few serious scholars or teachers of composition would point to textbooks in the
field as embodying the philosophical principles of the profession. Yet it is nonetheless
ture for many teachers of writing that their only introduction to the profession comes
from the textbooks that are offered them” (25). Although Brannon makes this argument
in the 80s, this is an issue that has not been resolved yet. When many composition
instructors are not adequately trained on what these outcomes actually are, much less how
to achieve them in their classrooms, the likelihood of applying a truly multicultural
approach lessens. Brannon argues that writing teachers must become philosophers of
composition, always looking for connections between their practices and the
philosophical and theoretical framework for these practices. Writing should be a way for
students to make connections and think about things in ways they have never thought of
before, and Brannon states that this “process can be nurtured, but it is not explicitly
taught; that is, teachers can assist the growth of writing ability but they do not offer that
ability as a gift from the literate to the not yet literate” (28). If composition classes are to
be required courses at many universities and colleges, then the need to provide focused
instruction to the future teachers of these courses is highly important. Bizzell points out
that “when my students encounter me as a writing teacher, they encounter all of me, my
entire personality, informed by all my religious, political, moral, and social
commitments” (“Save the World” 183). If this is true, then the need for instructors to
continually self-reflect on the implications of the practices within the classroom increases
exponentially.
In the foreword to Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Richard Shaull states that “There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (15). The instructor, then, becomes an instrument in either reinforcing conformity to current systemic beliefs and values or the agent through which transformation of the world is possible. It becomes essential for instructors to take moments for critical self-reflection to assess whether their practices are achieving the desired outcomes in order to resist conformity and promote conscientiousness. If the goal of the classroom is to help students achieve the critical affirmation that Min-Zhan Lu defines as “a literacy which might bring us hope and courage as well as vision and analysis of negotiating the crucial crossroad in the history of this nation,” it is necessary first to clearly assess and define how best to achieve this (173). Min-Zhan Lu argues that it is important for teachers to help students carry out such goals as ending oppression, grappling with experiences of privilege, as well as exclusion, approaching differences in experience and history with respect and responsibility, and finally, affirming “a yearning for individual agency shared by individuals across social divisions without losing sight of different material circumstances against which each of us must struggle when enacting such a yearning” (173). For Lu, these goals, important for students as well as teachers to strive for with the readings and writings they assign in the classroom, represent the larger desire to achieve social justice and provide a way for
students to have a voice in their own learning. In order for teachers to effectively apply a multicultural approach in the classroom, a variety of things must happen. First, it is pertinent that there is clear educational focus on teaching potential composition instructors the complexities of the term multiculturalism so that their only source of information on the topic is not just multicultural textbooks or readers. Second, teachers must become what Brannon calls philosophers of composition so as to be critically self-reflective of the way their own values and beliefs influence their teaching practices. Third, they must understand the critical goals of a composition classroom and strive to achieve these goals in practical and accessible ways that also further the call for humanism in the classroom. And in order to achieve these things, teachers must understand the interconnectedness of rhetoric with cultural, social, linguistic, socio-economic, and genre identities so as to better prepare themselves to help students understand these issues.

There are many things that can be done in order to achieve the type of critical self-reflection necessary to promote a humanistic and multicultural classroom. Using the questions outlined below as guidelines to facilitate critical self-reflection can make evaluating the extent to which the classroom is functioning as a multicultural classroom easier. These types of self-reflective questions also allow both the instructor and the students to be aware of the rhetorical choices they are making that are influenced by their own discourse communities. This, in turn, creates an active form of critical thinking through critical self-reflection. Critical self-reflection is important for both instructors and students to engage in so that they can be conscious of the reasons behind the choices
they make and how those choices influence not only others in the classroom setting, but also the larger population outside the classroom. Freire and Keating both argue that this type of dialogue is only possible when there is a self-reflective and conscientious facilitator who provides opportunities for the dialogues to occur in the classroom. As Lil Brannon states:

To be truly methodical about their teaching, teachers of writing must continually audit their governing philosophical perspective and the shape that perspective takes in their interactions with students. They must assume a habit of mind that causes them to continually monitor what they are doing in light of the philosophical premises governing their teaching practice. (27)

The need to be self-reflective and critically analyze the values that can come to the classroom may be addressed by the following questions that Composition instructors can keep in mind while designing their classroom activities and assignments.

1. Instructors should take opportunities to self-reflect which allow them to assess and evaluate how their own philosophies are influencing their instruction in the classroom. Some questions instructors can ask themselves to evaluate this aspect of their own ideologies are:

   a. According to my teaching philosophy, what are some goals or outcomes that I think are important for students to achieve in my classroom?

   b. Why do I hold these goals and outcomes to be important?

   c. What do these goals help my students achieve?
d. In what ways do these goals match the WPA learning outcomes for First-Year Composition?

e. What can the similarities and differences between my own goals and the WPA goals tell me about my own teaching philosophy?

f. In what ways can I incorporate the WPA learning outcomes into my own classroom?

2. Instructors should design assignments or activities and assign texts that enable students to make connections that move beyond the classroom. They should also help students engage in critical inquiry about the world in which they live. Some questions instructors can ask about their own assignments are:

a. Which of these goals specifically enable me to develop activities that help move my students from binary ways of thinking about the world toward gaining a more complex understanding of the ways people across a variety of discourse communities communicate?

b. Which of these goals specifically enable me to develop activities that help students understand the ways in which language can be used as an exclusionary tool?

c. How do these goals enable me to develop activities that can help students realize the validity of a variety of ways of communicating?

d. How do they also enable students to successfully gain the tools to succeed in the academic community?
e. In what ways does this particular assignment, text, or activity ask students to make connections between academic and non-academic ways of communicating?

f. To what extent does this assignment, reading, or activity raise awareness of the ways in which certain languages and groups of people (e.g. such as academic discourse community, groups with higher socio-economic status, gender, etc.) are privileged while others are not?

g. What activities have I designed to provide students with the metacognitive language they require (critical inquiry, problem-posing, self-reflection, exclusionary practices, politics of language, culture of silence) to engage in the type of critical self-reflection Freire advocates?

h. What activities have I designed to help students to understand what is meant when they are asked to discuss the values and beliefs of certain groups of people?

i. How can these assignments, readings and activities enable students to value their own discourse while understanding the discourse of the academic community throughout the semester?

3. Finally, instructors must facilitate classroom activities that ask students to evaluate their own values and beliefs and assess the extent to which they influence their own engagement with the material in class. This is only possible if students are provided with the meta-language to discuss and engage in this type of self-reflection. Here are some questions instructors can ask students to help them do this:
a. What discourse communities do you identify yourself with and why?

b. What are the different ways that you communicate within these discourse communities?

c. In what ways are these communication styles similar or different from the academic discourse?

d. In what ways does the communication method or language used within the academic setting affirm or conflict with the language(s) you speak in non-academic discourse communities?

e. How has your engagement with the class readings, assignments, and activities enabled you to engage with different points of view?

The way that knowledge of various people and communities should be constructed is through the collaborative efforts of the instructor and students in the classroom. In James Berlin’s prominent article “Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories,” he argues that “knowledge is not simply a static entity available for retrieval. Truth is dynamic and dialectical, the result of a process involving the interaction of opposing elements. It is a relation that is created, not pre-existing and waiting to be discovered” (774). Rather than lecturing on the way rhetoric is used differently in various cultures, the classroom should provide students the opportunity to explore what values and beliefs underlie currently held modes of thinking about and within certain groups of people. The heuristic provided above is one way of facilitating these discussions and explorations. This heuristic also provides a way for instructors to
make sure they themselves are rhetorically analyzing their own values and beliefs as well as helping students do the same.

Freire’s problem-posing theory and discussions on becoming more conscious human beings unmistakable lends itself to multiculturalism. He argues that “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (58). If students are asked to read, discuss, and write about diverse experiences of communities around the world, they are able to understand and gain familiarity with the diverse experiences of people around the world, which then enables them to first articulate then question the status quo and really have the opportunity to re-invent their perceptions of the world. Texts such as James Baldwin’s “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?” is a great example of readings that would enable students to historicize the contexts he presents in this article. Freire argues for a more liberatory approach to education where instructors help formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and … attempt to domesticate reality. They may discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human. They may perceive through their relation with reality that reality is really a process, undergoing constant transformation. (61)

And this idea of becoming fully human, closely related to what Burke argues, enables instructors to see the connection between rhetoric and humanism. For example, referring back to the Baldwin’s text, if students were asked to analyze any changes that may have
happened in society since Baldwin wrote this article. The political nature of the classroom makes it impossible to separate a discussion of language, knowledge and power from the inclusion of multiculturalism. The WPA outcomes statement outlines that in order to teach critical thinking, students must be able to understand the relationship among language, knowledge and power, and it is not possible to teach these relationships without a discussion of how specific groups of people exert power over others and how language is used as a tool to marginalize certain groups.

Self-reflection is vital in the move from binary thinking toward complex understanding, and Keating provides a very recursive model for how to do this well. The first step in this move is for students to become aware of their unconsciously held beliefs. This can be done using the third set of questions from the heuristic above, where students are asked to be reflective about how their own values and beliefs influence their engagement with the material in the classroom. Students are also able to reflect on their own values and beliefs if they are provided with the opportunities after discussions to freewrite or share their own reflections on what they have learned.

The second step is to help students explore the connections between themselves and the external world. The inclusion of instructor-directed activities and readings that ask students to explore the ways in which media, parents, education, religion, and many more factors influence the identities that they form are great ways of helping students understand just how much their identities are based on socially constructed ideas. Instructors can foster this connection making by asking the questions from the second criteria mentioned in the heuristic above. The assignments themselves can vary as long as
for each assignment, the instructor is able to respond to those questions about the ways in which these assignments, readings, or activities are helping students make connections between the world and themselves and the classroom. When students have begun to understand this, they can begin to understand the implications of the social construction of their own as well as others’ identities. This will not only allow them to move away from viewing the world as black and white, but will also allow them to think about whether or not they wish to keep, modify, or attempt to reject various beliefs and values. Keating states that this “self-reflection is a recursive four-part process” and is “both outwardly and inwardly” directed (14). In these ways, self-reflection can aid in the move away from binary toward complex worldviews.

Implementing such a framework in the classroom requires that the instructors are aware of the oppressive nature of the academic discourse and are open-minded to all the backgrounds and knowledge students bring to the classroom. As stated in the CCC’s position statement, “teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language” (1). This is not possible to achieve when there are many groups and languages that are rejected based on appearance, education, sex, class, and many other factors. And many who do try to be inclusive with the use of multicultural texts are not effective in their efforts to diminish stereotypes to achieve the liberatory education Freire advocates. In the explanation provided for why this position was adopted by CCCs, it is stated that as teachers “We need to discover whether our attitudes toward ‘educated English’ are based on some inherent superiority of the dialect itself or on the social prestige of those who use
it… [and are we rejecting] students who do not adopt the dialect most familiar to us…based on any real merit in our dialect or whether we are actually rejecting the students themselves, rejecting them because of racial, social, and cultural origins” (3). In a truly multicultural classroom, the focus should not be on rejecting certain races, cultures, sexes but on considering the roles that all these aspects of our lives play in forming our identities and making us human. However, because of the way multiculturalism can reinforce existing stereotypes if incorporated ineffectively, it is important for instructors to first re-define it for themselves in ways that enable students to gain the full benefits of using this framework in the classroom and it also provides teachers with a theoretically sound pedagogical approach to help students gain rhetorical awareness and become better critical thinkers.

Ultimately, it is important for writing instructors to be well educated and prepared to teach in ways that utilize the humanistic approach that Freire, Said, Lu, and Keating advocate. But this is not possible if larger programmatic changes do not occur. Freire claims that “Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from men” (69). There has to be a conscious effort by the whole Composition field to make strides to educate administrators, teachers, and students on the goals that all composition classrooms are trying to achieve. When the best practices to achieving these goals are not clearly defined within the field, the expectation of the outside world to understand the purpose of this field is unreasonable. Understanding that multiculturalism is an important
and essential part of achieving the critical pedagogy that many Compositionists strived for after the influence of Freire’s advocacy for a liberatory pedagogy is the first step. Perhaps such a cohesive and well-articulated view of composition is an ideal that is difficult to achieve, if not impossible. However, many smaller changes can be made within individual composition classrooms that address the importance of rhetorical awareness, critical thinking, and students’ right to their own language in ways that are achievable and transparent.

Using Lil Brannon’s idea that teachers must first become philosophers before they can become effective in teaching composition is essential to an effective application of a multicultural approach. Just as reality is always shifting and personal identity is created through conscious self-reflection, so must multiculturalism be created individually by teachers who have reflected and continue to reflect upon their own values and beliefs, and how these things influence their practices in the classroom. Jordan states that instructors “should begin by recognizing that inclusion necessarily involves a significant amount of interaction in order to maximize opportunities for different users of the discourse to notice and adopt new uses…[and] attempts to locate and contain multiculturalism miss the point that it cannot be contained” (173). Therefore, there cannot be a singular way of adapting a multicultural approach in the classroom, just as there is no singular way of viewing the world. It is the instructor’s responsibility to take opportunities to reflect critically and allow students to do the same in order to strive for the humanistic classroom that will enable both students and teachers to achieve social justice.
Works Cited


Yancey, Kathleen Blake. “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition.”