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CRITICAL LITERACY IN THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE MULTI-LAYERED, POLY-VOICED
ROLE OF TEXTS IN THE CLASSROOM

by
John Howard Paddison

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1995
As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by John Howard Paddison entitled CRITICAL LITERACY IN THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MULTI-LAYERED, POLY-VOICED ROLE OF TEXTS IN THE CLASSROOM and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Thomas Miller
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: [Signature]
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DEDICATION

"My major preoccupation is to work honestly and seriously toward the development of a better and just society."

Paulo Freire
Brazilian educator
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the manner in which texts are used in the classroom to either promote or inhibit critical literacy. Over a period of five months, from the Fall Semester of 1994, through the Spring Semester of 1995, I completed an ethnographic research study at four levels of education—the high school, the community college, the four-year college, and the university, all of which are located within Yavapai County in Northern Arizona. The results of that study are contained within this report.

Chapter One of this report presents the main argument of this project—that is, that critical literacy too often is not a vital consideration in textual selection and application in the average English composition classroom. Chapter Two is a review of the theoretical definition of critical literacy as it has evolved over the past quarter century. Of most importance in this analysis, however, is the relationship of critical literacy to classroom texts, especially in terms of the implications of liberatory pedagogy. In Chapter Three of my report I establish the method by which I will use ethnography—specifically critical ethnography—to test my hypothesis in actual classroom observations. In this chapter I also explain
my particular design, which involves direct classroom observation, as well as teacher and student questionnaires and interviews. These data-gathering methods provide the triangulation that is vital to my interpretation of the overall project.

Chapters Four and Five of this report focus on the actual case studies. Chapter Four is a presentation of the overall conditions of observation at the various schools. The second part of the chapter is devoted to the presentation and interpretation of the descriptive notes I that I took during my observation. Finally, in Chapter Five, I conclude my presentation with a discussion of the significant implications of my findings, as well as suggestions about the ways in which my study might be further extended.
In the tale of Sandford and Merton, where the two boys are described as amusing themselves with building a hovel with their own hands, they lay poles horizontally on the top, and cover them with straw, so as to make a flat roof; of course the rain came through; and Master Merton then advises to lay on more straw: but Sandford, the more intelligent boy, remarks that as long as the roof is flat, the rain must, sooner or later, soak through; and that the remedy is to make a new arrangement, and form the roof sloping. Now the idea of enlightening incorrect reasoners by additional knowledge, is an error similar to that of the flat roof; it is merely laying on more straw: they ought first to be taught the right way of raising the roof. Of course knowledge is necessary; so is straw to thatching the roof; but no quantity of materials will supply the want of knowing how to build.

I believe it to be a prevailing fault of the present day, not indeed to seek too much for knowledge, but to trust to accumulation of facts as a substitute for accuracy in the logical processes.

--Richard Whately, from the introduction to Elements of Rhetoric.

Though written in the early nineteenth century, Whately's assertion provides a good deal of insight into the current educational dilemma of how to accurately define and describe literacy. When critically analyzed, the anecdote of Masters Sandford and Merton helps one to understand the truly interconnected, inseparable relationship of reading, writing, speaking, and listening to thinking and learning. As well, one can begin to sense
from the example the communal, collaborative nature of learning, can begin to appreciate the way in which language totally circumscribes human knowledge and experience. Cognitive and linguistic processes go far beyond the realms of the mere application of "better" grades of knowledge and more basic skills. True literacy involves not only the acquisition of knowledge—the knowing—but also the synthesis and responsible application of that knowledge—the doing.

In a time when education is being shaken to its very pedagogical and theoretical foundations, when the ideological implications of teaching and learning are being severely scrutinized, Whately's vignette becomes particularly relevant. His brief but perceptive example illustrates the need for both teachers and educational theorists to reexamine how literacy is constructed.

CAC-Aravaipa: A Study in Hidden Agendas

As a critical example of the institutionalization of literacy, and of the often skewed relationship of literacy to human beings and language, I would like to use, as Whately did, an analogy. This analogy comes from my own teaching experience and involves young people, literacy, and power relationships. More significantly,
though, this analogy represents a point of incessant intellectual irritation from which my dissertation project has evolved.

During the 1992-1993 academic school year, I taught freshman composition at Central Arizona College, a small two-year community college in Aravaipa, Arizona. My position was a one-year replacement instructor for the lone full-time English Professor, who was going on sabbatical leave. The college is an unhurried, rural satellite of the main school in Coolidge, Arizona, one hundred miles to the northwest. Situated in the Southeastern desert regions of the state, The CAC-Aravaipa campus itself is centrally located in a long, peaceful valley between two massive copper mines--Magma Copper at the southern tip and ASARCO on the northern. The tall, pluming smokestacks of the two companies' smelters stand at the opposing ends of the valley as dingy territorial markers. On many still mornings the smoke from the stacks, carried horizontally on the prevailing winds, lays a fine, brownish-white haze over much of the thirty-mile-long valley.

Rich veins of copper lace the surrounding mountains, and as one descends from the high desert into the valley, the plundering of the mineral wealth becomes more and more obvious. Over the past several decades the companies'
owners and shareholders have extracted great wealth from the area. However, the exploitation of the vast mineral resources has come at great cost to the land which contained it. In many places in the valley, especially the area surrounding the Aravaipa campus, the rugged, brown, semi-arid, erosion-etched desert mountains have been internally purged of their copper. In the process the land has been stripped bare of foliage, animals and all other life as well, and left permanently scarred and barren. The leftover dirt accumulates in massive piles, heaped up to form giant, bunkered gopher holes. Rainbow-colored mountains rise like vast wastelands around the open-pit mines. As the land slowly degrades into a desolate moonscape, as each mountain is methodically leveled and turned into mine "tailings," the ground below continues to leach the toxic residue down into the water table below. The juxtaposition of the Aravaipa campus to the valley is replete with irony. In discussing T. S. Eliot's "Wasteland," one could very easily point out of the windows of Avavaipa Building A to the other terrible wastelands in the distance and offer a true Freirian reading of the world through the word.

Many of the area residents, and thus the students of CAC-Aravaipa, are as richly brown as the desert landscape beyond the valley. The populace in the valley is heavily
Mexican-American, with several generations of the people having already invested years and lives into making a profit for the mines. Much of the culture of the area is rich in Spanish heritage, and the "familia," both immediate and extended, is a vital part of life and living. Many cohesive ties bind the people together, not the least of which is working at the mines or in mine-related businesses.

Most of the people are bilingual but cannot read or write well in either English or Spanish because their schooling has not helped them to see their bilingualism as a potential source of power. What is far more disturbing, though, is that too many of the young people emerge from the mine-funded high schools with diplomas in their hands, but with very limited reading, writing, and mathematics skills. Truly, these students' education has not provided them with the ability to critique the subtle exploitation that seems to be an ongoing part of their lives in the valley. Many go to work for the mines—a fate which their educational experiences seem to have trained them well for. Those who choose to perpetuate the sham for just a bit longer opt to go to CAC-Aravaipa. Others leave for the bigger cities in the state or go on to the almost impossible curriculum of one of the three state universities. The duplicity is passed on from generation to generation.
Current statistics from CAC-Aravaipa's assessment scores, which are derived from the placement tests administered to incoming freshmen at the beginning of each semester, serve to explain the power relationships that drive the educational system. In 1992, 58% of these new students were below the state and national average in writing skills and 65% were below the state and national average in reading skills. The report for 1992 noted that "These data simply confirm what we already know, namely that our students, for whatever reasons, arrive at CAC severely under-prepared to do college-level work, more than other students in the state and in the nation" ("Assessment Scores" 2).

Certainly many factors are at work and I don't pretend to be able to account for them all. After all, years of research have gone into describing the ways in which schools socialize, sort, and indoctrinate young people. However, the local schools seemed to be providing what the local economy required, for neither ASARCO nor Magma needed many workers with reading and writing skills "underground" in the mines and pits. Indeed, these companies had even less of a requirement for workers who possessed critical, questioning abilities. Very simply, the human resource demands of the two major employers in the valley shaped the students supplied by the local school systems--students
woefully lacking in literacy and critical questioning abilities.

Within the microcosm of the Aravaipa classroom, I was able to observe how the curriculum subtly reinforces the demands and power relationships of the broader marketplace. Indeed, I was abruptly made to become more consciously aware of the covert relationship of educational texts and contexts to the ideology of the dominant culture, made to understand how these distorted textual relationships actually serve to inhibit true literacy and critical questioning abilities in students.

These relationships were brought home to me during one particular class session in my English 100 Pre-College Composition course. Midway through the fall semester, I became extremely frustrated with the students' inability to sustain unified thoughts in their discourse, either written or spoken. In an attempt to help the students understand paragraph unity, I had them analyze the paragraphs in an essay from the departmentally sanctioned textbook by John Langan entitled English Skills With Readings, a developmental reading/writing text built around the modes approach to writing and a stilted five-paragraph essay model. The title of the essay the students were assigned was "What Good Families Are Doing Right," by Delores Curran. I had selected her essay because the text
itself had remarkably coherent, well-developed paragraphs. And, I thought inanely, the essay might "touch" the students--inspire them, you might say. To my amazement, instead of silently resisting me by not entering into discussion, the students began to spontaneously, even vehemently, criticize the Curran text as being distorted and extremely value-laden.

Why, the normally silent Amadee Roy wondered aloud, did Curran describe the qualities of a "good family" as "the ones in which the mother and father have a strong, loving relationship"? Amadee wondered if his family was "bad" because there were just he, his mother, and his six brothers and sisters, and because his "ol' man was long gone."

"Well, ah . . . ," I replied lamely as Amadee slumped back into his chair, and he retreated into his sullenness.

"And what about this crap?" challenged Harlen Jose. He picked up the textbook contemptuously and shook it at me, as though my white face symbolized a glimpse of a broader reality; he read aloud from the essay, "'Close families seem to recognize that a comment made in jest can be insulting. A father in one of my groups confided that he could tease his wife about almost everything--her cooking, her appearance, her mothering--whatever. But not her skiing.'" Harlen stopped, set the book down,
and looked straight at me. "Man, what a crock! My ol' lady cooks and cleans, but she ain't never been up on no skis. She weights like about three hundret pounds!"

Everyone laughed at the imagined sight of Harlen Jose's large mother up on skis, barreling intently down the wintery, cold slopes of Snowbowl Ski Resort, her chocolate-brown face set and hardened to the white snow, her gloved red hands gripping tightly the narrow ski poles.

"Yeah, and look at this," chimed in Jessel. "'Parents should view [television] programs with their children and make moral judgments and initiate discussion.' My folks don't watch nothin but W.W.F. Man, I remember onct when Hulk Hogan . . . ."

I detached myself from the discussion, watching, listening, allowing them to explore the depths of their own angry critiques, hoping that the critical moment would sustain itself. Unfortunately, the sudden burst of intellectual intensity, when hands were shooting into the air and heads were nodding vigorously, when two and three people were all trying to speak at once, was gone almost as quickly as it had come. And nothing that I did the remainder of that class session, or the semester for that matter, regardless of what I tried, could again recapture that critical spirit.

Later that day, while sitting in the quiet of my office
and studying the table of contents of Langen's textbook, I discovered the obvious. Amadee and Harlen and Jessel and the others had been right. Many of the hidden agendas of the dominant culture could almost be checked off on a point-by-point basis. Michael Ryan's "They Call Him a Miracle Worker" subtly purveys the myth, the ideological lie which all good workers need to hear, that "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again." Earl Ubell's "How To Think Clearly" affirms the fact most companies in the broader economy need clear-headed workers that can unswervingly stay on task, even if that task is manufacturing smart bombs or turning mountains into lifeless pits. Shiela Akers' "Power Learning" re-delivers the cultural message to people of lower class status and to minorities that the university is really not for most of them. These nice, tight ideological packages that I was so smugly peddling did indeed talk about a specific class-based, gender-based, race-based reality, a reality that could not be farther from the reality of my students.

As I sat there that afternoon, I was perplexed by the whole episode. I fully realized that this brief occasion of actual critical "praxis" in the classroom was certainly the exception more than the rule. No matter how much I thought I had given students the opportunity for critical expression, they had never challenged texts
or, even more importantly, openly contested the ideological biases that are so neatly conveyed in texts. Yet these students had managed to do so, even in spite of me.

**Literacy and Ideology**

The incident at CAC-Aravaipa has served as a pivotal point for me in my teaching career. I have come to realize that I have been, and continue to be, working within an entrenched system which very methodically socializes, categorizes, and stratifies people.

For example, Paul Willis has described these same social dynamics quite well. In *Learning to Labour*, he discusses his ethnographic study of working class male students at Hammerton Grammar School in Central, England. His findings reveal how the working class is reproduced by cultural processes in which working people from generation to generation are situated in the lower strata of society—the same processes that occur on a regular basis in places like Aravaipa Valley. Willis, like many other educational theorists, maintains that the methods of reproduction, class identification, and caste reinforcement take place under the auspices of many different economic, social, political, and cultural institutions, the primary one being schools. There are
many means by which the "lads" of the Hammerton School are continuously channeled into the working class forms of the industrial community. He theorizes that

[t]hese processes help to construct both the identities of particular subjects and also distinctive class forms at the cultural and symbolic level as well as at the economic and structural level. . . . [For] class identity is not truly reproduced until it has properly passed through the individual and the group, until it has been recreated in the context of what appears to be personal and collective volition. . . . Labour power is an important pivot of all this because it is the main mode of active connection with the world. (2)

As Willis observes, too often within capitalistic forms the representation of people's own cultural contexts become the very means of their intellectual subjugation. Willis describes these processes as involving ideological hegemony and appropriation within education--certainly the processes that I found to be actively at work at CAC-Aravaipa.

I have since tried hard to understand what went on that afternoon. My ongoing self-reflection about the implications of that incident have given me new insights into my teaching and into my teaching philosophy as well. Indeed, I have always believed that I was teaching critical
thinking abilities in my class. I realize now, however, that like Whately's Master Merton I have been merely piling on more straw all the while. When that didn't work, I fell back on my elitist literary training and searched for better grades of literary and cultural "straw" with which to create literacy. I have come to realize also that, in so doing, I have also been tacitly promoting passivity and the reification and duplication of the status quo. That is, as a teacher I am an agent for non-change, a position which Gramsci describes as being a "traditional intellectual." He maintains that such institutionalized representatives must necessarily speak, consciously or unconsciously, the ideas and aspirations of the dominant society in order to build and extend the ideological prominence of that very powerful group (3). This situation is particularly painful to me because it is the antithesis of my original purpose in becoming a teacher--to effect positive social change through teaching.

But since that incident at Aravaipa, I have had the redeeming good fortune to study the liberating ideas of those rhetorical and educational theorists who argue that to be an effective teacher, one must redesign the architecture of education and not simply lay on a better grade of knowledge. Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, Henry Giroux, Richard Ohmann, bell hooks, Patricia Bizzell, James Berlin,
Maxine Green and many others are the new rebuilders of roofs. From them I now know that critical teaching must involve critical literacy, the ability to critique and reflect on the ideological implications of texts. The key issue, then, becomes what Freire identifies as the liberating concept of praxis—that is, the melding of theory into actual critical classroom application, the practices that Knoblauch and Brannon see as "a continual reconstituting of theory by appeal to the concrete experience of practitioners" (8). This transformative ideal of praxis seems to be closely aligned with a principled spirit of critical literacy, both within and beyond the classroom. For critical literacy includes the close questioning—through reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking abilities—of commonly held ideological assumptions about the world, both within and beyond the classroom.

Critical Literacy as Educational Praxis

A brief survey of contemporary theories of literacy reveals several diverse and often conflicting perspectives of what being able to read and write really means. In Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy, Knoblauch and Brannon describe the intersection of these conflicting
interpretations in the following way:

In the United States today several distinct and conflicting arguments about the nature and importance of literacy, each reflecting an alternate ideological disposition, vie for power in political and educational life. (17)

While diversity is necessary to theoretical inquiry, such divergent understandings of literacy highlight the notion that given the inherent power relationships involved in language and language use, those power relationships must also be manifest in literacy. A more rigorous conception of the struggle involved in literacy theories will lead to a greater understanding of what motives drive the creation and interpretation of signs.

In recent years theorists have come to advocate a social evolution, or in the more negative sense the cultural deprivation approach to the conception of literacy. For example, Havelock argues in *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* that there are distinct intellectual differences between historically oral, primitive cultures and more modern literate societies. Ong takes these ideas further. In *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, he posits that language users must move or progress from oral to written means of communication, and that such
progression from one type of literacy to another involves more sophisticated thought processes. Such conceptions of literacy have come under criticism because the implication can easily be drawn that to become more literate is to become more fully "human."

As Knoblauch and Brannon further point out, many contemporary educational theorists--the "back-to-basics" devotees--see the relationship of education to literacy in functional, practical terms. Literacy "skills" are held to be no more than a routinized, mechanical, decontextualized, user-based application of communication abilities (17-21). Such approaches to knowledge and knowing are the same as Master Merton advocated, that is, the laying on of more straw in a methodical, functional, practical, unquestioning manner. Others such as E. D. Hirsch and Allan Bloom see literacy as historically bound up with Western traditions and values. In light of these critiques, the relationship of education and literacy, to extend Whately's anecdote, is analogous to merely the piling on of a better grade of straw, that grade which somehow inherently carries a myriad of nebulous but transcendent and lasting worth.

However, of more significance to the discussion about the meaning of reading and writing is the recent emergence of an alternative, more comprehensive perception of
literacy--critical literacy. This perception of literacy holds that reading and writing abilities can and should move far beyond just functional skills, or mere familiarity with a selected body of literary works. Rather, literacy must involve the critical, questioning realms of communication skills and abilities--those levels of ability that are crucial if people are to participate in and transform society.

According to theories of critical literacy, which trace many of their foundational ideas to the critical thinking movement of the past twenty years, students can and must learn to question their learning, as well as the broader cultural dimensions of their experience. However, by putting theories of critical thinking into political and social contexts, advocates of critical literacy present a model of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking abilities that is ideologically defined and circumscribed. Literacy is viewed as being fully subservient to all of the power relationships and disparities involved with the social construction of language. Consequently, the proponents of critical literacy hold that education and literacy must continually be reconstructed, and the classroom must continually be reassessed and redesigned to challenge social inequities and the unanalyzed assumptions that perpetuate them.
Critical literacy can and must lay bare the power relationships hidden in language learning and language use. For it is through critical literacy that educational questions are brought to the surface: How can literacy promote unity over exclusion? When will literacy be used to promote civic and ethical responsibility and a general sense of caring about the well-being of all people? In current cultural constructs, who is authorized to be literate and why? In the authorization process of determining who is "literate," who then must necessarily be "illiterate"? How does the authorization process for literacy validate and maintain itself? Perhaps of more importance, though, is the question of how this authorization process is sustained. As Kretovics points out in his essay on critical literacy,

[w]e can begin to ask questions such as "Whose knowledge is it?" and "Whose interest does it serve?" or "Who decides what knowledge is important?" and "Who has access to the 'important' forms of knowledge?" These questions cannot be asked or adequately answered within the structure which mainstream educational theory provides. (55)

Surely such critical questions point toward the methods by which the legitimization of literacy take place in education.
This legitimization process is probably most obvious in the icons used in education--the texts that are used in educational processes. Therefore, the objective of this research project will be to scrutinize texts as being both the main catalyst for, as well as the primary challenge to, the ideological re-presentations of the dominant culture--those domineering, oppressive assumptions and ideas that too often have severely negative consequences for minorities, women, and the poor. Critical literacy provides the opportunity for a more careful analysis and broader conception of the powerful political and economic dimensions of knowledge, literacy, and learning. Peter McLaren offers the following compelling description of the relationship of literacy to texts:

Critical literacy focuses, therefore, on the interests and assumptions that inform the generation of knowledge itself. From this perspective all texts, written, spoken, or otherwise represented, constitute 'ideological weapons capable of enabling certain groups to solidify their power through acts of linguistic hegemony. (218)

Understanding these relationships is the critical element--the praxis--in dealing with the theory and politics of literacy as it applies to classroom instruction.
In terms of praxis, then, the purpose of my research project will be to test the assumptions that texts can be, and too often are, used unproblematically within the framework provided by mainstream educational theory and practice. As such, texts become integral parts of hidden curricula, and thus serve as effective strategies of containment and reproduction—those strategies that become most obvious in places like the Hammerton Grammar Schools and the CAC-Aravaipas of the broader culture. As Knoblauch and Brannon point out,

by illuminating what is not said and done in the classroom and not present in educational materials, as well as what is said and done, we can begin to seriously challenge the assumptions, such as homogeneity and neutrality, perpetuated by the rationality which presently dominates the educational field. (14)

By examining what is present and absent in any given text, we can expose the ideologies embedded in it and the interests it serves. Within this area of critical awareness the ideal of literacy as a transformative process is achieved. Within this critical dynamic students can become active agents and questioning participants in a broader
society that is in dire need of change.

In conducting this research project, then, I will be particularly concerned with the part that classroom texts play in either thwarting or bringing about critical literacy in students. Therefore, I must initially define critical literacy as literacy skills so taught as to enable students to critically analyze and question the assumptions that they have formed about the broader communities in which they live. The teaching of critical literacy abilities necessarily assumes that in any given learning situation the individual student can and will use language to promote a questioning, dialogic relation between himself or herself and any given text and context. This assumption contains a crucial dialectic between the individual, the text, and the context of the broader community. It is within this critical dialectic that ideological forces are relentlessly exerted on students by the institutions of the dominant culture. Thus, students must learn to question this dialectic if true learning is to take place, for this dialectic provides a context that can promote social consciousness and individual responsibility. To appreciate the dynamic of this critical dialectic, one must also appreciate the conception that knowledge is socially constructed.

In the Preface to their text *The Rhetorical Tradition*,
Bizzell and Herzberg have very aptly described the exploration of the relationship between discourse and knowledge as a "new attempt to understand the ways that self, society, and knowledge are situated in language" (vi). More often than not, this questioning process must necessarily explore the ways in which those relationships are economically determined. In the fields of language and education, for example, a good deal of contemporary research has examined the social dimensions and material conditions of language learning and language use. Specifically, theoretical areas such as liberatory education and critical pedagogy are concerned with how language, under the pressure and constraints of economic conditions, mediates the social construction of people through the knowledge they unquestioningly absorb. Language invariably conveys the ideological assumptions of the dominant culture—its unanalyzed values, morals, myths, goals, lies, wishes, and dreams. Language reifies the dominance of the status quo and the ruling class; as such, language processes become at once both driving forces and also outgrowths and results of that mediation phenomenon. Within this cultural recycling of power and powerlessness, these ideological assumptions are often conveyed through the texts of the broader culture. In the realms of education, these same assumptions are too often purveyed through the
texts, curriculum, and procedures that are used in the classroom.

Therefore, the intent of this research project will be to question and thus extend current liberatory theory, which maintains that texts need to be closely scrutinized in terms of how they either promote or thwart the questioning abilities of both teachers and students. For teachers, the way in which texts are presented or not presented as critical readings in the classroom has profound pedagogical implications for both the individual teacher and for the profession as a whole. For students, language skills must move beyond functional or cultural literacy, and develop to the stage of critical literacy. These two areas will be the focus of my research study, for both areas seem to be relevant to a deeper understanding of the way in which communication abilities become the critical tools that enable students to actively question the world in which they live. Indeed, both areas provide fertile ground for a fuller understanding of how the processes of intellectual curiosity and critical awareness build social consciousness and responsibility.

With such a research focus, not only are the "what" and the "how" of teaching important issues, but so also are the issues involved with the "why" of teaching. These "why" issues, which are always overshadowed by broader
ideological implications, are inherently laced with ethical and moral dilemmas for the individual teacher. As many liberatory educational theorists rightly point out, the individual teacher must continually address a particularly urgent and pressing educational question: If knowledge is inseparable from the ethical and moral imperatives of the broader social forms in which that knowledge exists, are not teachers automatically ethical and moral agents of these social forms, bad or good? For me as a teacher this situation poses a professional dilemma--one which I think Willis identifies quite well in the closing discussion of his Hammerton study. He maintains that "official ideologies and aims are mediated to [and by] the agents and functionaries of particular institutions" (177)--not the least of which are teachers like me. As a result, I feel compelled in my research to work toward resolving this personal dilemma of agency, for only then can I truly learn from CAC-Aravapia, and thus become a better teacher.

In my initial research on this dilemma of agency, I have found that a number of contemporary educational theorists have begun to critique the lack of ethical and moral responsibility too often imparted on students by capitalistic-oriented educational institutions. Theorists such as Balibar, Macherey, Althusser, Habermas, Marcuse,
Bowles, Gintis, et al. describe educational institutions as being almost totally representative of, and thus closely bound to, capitalistic market relationships and ideologies. As sites of cultural production, schools become conduits for the sociological, economic, and political inequalities and power imbalances of the broader capitalistic culture. This broader culture is too hard-driven by greed and competition. As such, its hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion are subtly, sharply drawn along the division lines of wealth and nonwealth, white and nonwhite, male and nonmale, along the horizontals and diagonals of power and powerlessness, of equal and unequal, of justice and injustice. Further, these theorists discuss not only how the realm of academia too closely mirrors the business world, but they also examine how educational practices actually participate in the reproduction of social and economic inequality. The language practices of education are instrumental in smoothly conveying to students the collective economic, social, and belief systems of dominant cultural forms. These unanalyzed assumptions—which Michael Apple describes in *Education and Power* as "sets of lived meanings, practices, and social relations that are often internally inconsistent (15)"—allow a blatantly unequal society to continually legitimize and reproduce itself with little or no self critique.
Additionally, these same theorists raise serious questions about the quality of the students who are being "supplied" to the broader culture by the "assembly lines" of education. Aside from obvious failures in such areas as minority retention and the teaching of basic literacy skills to all students, educational institutions have been criticized for "producing" uncritical, self-interested, consumption-oriented workers--those silent citizens who are most vital to sustaining a consumer-based society, a society whose chief purpose is to feed upon itself. Such theories help explain education programs like "grading" and "tracking"--two processes which very efficiently channel students into those long educational pipelines labeled "dropout," "technical/trades" and "college-bound."

Certainly many of these theoretical constructs have been sharply criticized as being too atavistic and deterministic (Giroux, "Ideology and Agency" 15-17). However, when an individual teacher like me considers the basic premises from which these theorists all work, reconciling educational theory to educational practice becomes extremely problematic. Of even more significance to me as an educator, though, is how these broader conditions and implications affect me on an individual basis--in the classroom. As Apple has further pointed out, schools continually create and recreate the conditions
by which ideological hegemony is maintained; therefore, ideological hegemony can probably be most obvious "in the day-to-day practices of individual institutions and [the individual] members"--the teachers, students, and administrators (40).

Given this, I must continue to question the rationale and assumptions--the agency--under which I work. For example, how can I move beyond merely turning students, as "raw material," into the finished product of good, unquestioning workers? This is an important question because these processes are even more apparent in the new educational models that are currently gaining popularity. Programs such as the university's "TQM--Total Quality Management," or the community college's "Tech-Prep," or secondary education's "School to Work" are approaches to education that fit well into the objectified production model of education. Such programs continue the ongoing process of making the classroom analogous to the business site.

With such obvious and persistent metaphors, I can only ask myself if I am philosophically obligated to be the agent of an educational system that very consistently and quite effectively reproduces the status quo. If not, how can I serve as a catalyst to make schools the fundamental agencies for the social transformation of the
human condition? Philosophically, what do I as an educator feel that students should not only know, but also be able to do and be when they leave the classroom? Shouldn't effective teaching also be a search for what methods best serve to challenge and transform students and help them become ethically responsible, critically conscious, socially active agents of change?

Given these research questions, my dissertation will analyze the political dimensions of teaching, texts, and institutional assumptions. In attempting to attain valid conclusions from this study, I will also try to understand and apply current liberatory theories of language, society, and learning--those theories that attempt to describe the ethical responsibility and social participation that are inherently integral to the nature of knowledge, values, and teaching. More important, though, the major goal of this study will be to turn theory into classroom practice--an area that is lacking in a good deal of liberatory theory and critical pedagogy. Teaching must itself involve questioning, action, and praxis.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:
CRITICAL LITERACY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP
TO TEXTS IN THE CLASSROOM

I need at this point in my research project to define the major term of my study--critical literacy. In recent years, several interpretations of the concepts of "critical thinking" and "critical literacy" have emerged. Because these terms represent broader concepts, they have been defined in overlapping ways. Therefore, I feel that at this juncture I need to strive for a more precise definition of critical literacy.

Much has been written on the teaching of critical thought and critical communication, and the ensuing ideas fall into a number of different areas: informal logic, problem solving, critical thinking, and critical literacy. A close analysis of these various viewpoints allows for the creation of a narrower, much more manageable understanding of the most important aspects of critical literacy. For example, informal logic and problem solving are concepts that are very much associated with a positivistic observational approach to knowledge. Critical thinking, on the other hand, has as its basis a fundamental questioning approach to learning and thinking, but still
is very much anchored in rationalistic, value-neutral perspectives. Therefore, these various forms of critical thinking need to be criticized more pointedly because they are both decontextualized and apolitical. In my analysis, I would like to show how critical literacy synthesizes the essential elements of all of these approaches. As a method of learning and thinking, of knowing and doing, critical literacy uses literacy skills to question not only information and ideas, but also the value and belief systems that define that information and those ideas. Such a close, questioning scrutiny of knowledge and its contingent values is crucial, for as teachers, we must constantly be aware that knowledge is inseparable from the values that create it. In the following segments, then, I will give a fuller explanation for this specific, limited definition of critical literacy.

The Critical Thinking Movement

In 1962, during the earliest phases of the critical thinking movement, Robert Ennis defined critical thought as understanding meaning by searching for ambiguities and contradictions, and applying both inductive and deductive reasoning to problems and assumptions ("A Concept" 84). Edward D'Angelo challenged the somewhat limited and rigid
approach of applied logic and proposed a more flexible definition: "Critical thinking is the process of evaluating statements, arguments and experiences" (7). In the introduction to his book *The Teaching of Critical Thinking*, he outlines the necessary skills and attitudes as intellectual curiosity, objectivity, open-mindedness, flexibility, intellectual skepticism, and intellectual honesty. To achieve these aptitudes one must be systematic, persistent, and decisive and also respect other viewpoints (7-8).

As an elaboration of Ennis' and D'Angelo's definitions, John McPeck notes that critical thinking is not a single construct, but a complex cognitive process involving many interrelated skills. He further maintains that the ability to think critically is not "merely raising questions . . . [nor] does it involve indiscriminate skepticism" (*Critical Thinking* 7). Rather, the teaching of critical thought involves the teaching of "reflective skepticism . . . linked with specific areas of expertise and knowledge" (*Teaching Critical Thinking* 35).

Richard Paul, a leading advocate of integrating critical thinking into education, expands these definitions. He argues that teachers of critical thinking skills must continually develop methods to enable students to explore the multi-layered nature of meaning (xv). Such an approach
requires teachers to employ classroom practices based upon dialogic discussion, open-mindedness, and analytical questioning of the assumptions of oneself and of others. Through the questioning dialectic of the classroom, learning is not merely absorbing knowledge, but also synthesizing, evaluating and applying it. This critical system is not just criticizing or simply carping at the world, nor is it merely the use of the Socratic dialogue; rather it engenders in students a spirit of "principled thinking... within multiple points of view and frames of reference... [which yields] genuine knowledge rather than mere recall" (Paul 62). Paul's definition relates well to William Perry's research work. Perry's research findings indicate that individuals develop critical thinking in a sequential way: from a basic willingness to suspend judgment, to an ability to appreciate multiple viewpoints, and finally to the capability for questioning and analyzing the external world (4-5). The learner, in acquiring such a critical stance, becomes intellectually mature enough to see the various sides of a complex concept or an issue.

Critical thought, then, cannot be taught in a superficial, simplistic way—as a discrete unit of instruction within a single content area such as English or philosophy or geography. The ultimate goal for teachers in teaching critical thinking should be the direct
application of skills, attitudes, and concepts in order to help students to become independent thinkers in all subject areas. This type of teaching provides the conditions in which honest and intelligent disagreement is not only desirable and possible, but highly transferable to all areas of learning and living. In Teaching Critical Thinking, McPeck theorizes that reasoning ability "covers all manner of cognitive phenomena" in all disciplines of education (4).

Unfortunately, the teacher's challenging of prior knowledge is a condition which is discouraged in most school and content area settings (Brookfield 4). Learning is still very much rooted in having students memorize educational materials. In discussing how teachers can and must use critical thinking to overcome the non-problematic, mere memorization of information, Edys Quellmalz maintains that critical thought engages sophisticated cognitive behaviors: Higher-order thinking processes produce new knowledge or knowledge in new forms, while lower-order processes reproduce knowledge from memory or through the application of rote learning (88). Within the framework of educational psychology, the approaches involved in the teaching of critical thinking closely follow those outlined in Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive domains. This progressive hierarchy of levels in the cognitive domain
involves knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, and synthesis (Bloom et al. 47-49, Lafrancois 272). Based upon these criteria as learning objectives, Ennis holds that true critical thought occurs when the learner is encouraged to move beyond the basic level of knowledge acquisition into the more complex realms of meaning-making ("A Taxonomy" 10-11).

As early as 1941, Edward Glasser observed that critical thinking is a desirable outcome of education because it "helps [the individual] to meet his [or her] problems more intelligently, . . . to cooperate better with his [or her] fellow man . . . [and] to form intelligent judgments on public issues" (9-10). Equitable social cooperation is very much an objective of critical thinking. Glasser also associated Piaget's conceptual theory of formal operations with those processes which occur in critical thinking. He noted that "[t]he development of logical reasoning is aided through the process of 'socialization' as the child often finds it necessary to justify his [or her] statements, beliefs, and even actions to other[s]" (25). William Perry sees this development as moving through stages of dialectical (critical) reasoning (98), toward the eventual achievement of personal social commitment (202). And according to Lawrence Kohlberg, the moral development of the individual takes place along similar stages that are
facilitated by the socialization process (1-6). Based upon these ideas, the social dynamics of critical thinking have come to be more fully explored.

More recent advocates of critical thinking pedagogy suggest that critical thought is contingent on both collaboration and social responsibility, and thus must be considered an inextricable part of education. When students are taught to think critically, especially when that teaching is based upon active social participation, they are able to alter, replace, and further develop their existing mental structures. The values, morals and principles inherent in learning and teaching become vital, inseparable parts of critical thinking. Knowledge without ethical meaning, and learning without active social participation, are incongruities that are not compatible with effective teaching and learning in a value-laden world.

Contemporary critical thinking theorists have approached collaboration and social responsibility in much more specific ways. For example, in a recent article in Educational Researcher Stephen Norris argued that "much of the content of [everyday life] is not taught in schools" and that critical thinking as an educational concept has significant implications that go far beyond school subjects (21). Critical, reflective thinking and learning involve the questioning of "deep seated problems of environmental
damage, human relations, . . . rising expectations, diminishing resources, global competition, power imbalances . . . and ideological conflict" (Paul 46). Effective teaching occurs when teachers are able to help students situate themselves in the broader context of issues, and then take an informed stance on those issues. As Joanne Kurfiss asserts in *Critical Thinking: Theory, Research, Practice, and Possibilities*, for many in the field of education, teaching must become "the mature epistemology of commitment . . . that is the true aim of instruction" (v). The long-term and ultimate value of the teaching of critical thought is helping students to reflect on and evaluate every aspect of their personal lives and social environs, and then act upon those reflections and evaluations.

Marilyn Wilson, in her article "Critical Thinking: Repackaging or Revolution?" extends this notion even further. She maintains that, given what current research has advanced about schema theory and communication processes, any written or spoken text can "no longer [be] a fixed object but rather [is] a fluid entity that, in part, is molded and shaped by meaning-making" communicators (547). The critical dialogue is one by which communicators use a process of "forging" rather than "finding" meaning, both cognitively and affectively.
As these examples show, extremely useful models for teaching critical skills are contained within current theories about cognitive and social development and structures, as well as psycholinguistics. These new understandings provide an important backdrop for the teaching of critical thinking, the key element of which becomes the questioning dialectic that collaboratively connects learners to each other, as well as to knowledge and meaning. This critical dialogue allows for, even accelerates, the making of connections. Within such an educational context, the spirit of critical questioning and reflexive inquiry is promoted in all language use. Students are empowered with the ability to use their natural reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to think about, question, critique, and thus ultimately participate in and recreate the broader communities of which they are a vital part. In this context, a questioning, contemplative life is synonymous with responsible, participatory behavior in the community.

Critical thinking theorists maintain that teachers are in a unique position to facilitate these processes of social interaction and critique, and to promote critical questioning and dialogue in the classroom. These theorists also suggest that many of the instructional methods and teaching approaches of critical thinking involve singular
themes of question-raising, openness, and tolerance for diversity. These critical themes cut across all disciplines, and are applicable to all levels of education. Stephan Brookfield, in his text Developing Critical Thinkers, has found that the teaching of critical thought is "encouraged by an essentially interdisciplinary curriculum and by teachers who know how to encourage and coordinate reading, writing, and discussion" (5). Though content-based, a pervasive, pervading attitude of intellectual curiosity is necessary in any critically oriented classroom. D'Angelo describes this attitude as "[s]eeking answers to various kinds of questions . . . [and] investigating the causes and explanations, . . . asking why, how, who, what, when, and where" (7). In such a setting, students and instructors must necessarily struggle with real life problems and issues within the classroom (Meyers 8).

But as Paulo Freire has pointed out in his description of the "banking method" of education, school settings have traditionally been founded on a non-problematic approach to teaching, settings in which knowledge is presented and conveyed as a commodity, with teachers being the commodity brokers (Pedagogy 63). If this situation is true, then teachers of critical approaches are necessarily obligated to assess existing pedagogies, curricula, and methodologies.
In so doing, these teachers must also realize that the teaching of critical thinking over existing pedagogy requires a thorough reassessment of materials, practices, outcomes, and evaluation in order to change the structure of the classroom and classroom approaches.

In the article "Critical Thinking as an Educational Ideal," Harvey Siegel provides an excellent justification for this change. Not only is the "content of education" important, the "manner of education" is equally prominent in effective teaching (10). This "critical method" involves practices in which

- the teacher always recognizes the right of the student to question and demand reasons; and consequently recognizes an obligation to provide reasons whenever demanded. The critical manner thus demands of a teacher a willingness to subject all beliefs and practices to scrutiny, and so to allow students the genuine opportunity to understand the role reasons play in justifying thought and action. The critical manner also demands honesty of a teacher. . . . In addition, the teacher must submit his or her reasons to the . . . evaluation of the student. (Siegel 11)

Critical teaching, Siegel further argues, constitutes a revolution in teachers' attitudes, approaches, and classroom practices (12).
Most critical thinking advocates also agree that such teaching, no matter what the discipline, does not operate in a quiet, efficient, highly organized manner. Instead, such instruction can only take place within an interactive setting in which ongoing student/teacher interaction, collaborative discussion, and critical dialogue play a key role (Brookfield 238, Meyers 60).

Much of what these theorists have said, and continue to say, makes sense. Yet in the final analysis, the body of theory that falls under the broad category of critical thinking is pedagogically weak and insubstantial because it fails to create a viable paradigm of critique. The reason for this is that its proponents ultimately attempt to remain apolitical and value-neutral—a position that is untenable given the ideological processes of institutions and the socialization functions of education.

For example, with critical thinking, "prior knowledge" is still very much readily accepted and never truly critiqued as being powerfully charged in a politically and ideologically determined sense. Consequently, knowledge itself, and even the language that conveys it, becomes depoliticized and divorced from reality. Even the healthy, questioning skepticism that is a key part of the theoretical base is relatively weak; since the practical and political dimensions of knowledge and community are not explored,
this skepticism doesn't really develop beyond an idealized and unsituated version of liberal humanism. The mere application of knowledge continues to remain a utilitarian problem-solving exercise, and not the true problem-posing approach that is needed in education. Indeed, the underpinning of critical thinking theory provides very much of a formalist, skill-based, almost reductionist perspective in which complex cognitive processes are decontextualized and often routinized.

Knowledge, learning, and thinking cannot be considered separately from the broader political, social, and cultural forces that are continually at work on and within the educational processes. The theoretical fields of liberatory education and critical pedagogy address these very deficiencies by advocating what has come to be called critical literacy. This is an important connection for teachers. The message to them is that self-reflective praxis is very much situated in the questioning of accepted assumptions.

**Politicizing the Apolitical: Contextualizing Critical Thinking**

Current theories of critical thinking become even more dynamic and relevant when juxtaposed against the
ideological and political orientation involved with liberatory education and critical pedagogy. Because liberatory education and critical pedagogy work primarily from a Materialist, neo-Marxist perspective, both provide a rich theoretical source for thinking about the relationship of education and politics. When considered against a backdrop of liberatory education and critical pedagogy, critical thinking takes a radical direction, one in which both student and teacher learn to tap into the political and ideological nature of knowledge and language. For both the student and the teacher, critical thinking becomes analytic, dialectic questioning. Critical literacy becomes the situated dialogue of critique and the contextualized discourse of possibility. Critical education becomes a process of social transformation which is brought about through the problematization of knowledge and experience, and the deeper understanding of cultural power relationships. Richard Ohmann has quite appropriately summarized this new liberating spirit as the ability to "[n]ourish critical consciousness," to "make school itself counterhegemonic," to "educate and agitate" ("Foreword" xv).

Ohmann's ideas certainly suggest a broad-based transformation on the part of both the individual teacher and the student. This transformation becomes, over time,
a renewing process of self-reflection, of self-realization, and of self-actualization, a process of new understandings, a process of commitment and re-commitment for the existential teacher and student. This transformative process begins, I think, when one looks closely at liberatory theories of knowledge and education, at how these ideas relate to the individual teacher and student, and at how these ideas are played out though classroom practices and materials. Theorists concerned with liberatory education analyze the conditions of ideology and education, and the relevance of these conditions to a theory of teaching methods. As they maintain, when one starts to understand the pedagogical implications of these conditions, then the importance of continuous, close questioning of these conditions becomes apparent. When this intellectual process of deep questioning becomes an integral part of the teaching/learning experience for both students and teacher, then questioning becomes a foundation for critical action. Education truly becomes "critically" important, for one cannot act effectively without having a fuller understanding of how power is exercised in the broader culture. The education process truly becomes practically situated and reflexive--not idealized and illusionary, but practically useful as a transformative undertaking by both student and teacher.
1. Liberatory theory as the foundation for transformation:

Such transformations are certainly a vital part of much of the Marxist-inspired philosophy of liberatory education, for Marxist concepts provide a clearer understanding of how ideological dominance in all human institutions can be identified and closely critiqued. Yet in terms of educational pedagogy, the descriptive application of Marxist and neo-Marxist theory is widely varied, diversely interpreted and, most importantly, sporadically applied. As Henry Giroux points out in *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling*,

one searches in vain for a comprehensive critical theory of education which bridges the gap between educational theory on the one hand and social and political theory on the other. One also searches in vain for a systematic theoretical approach to radical analysis of the day-by-day socio-political texture of classroom structure and interaction, i.e., how specific forms of knowledge and meaning penetrate, develop, and are transmitted within the context of the classroom experience. (63)

There does, however, seem to be a progressive evolution to what these theorists have to say, and that progression contains the tenets of a theory of individual liberatory pedagogy.
Much of early liberatory educational theory grows out of Marx's analysis of the iniquitous relationship of economics to society, and the oppressive power relationships that arise. People like Herbert Marcuse, Etienne Balibar, Pierre Macherey, and Louis Althusser see ideology as calculated systems of cultural and intellectual oppression, engineered by those in power to maintain that power.

Marcuse, for example, maintains that the only way in which social systems and institutions can be understood is through an understanding of Marxist theories of economics and dialectic materialism. He further asserts that through the capitalistic imperative of materialism "repression (material, intellectual, psychological) has attained an intensity and effectiveness which makes it questionable whether the concept of freedom will ever be translated into reality" (219). Dominance by the ruling class is attained through calculated ideological oppression of the weaker classes, especially through educational systems.

Further, when Balibar and Macherey discuss the theory of the dominant ideology, they are necessarily identifying and indicting many of the guises and ruses that are at work in American politics, economics, and society. According to Balibar and Macherey, the means of control are most obviously at work in language:
the national language is . . . the historical outcome of particular class struggle . . . [and as a result] . . . common national language is needed to unify a new class domination, thereby universalising it and providing it with progressive forms throughout its epoch. (84)

In addition, they go on to clearly identify the "school apparatus [as being] the means of forcing submission to the dominant ideology" (85). Basing their ideas on Marx's classical theories of class struggle and domination, these critics point to the dynamics by which the dominant ideology is imposed on all Americans through such movements as cultural literacy and "English Only" doctrines. Language, education, and the control of literacy and the instruments of literacy are the primary methods by which the reigning institutions and power structures sustain and reproduce dominion.

Althusser takes this critical indictment even further by making some very strong pronouncements about the methods by which dominant institutions maintain their prominence. He formulates a theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) to account for the numerous ways in which the established ideology is imposed on the participants within a society (239). By discussing all of the levels of ideological domination--from the basic family unit to the
national and even international forms--Althusser makes a strong case for the fact that humankind has a social foundation, even an innate need, for ideology (244). However, when these ideologies come to dominate, the oppressive power of that domination obscures ethical and moral considerations; people are absorbed unquestioningly into the dominant ideology by the subversive workings of ISAs. The individual is transformed into a subject "by the very precise operation . . . called interpellation or hailing" (245): he or she is drawn into, and thus subjugated and silenced by, ideology. Even today, just as in the time of what Althusser calls traditional "despots and priests," this subversive process still allows "a small number of cynical men" to dominate through a "falsified representation of the world . . . in order to enslave others by dominating their imaginations" (241). In terms of education and literacy, the likes of E. D. Hirsch and Alan Bloom can and do emerge to fill the modern-day roles of Althusser's despots and priests.

From a very radical perspective, these neo-Marxist critics question the ethics of capitalism and the morality of ideological structures that allow the wealth of a nation, and of the world for that matter, to be siphoned off into the hands of a few, while millions, billions, of others go begging. Moreover, what is the true nature of knowledge
and education in a world where two-thirds of the inhabitants are politically, socially, and/or economically oppressed? How does the individual teacher come to an epistemological understanding of teaching and learning, given these inherent inequities in the broader culture, and the ensuing injustices? Haven't education and knowledge always been perceived to work for the betterment of humankind?

To attempt to answer these questions one must understand an innate sociopolitical concept. In the formation of human institutions--political, religious, social, economic, familial, etc.--sites are naturally created for the ongoing production and dispersion of ideology. This process is vital for the survival of the institution. Further, the ideological site or sites that most effectively acquire, align, and even absorb other ideological sites are those that consistently maintain dominance.

As an institution, then, education itself becomes an integral part of the sustained production of ideology--the unanalyzed assumptions that have perpetuated and continue to perpetuate gross imbalances in the broader society. That is, education becomes a tool that is easily used by other dominant institutions to represent, re-present, and even mis-represent reality in order to preserve and sustain that domination. As forums for the
replication of ideas, educational systems become, in the terms of the neo-Marxist theorists, false reflections of reality that are distorted to fit the pervasive ideals and assumptions that are, right or wrong, necessary for the sustenance of the dominant culture.

In *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradiction of Economic Life*, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis explore how educational institutions function in a capitalistic economy. In critiquing the American education system, the authors make some very substantial conclusions. Education, itself a means of production, has the task of producing people that are most demanded by a capitalistic work place. This requires as an end product a worker who is certainly literate, but also a worker who is submissive, uncritical, and passive in the performance of tasks—essentially, a worker unaccustomed to questioning the broader context of his or her work, or even his or her own existence. As Bowles and Gintis note,

> making U.S. Capitalism work involves: insuring the minimal participation in decision-making by the majority (the workers); protecting a single minority (capitalists and managers) against the wills of a majority; and subjecting the majority to the influence of this single unrepresentative minority. (54)
The educational process, then, comes to be metaphorically defined as an "assembly line" for the production of good worker/consumers to fulfill capitalistic market demands. By fulfilling the labor requisites of the free enterprise system, and thus silently sustaining political and cultural balances of power, American educational institutions have until recently been able to supply the demand of the broader capitalistic labor market quite satisfactorily.

2. Liberatory education as critical action:

Recently, however, educational theorists have begun questioning these basic radical assumptions. The result has been that a good deal of the initial neo-Marxist theory has come to be more severely critiqued. The radical application of Marxist-based theory itself is said to be mired in its own political agenda, and thus the theorists themselves become the victims of their own criticisms. These theorists are preoccupied with the inherent corruption of bourgeois capitalistic democracies; as such, they totally disregard the notion that dominant, hegemonic ideologies are evident in all political systems. All ideologies--democratic, socialist, communist, fascist--seek to gain power through ensuing political, economic and social orders. By failing to distinguish their own ideological agendas, neo-Marxist theorists themselves
become restrictive and seek to dominate.

More significantly, these radical theorists are said to provide extremely deterministic models of the relationship between the economic structures of society, the ensuing institutions, and the individual (Giroux, *Ideology* 145). According to this view, the individual, and particularly the individual as teacher, can only be perceived as being a passive component of the processes of ideological reproduction, can only be seen as being inextricably bound up in and enslaved by systems of subtle intellectual oppression. In this context, one is continuously, helplessly being subsumed into the broader networks of the dominant culture; he or she thus becomes an unwitting accomplice to and an unquestioning pawn of an all-encompassing complex of beliefs and values, and is subsequently viewed as possessing little or no means of resistance.

As later theorists came to realize, this conceptual model of education and educational practices is rigidly atavistic. These same theorists have also attempted to make neo-Marxist theory less politically reductivist by moving beyond a leftist rejection of capitalistic forms and a radical critique of how these forms are represented in educational institutions.

For example, more recent ideas involving liberatory
education have tempered overly deterministic models of teaching and of students and teachers. The fact that ideology is and always has been a pervasive, ever-present means of human oppression is well established by previous neo-Marxist thought. But these forces operate on an unconscious rather than a conscious level of human behavior. As a reflection of the dominant culture, ideology is actually a covert network of the ideas, ideals, values, and morals of the culture in power, and these systems of belief are continually contesting for positions of dominance; yet the individual always has the free will of intellectual resistance. This intellectual resistance is rooted in an understanding of ideology as being, in and of itself, neither good or evil, nor all-consuming, and as being a reality that must be continually confronted and dealt with. In light of this new understanding, theorists such as Giroux, as well as Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, see the conflicting relationship of ideologies as providing a rich context for intellectual resistance and the exercising of critical free will.

In his line of analysis, Giroux continually deals with the issue of determinism versus freely chosen resistance in education. He points out that Marcuse has been perceptive "in specifying both the form and content of hegemonic ideology," and in discussing the complex web
of social formations and institutional structures that comprise the matrix of ideologies, those which continually move toward political dominance (Ideology 23). Further, Giroux asserts that schools are "institutions of cultural and social reproduction." As such, the primary function of schools is to reproduce and institutionalize the dominant ideology (Ideology 33). In the process, education necessarily reproduces social and economic inequality as well.

But Giroux also rightly points out that these radical interpretations of education and the individual constitute "a mechanistic analysis that encloses itself in the dead-end of one-dimensionality" (Ideology 69). Certainly dominant ideologies are subtly refracted throughout the agendas of education. But Giroux maintains that "[t]he engine of ideological repression does not run so smoothly. . . . There are contradictions that help the oppressed see through the transparent claims and norms of the given social order" (Ideology 133). He believes that educational institutions, though being instruments for the reproduction of dominant ideologies, in the same instance provide "terrains of contestation" wherein critical educators can resist the tyranny of unquestioned, unanalyzed assumptions (Ideology 3). While schools are sites of dominance, they also "provide a field for resistance to
the hegemonic culture" when they become the basis for a theory of emancipatory pedagogy (Ideology 30). In Theory and Resistance In Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition, Giroux argues even more convincingly that a deeper perception of the dynamics of ideology and dominance can only lead to a more comprehensive, responsive theory of education—a liberatory pedagogy that serves to emancipate rather than restrict (108). A more complete understanding of the nature of ideology and domination, one based upon the notions of agency, struggle, and critique, transcends the traditional, insubstantial neo-Marxist interpretations of education (Theory 12).

What is most important in his discussion is that Giroux proceeds under the assumption that educational systems, rather than being the machinery for ideological reproduction and reification, can provide the critical forum from which to begin the transformation of the broader society. Given this, educators can and must develop individual "strategies of résistance" and implement these strategies on a personal level in the classroom. These new liberatory approaches and forms provide a foundation for the "process of radical reconstruction" in education (Ideology 129).

Along this same line of inquiry, Freire's and Shor's extensive theories of liberation are also deeply concerned with ideological resistance and its application to the
classroom. In the introduction to Freire's book The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation, Giroux speaks of Freire's educational ideas as being the distillation of radical pedagogy. Education, for Freire, "is an ideal in the transformation of society through the discourse of critique and the language of possibility" (Henry Giroux, qtd. in Freire, Politics 9).

Freire explains these liberatory concepts and strategies extensively in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. In his text he asserts that educational systems founded on and funded by capitalistic forms ultimately result in intellectual oppression in both the learner and teacher. He argues for educational curriculum and methods based upon problem-posing approaches to teaching and learning—those approaches that rend the classroom "tranquillity that rests on how well men [or women] fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it" (Pedagogy 63). Education must be made a system whereby knowledge can be and is used as a foundation for the liberation of the intellectual spirit of both the learner and the teacher. In subsequent works, such as The Politics of Education, Freire further calls on education to help students reflect on historical and cultural realities by working from and on the experiences that they bring to the educational site.
Shor deals with applying Freire's problem-posing method in the classroom. In Shor's *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* and *Freire for the Classroom: A Sourcebook for Liberatory Teaching*, the ideas of liberatory education and critical thinking are extended and transformed into the concept of critical literacy. The spirit of Shor's work is best summarized in the words of Freire:

This is a great discovery, education is politics! When a teacher discovers that he or she is a politician, too, the teacher has to ask, What kind of politics am I doing in the classroom? That is, in favor of whom am I being a teacher? The teacher works in favor of something and against something. Because of that, he or she will have another great question, How to be consistent in my teaching practice with my political choice? I cannot proclaim my liberating dream and in the next day be authoritarian with the students. (qtd. in Shor, *Critical Teaching*)

Within this spirit Shor applies much of Freirian theory to the classroom, particularly in the area of adult education.

Freire and Shor, as well as Giroux, have synthesized several strains of neo-Marxist radical and liberatory theory. Through their ideas one can clearly see that the
development of neo-Marxist educational thought points to an imperative question: On a deeper, more personal basis, how does the individual teacher deal with disquieting ideas of ideology and agency? The praxis of critical literacy seems to provide an appropriate answer. Certainly the individual teacher is immersed within the confines of a broader construction of imposed values and beliefs; however, neo-Marxist liberatory pedagogy points to the means by which he or she might become liberated from these oppressive restrictions through the processes of critical self-reflection and the teaching of critical literacy. The advocacy of critical literacy provides an avenue for transformation of the world. This is a critical pedagogy that Patricia Bizzell describes quite nicely as having a dual function: first, to "delegitimate forms of pedagogy that imitate and generate unjust social power relations," and second, "to delineate forms of pedagogy that imitate and generate egalitarian social power relations" ("Power" 55).

Critical Literacy: The Catalyst for Transformation

In order to practice those dual functions that Bizzell identifies, one must, I think, establish a workable definition of the term critical literacy. Any meaningful
definition of critical literacy certainly must attempt to incorporate the social construction of knowledge and the ideological dimensions of language and language production. Within such a definition, one finds a greater understanding of the multifaceted nature of literacy—that is, a comprehension of literacy abilities as going far beyond the mere acquisition of encoding and decoding skills, or mere facility with words and texts, or merely becoming a willing, active participant within a dominant linguistic community. Rather, a critical perception of literacy allows one to conceive of reading and writing abilities not only as the means with which one learns to read and write, but the means by which one learns to re-read and re-write the world through the continual critique of the texts and contexts of language.

This critical comprehension begins when one understands that reading and writing abilities do more than provide social access through literacy; these abilities also are the source for social restriction through such pejorative terms as illiteracy or non-literacy. Freire defines writing and reading as political (and thus power-laden) activities, and this definition is fundamental to redefining literacy as the means of transforming the world. Much of his theory is devoted to critiquing the repressiveness of language and educational practices, and the searching for the means
with which to overcome this oppression. According to Freire, the politics of literacy and illiteracy are the means by which the dominant social forms can and do maintain the status quo through control of discourse practices. Literacy, then, becomes the means by which "illiteracy can also appear as a manifestation of people's 'incapacity,' their 'lack of intelligence,' or their proverbial 'laziness'" (Freire, The Politics, 7). Literacy itself often is an ideological tool by which people are robbed of their basic ability to question and thus transcend the world beyond them.

But critical literacy becomes the means by which individuals can liberate themselves from intellectual and ideological tyranny. For example, in Literacy: Reading the Word and the World, Freire and Donaldo Macedo describe literacy as the ongoing task of creating a critical citizenry by the critical naming of the world through the written word. Freire and Macedo maintain that education, and thus literacy,

should be [the] means that enable students to interrogate and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than merely serving, the wider social orders. . . . It is through the full appropriation of the dominant
standard language that students find themselves linguistically empowered to engage in dialogue with the various sectors of the wider society. (152)

In a critical sense, the purpose of literacy education is to create, through the catalyst of individually lived reality, an awareness of the matrix of socially constructed forms. These are the forms within which writing and reading abilities develop and function.

Building on Freire's ideas of "re-reading" and "re-writing" the world through the word, Lankshear and McLaren point out that understanding the relationship between literacy and social practices "enable[s] human subjects to understand and engage the politics of daily life in the quest for a more truly democratic social order" (xviii). Such critical awareness is the foundation for an informed and critically aware population--one in which the individual members are both responsible and willingly able to challenge the repressiveness of the larger society. As Lankshear and McLaren further point out, such critical practices invite "a 'rewriting' of the world into a formation in which [people's] interests, identities, and legitimate aspirations are more fully and equally present" (xviii). Language and language use become seen not only as processes of signification and/or processes of oppression, but also as processes of intellectual
liberation, as well as democratic and economic emancipation. Knoblauch and Brannon also see those "rewriting" and "rereading" processes as being a fundamental part of classroom instruction. The direct application of critical literacy specifically involves a close critique of the political nature of schools, and of the resulting assumptions and practices that often go unanalyzed. In more fully defining the concept, the two authors maintain that critical literacy assumes that all students, as American citizens, "should understand, accept, and live amicably amidst the realities of cultural diversity--along axes of gender, race, class, and ethnicity" (6). Additionally, critical literacy, as an educational construct, presumes a basic sense of fairness in the human experience and that "no one group is exclusively entitled to the privilege of representation, but that each has a right to tell its story" (7). As such, teachers can and must, according to Knoblauch and Brannon's interpretation, remain similarly reflective about their instructional practices, so that they stay responsive to the fullest range of student needs as well as the ethical imperative of social justice--so that issues of gender, race, and class, for instance, along with other cultural realities of American life, are woven self-consciously into pedagogy, not subordinated to
a myth of disciplinary neutrality or a myth of the American melting pot. (8)

Critical literacy pedagogy demands close, questioning analysis of the power relationships imposed upon people through language use, and the implications that this dynamic has for self-actualization and social transformation.

Critical literacy allows the individual teacher to ask some pressing questions: What is the nature of this society? Why has the fabric of this culture been woven in specific patterns? Where is it going? Where has it been? For in using literacy to engage the world through critical, dialogic interactions with others, and through the continuous questioning of language practices and methods, both student and teacher begin to understand the layered realities of the world beyond the classroom. In using reading and writing, and speaking and listening abilities as well, to probe this embedded, impacted layering of reality, both student and teacher are deeply involved in the learning process—the critical learning experience that eventually, hopefully becomes a questioning, reflexive attitude beyond the classroom.

Giroux aptly describes this dynamic as taking place within the framework of a critical dialectic. His theory of knowledge and critical learning focuses on the actual social practices—the praxis—that is brought about through
language use. Common, everyday, experiential knowledge is converted through the language of transformative dialectic into a critical understanding of multiple realities, and thus into active ethical participation in broader social contexts. Dialectic, to Giroux, is the critical nexus between learning and knowledge, for in educational contexts the questioning dialectic requires that we redefine knowledge in political terms, and look at the ways that teaching and learning are mechanisms of social and cultural reproduction ("Mass" 197).

In terms of critical literacy, citizenship education, and liberatory learning, then, the fundamental issue is that public education continually, systematically disenfranchises certain student populations. As "transformative intellectuals," individual teachers must continually reevaluate their obligation to educate all students to be participatory members of a society. Aronowitz and Giroux maintain that

> [i]t is important to stress that teachers must take active responsibility for raising serious questions about what they teach, how they are to teach it, and what the larger goals are for which they are striving. (30)

Only through the process of critical questioning and creative reflection can teachers and students see broader
contradictions and inconsistencies that are inherent in the world outside the classroom—those social, political, and economic problems that are often glossed over in positivistic, so-called "objective" approaches to teaching and learning.

This dialectical questioning approach to knowledge makes students the source for their own transformations. The outcome is students' active moral and ethical participation in the broader social spheres. Dialectic as a critical technique in the classroom allows both synthesis and liberation; it is the catalyst for release from unquestioned, unanalyzed assumptions—those broader ideological forces and influences that impact, and too often restrict, people, both individually and as communities. This is the basis for what Giroux calls a "pedagogy of critical citizenship [needed] to reconstruct a visionary language and public philosophy that puts equality, liberty, and human life at the center of the notions of democracy and citizenship" (Schooling 29).

Through critical dialectic, the renegotiation, the reconstitution, and the reconstruction of knowledge necessarily takes place in "linking ethics, democracy, and politics to the meaning and purpose of schooling" (Schooling 83).

Thus critical pedagogy calls for the use of literacy
skills as tools and strategies with which to critique the ideological representations of dominating social relationships and usurpatory material representations. And as Giroux and Aronowitz explain in *Education Under Siege*, the education system is the hidden, silent theater for many of these representations; as such, the education system is inextricably bound to the liberating ideals of "self- and social empowerment as well as to the processes of democratization" (132).

When one considers that these liberating ideals can only be brought about through the problematization of knowledge and its contexts, one can see that the education concept of critical literacy goes far beyond that of critical thinking. In the problem-solving approach of critical thinking, the students are "given" the problem by those in power; in the problem-posing approach of critical literacy, the innate questioning processes of students can be used to uncover those problems and issues that are too often ideologically buried. After all, the genius of the human spirit is that people were put on this earth to ask questions and continually seek answers.

**Critical Literacy and the Ideology of Texts**

These theories have most commonly been applied to
the dialectical processes of reading and writing, and much less to texts themselves as inscribed icons of language. Because they document how power is embodied in language, texts can and should be critiqued in terms of being user-based, in terms of being ideological repositories, and finally in terms of being the catalysts for change and transformation. A close analysis of the contexts of texts reveals not only the ideological implications that are contained in such texts, but also what is left out of these texts. The critical analysis of what is and is not in texts should allow one to see the ideological agendas that are represented.

At this juncture in the discussion, it is important to note that just as literacy has been historically appropriated by various ideological power structures, so also have the various textual representations of culture been used and co-opted. This is particularly true in the realm of education, where literacy is merely the accessing and receiving of information. In many school textbooks, as Aronowitz and Giroux have asserted, "knowledge is broken down into discrete parts, standardized for easier management and consumption, and published with the intent of being marketed for large general student audiences" (27).

Therefore, the uses of texts must be examined
against the purposes literacy serves in both American education and in the broader American culture. In discussing the various historical methods of acquiring and using literacy, Lankshear and McLaren note that early forms of mass literacy in American public education were constructed so as to "assert teacher and adult authority, establish values and habits of drill, and promote passive attitudes and responses on the part of pupils" (5). Such indoctrination in literacy fits in nicely with the industrial revolution and the developing capitalistic forms of mass production—a time when good, unquestioning, subservient workers were most needed. The authors note that literacy further developed to differentiate people along lines of class: "quite different literacies were conceived and transmitted; for example, among students bound for professions, higher learning, and so forth. Such students learned within very different instructional settings" (6).

Up to and including the present times, educators have quite easily been able to establish artificial differences in the content and purpose of literacy through such nefarious devices as "tracking" and "assessment." What invariably results is the institutionalized classification and stratification of students. More significantly, though, such arbitrary differentiation
and covert agendas call for the creation of hidden curricula, and this process is probably most apparent in how textbooks have historically been used in the classroom. In her cogent, close analysis of the history of textbooks in recent school history, Frances Fitzgerald notes that a good portion of the texts used in the classroom through the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth century, reinforced the illusion of America as a seamless, compromising, totally democratic society. In discussing the traditional ideology of texts and textbooks, Fitzgerald posits that

\[a]t least since the eighteen-nineties, the school histories have focused more or less narrowly on the development of the capitalistic nation-state. To the extent that they dealt with social history, they have assumed a fairly homogeneous society, in which all differences could be justly compromised to suit all parties. In practice, this has meant taking the position of the ruling class--whoever they happened to be at any given time--and suppressing the views of other. (104-5)

This ideology of literacy is sustained and even expanded through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and has become deeply embedded in present-day educational forms.

James Berlin, for example, sees the evolution of
literacy skills in the nineteenth century as growing out of "scientistic" approaches to educational theory. In what he calls an "assembly line in education . . . current-traditional rhetoric is the triumph of the scientific and technical world view" that persists even today (Writing 62). Berlin further maintains that "the development of literacy skills has taken place along 'mechanistic' lines which remove ethical and all but the most elementary emotional consideration, with the sole appeal being that of understanding and reason" (Writing 63).

Within education, the acquisition and uses of literacy have been very much dominated by a fact-based, knowledge-oriented, value-neutral curriculum. These are certainly the approaches that are dictated by the technology and competitive dynamics of the broader capitalistic market forms. As Richard Ohmann has observed, this is representative of a general principle of ideological hegemony: "a privileged . . . group will generalize its own interests so that they appear to be universal" (English 86). The point here, however, is not to say that these approaches are of no value as educational constructs. Rather the argument can and should be made that the powerful assumptions behind such educational rationales must be critically analyzed.
According to Giroux, this empirical/technical rationality is one in which the status quo uses education for "control and certainty"—that is, pedagogy "which generates and supports behavior that is adaptive and conditioned . . . so as to ensure stability" (Theory 176). Such influences of stability and control have resulted in what Freire has described as the "banking" concept of education (Pedagogy 59-63). As Freire maintains, this capitalistic educational model is one in which information is "deposited" in the student and "withdrawn" at a later time through objective tests, with a small amount of interest generated in the process. Within this educational setting, texts become merely inert artifacts which convey only "received" knowledge. Invariably the dominance that knowledge and literacy have over students results in a systematic, ongoing silencing of those students, especially with regard to texts. This environment openly declares itself "democratic" while actually constructing and reproducing inequality. The curriculum is presented as normative, neutral and benevolent, . . . adjusting most students to subordinate positions in society. Inequality is presented as natural, just, and earned, given the differing "aptitudes" and "achievements" of various groups. The advantages of the elite are hidden behind
a myth of "equal opportunity" while the idiom of the elite is named "correct usage". . . . (Shor and Freire 121-123)

The dominant/subservient human relationships inherent in this model of the transmission of knowledge allows little room for using texts to reflect on and question the dynamics and consequences of the processes which drive this model.

More important to my project, though, is the way in which current literacy studies have examined the ways that school texts convey the distorted valuation systems that allow dominant economic, social, and/or political entities to sustain class stratifications. For as Michael Apple has pointed out in Teachers and Texts, historically [m]any of the reasons why the texts and other materials made available for school use look the way they do is deeply related not only to class, but to the gender (and race) characteristics of the group of people who actually publish the materials in the first place. (Teachers 9)

As a result, most texts are used unproblematically within the contexts of mainstream education.

In his essay on the power of literacy, Adrian Bennett observes that classroom texts claim to be politically neutral and value-free, but in reality remove truth from
the "personalized subject . . . by allowing individuals to be treated as interchangeable recipients of the truths embedded in particular textbooks" (57). Further, James Collins believes that "the link between literacy, schooling, and the ideal of individual social mobility . . . achieves a particular kind of indexical fixing of texts, both their production and their comprehension" (13). Lastly, Joseph Kretovics has pointed out that the knowledge offered in various texts about racial and ethnic minorities, women, the working class, and other marginalized groups has been distorted, misrepresented, omitted, or stereotyped to support the interests of powerful social, political, or economic groups and legitimate the status quo. (59) As these writers accurately assert, texts often sustain the inclusions and exclusions that are inherent in the broader culture.

In terms of texts, and related literacy, the dynamics of inclusion and thus exclusion, of valuation and thus devaluation, take place along the lines of "standard," often privileged, language use. The way in which one successfully negotiates and uses the language of the dominant culture, as represented in the texts of that culture, measures the degree to which one will be deemed "literate" or "illiterate." To be "literate" in the
"standard" language and texts is to become one with the dominant cultural institution; to not do so is to remain outside of that institution. These valuation and devaluation processes neatly allow the social and economic domination of hegemony—that is, those means by which the dominant culture silences, absorbs, or shuns dissidence through the processes of consensus and legitimization.

The body of texts canonized in literacy classes graphically documents ideological hegemony. As Peter McLaren has brought out in his work on the ideological implications of texts, "[s]trands of elite Western culture, those that encode primarily the triumph of White males, constitute a significant portion of the canon." Within educational contexts, such textual representations provide "a sacred pool of cultural information" (222). These representations are exactly those that are needed to reinforce the stratification of social orders. Gerald Graff has further described texts in terms of how they so often overtly convey the norms and values of the middle-class and upper-class elements of society. At the same time, the controversies that are embedded in texts are never made an integral part of teaching or the curriculum. Graff also notes in *Professing Literature* that "educators are saying, in effect, that it is more important to protect the integrity of the great tradition
than to relate that tradition to the cultural controversies of the times" (261). The problematic nature of texts themselves never becomes the focus of literacy.

As a result, educational literacy becomes consumed by the assumption of a privileged, institutionalized body of literary works. The practitioners of language and literary study reverently refer to this edifice by several venerable names: "literature," or "literary tradition," or "the literary canon." To many in this group of devoted practitioners, custodians of literature must constantly be vigilant. There is always the constant need for vigilance and critical control of that body of texts and keep them unsullied by contact with the unread masses. The privileged body of knowledge--that which is magically embodied in those literary texts--must always be carefully kept from the mentally undisciplined. The intellectual riff-raff must be kept at a distance, for their having access to the mystical texts would certainly result in literary "chaos" and interpretative "anarchy."

Such elitist attitudes and positions are most represented by theories such as E. D. Hirsch's "cultural literacy." Hirsch has devoted considerable effort to maintaining the stories and values of the dominant culture. Working on the basis of a list of the "great books," he maintains that literacy is closely tied to the texts
which are most representative of high Western culture. Hirsch's theories have been sharply criticized as being intellectually elitist, and have been deemed to be a "privileged ideology of literacy" and texts, a theory that itself maintains the hegemony of the dominant culture (Bizzell, "Arguing" 144-148).

Certainly the persistent problem that faces us as teachers in employing this elevated, elitist approach in the classroom is the difficulty we face in establishing alternative definitions of texts. Too often, when classroom texts are an entrenched part of a canonical body called "literature," we unquestioningly teach those specific texts, and teach them in the same way, merely because somebody once taught them to us. As such, these texts too often come to embody and epitomize all of the unanalyzed assumptions that underpin what we teach and why we teach it. To more fully understand the implications of this institutionalization of literature in education, then, is to necessarily perceive the canonical texts as being representations of the status quo.

More comprehensive models of teaching and learning are beginning to come to grips with this necessity. Such models try to account for the ways in which social, cultural, and political forces shape the creation, recreation, and transmission of knowledge within
educational institutions. In advancing one such model, James Berlin asserts that teaching is only viable if it "is self-consciously aware of its ideological stand, making the very question of ideology the center of classroom activities" ("Rhetoric" 490). In such educational situations, the [d]emocratic conceptions of language . . . establish an open community for free discourse, a community where the rights of the people to express themselves are protected. This makes knowledge available to all, whereas its opposite makes ignorance the normal state of the majority. (Rhetoric 86) The model that Berlin begins to build is one of critique rather than acquiescence, especially with regard to texts. Giroux adds to this model by showing that in all educational contexts the subtle agendas of the dominant culture are at work. These are the agendas which he has quite perceptively identified as hidden curricula—"those unstated norms, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through the underlying structure of a given [course of study]" (Teachers 51). Often these hidden curricula are deeply embedded within classroom texts themselves. Shor further extends this educational model. He maintains that the basic act of teaching involves identifying the political and ideological constraints
that are continually at work on the curriculum, the learner, and the teacher; within this context are the implications of a teaching shift from capitalistic authoritarianism to one that seeks liberation from the oppressive ideological dominance of that authority (Empowering 23-26). To do this teachers must be more willing to recognize and grapple with the dominant authority that resides in classroom texts.

The implication of these innovative ideas is that teachers need to use classroom texts to engender questioning attitudes, and thus critical literacy, in students. For example, if we as teachers are having students reflect on texts, then that reflection process should be based upon something more substantial than, say, excavating those texts for hidden transcendental "meanings"—those subtle truths that point the way to a "better" mankind. Nor can those literacy processes treat texts as being unique unto themselves. Rather, given what many contemporary liberatory theorists say, true classroom praxis treats texts as being one of the main cultural methods for either sustaining, or for that matter, challenging ideological assumptions.

An illustration of this claim can be found in reader response—an approach to literature that calls for deeper reader participation in negotiating texts. The main thrust
of such reader-centered approaches involves the bourgeois notion that literature and literary texts are a "vital personal experience" for the individual student (Rosenblatt, *Literature* 59), and that each student reader brings to the reading situation a "complex web" of attitudes, influences, and experiences (Rosenblatt, *Literature* 92). Yet such reader-centered approaches to literature remain subjective, rather elevated interpretive methods that never really attempt to deal honestly with the power relationships that permeate and thus often pervert literature and texts.

What best represents a viable alternative is the work of people like Kathleen Weiler and bell hooks, both of whom critically analyze the manner in which ideology is manifested in the oppressive relationships, and interrelatedness, of race, gender, and class. For example, Weiler writes of hooks, "By making the category of race central to her work, she brings the realities of racism and the need to consider racial identity as well as gender and class position into her work in a fundamental way" (45). As hooks often demonstrates in her own teaching, teachers need to foreground such issues, which are often embedded and thus hidden in texts.

A questioning, critical approach to texts and literature necessarily requires much more than merely
artistic appreciation or intellectual comprehension—what Louise Rosenblatt has identified as "aesthetic" and "efferent" reader stances in the reading situation (The Reader 22-35). Reader-centered approaches can be made more critically effective if students are taught to situate their responses in terms of broader categories. For example, a working class student, or a female student, or a minority student, can be taught to think about how an elite text excludes all that he or she knows or has experienced.

The problem, however, is not with reader-centered approaches; the problem is the common conception of the reader and the text as being autonomous rather than socially constructed. All too often texts, and the responses to those texts, merely mirror, and consequently perpetuate dominant ideological structures—those collective economic, social, and political belief systems which are too hard-driven by the greed and competition of consumerism and capitalism. Within such systems hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion are subtly, but sharply, drawn along the division lines of wealth and non-wealth, white and non-white, male and non-male, power and powerlessness.

Given the inherent inequities maintained by ideological systems, and the ensuing social imbalances
and disparities, Eagleton has rightly noted that the study
of literature, and thus theories about literature, tend
to "strengthen rather than challenge the assumptions of
the [existing] power-systems" (195). Literature and
theories of criticism, such as reader response, too often
become an integral part of the unanalyzed assumptions--the
ideologies--that have evinced, and inevitably continue
to perpetuate, the flagrant injustices within societies.

Therefore, it would seem then that any fundamental
approaches to texts in the classroom would necessarily
involve methods that encourage students to critically
question all of the underlying, unanalyzed assumptions
of individual texts. Such questioning approaches are
grounded in challenging texts as being representations
of broader ideologies, or as working against the
oppresiveness of those ideologies. Many educators ignore
this practicality--that is, the critical, questioning
dimension of the social and ideological implications
inherent in a text--in both theory and practice. What
student and teacher alike most need are theory and practice
which liberate them from the ideological ruse perpetrated
in the texts they use.

McCormick and Waller, for example, refer to this
very dilemma in their essay "Text, Reader, Ideology:
The Interactive Nature of the Reading Situation." They
maintain that the problem involves "the solipsism and reified subjectivism of much . . . criticism" (193). They further theorize that any model of the reading process must emphasize the interrelatedness of social and cultural factors, and must account for ideology--"the shared though very diverse beliefs, assumptions, habits, and practices of a particular society" (194).

To understand the way in which ideology works on readers, writers, and texts, we must look at the different levels at which these rather powerful influences are apparent. To accomplish this, some are now examining the role of ideology in defining literature, texts, and the reading process. What they have come to recognize is that there seem to be different levels of involvement in any reading situation, such as those identified and suggested by Michael Johnson. He posits that higher-level modes of reader response are "synthetic" and "pro-active," and are those which call for "a new pedagogy of literacy [which] must continue pushing, expanding, and refining its interrogations (and self-interrogations), theories, arguments and practices" (314).

Still other theorists, moving even farther beyond the romantic notion that individuals determine their own readings, are looking more closely at how individual responses are socially constructed through the working
of ideological forces. Bill Corcoran, in his article entitled "Reading, Re-reading and Resistance: Versions of Reader Response," made the following assertion:

The problem is that the active readers posited in many versions of reader-centered theory are not, by definition, strong or resistant readers until they can read 'against the grain' of a text's dominant ideology. This deliberate attempt to read from the alternative perspective of class, race, religion, or gender demands that the reader be sited in a discourse which acknowledges the social construction of the self and its inevitable positioning within a set of wider cultural formations and categories.

(132)

As such, reading "against the grain" is a much more dynamic concept than merely active reading. The process very much involves what Mark A. Faust identifies as a resistant reading--a "dialogic" questioning that is vital to the process of meaning making (46).

Higher levels of reading invariably require a critical stance on the part of the reader. When teachers strive for this more responsive, more responsible level of reading in classroom practices, students are allowed to explore their own socially conscious responses--those that critically question underlying assumptions, values, and
ethics. They are provided with a critical literacy—a communicative foundation from which to actively probe the ideological manifestations that texts inherently convey and at the same time disguise.

In terms of critical literacy, liberatory education, and the social construction of knowledge and language, understanding not only how readers "fill in" and "structure" texts, but also understanding why they do so is crucial. That understanding occurs at a very critical, self-reflective level—a level that was and is still undermined by texts of power and powerlessness. Texts are not artifacts, for human existence is a text of intertextuality both in a temporal and spatial sense; texts are entities whose context is dictated by very powerful, and very nebulous, factors and forces. This understanding allows teachers and students alike to use literacy to question those texts and contexts. Whose reality is being affirmed or denied in texts? Whose purposes are being served? Why? How? The desideratum of education should be that students and teachers be able to interweave their reading and writing, speaking and listening abilities within the framework of such basic questions.

This realization can be liberating. Teachers need no longer stand complacently at the gigantic granite rock
of "literature" and artificial texts, anchored to it by the bonds of their own silence, craftily chipping off pieces of the edifice for students to place carefully in their empty pockets—both teacher and learner duped into the fallacious misconception that those mere fragments are the ultimate value of learning. Within this context, then, multi-level literacy becomes critical in the systematic analysis of both textbook purpose and textbook content in the classroom.
CHAPTER THREE

A RATIONALE FOR USING ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDIES
AS DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSES OF CRITICAL LITERACY

The theoretical foundations laid out in the previous chapters provide the basis for the research study that is discussed in detail in the remainder of this dissertation. The intent of this study is to add to the somewhat limited research concerned with how theories of liberatory education and critical literacy can be transformed into critical classroom praxis. This is particularly important for me as a teacher, for as I understand it my task is to continually seek purposeful praxis--the meaningful, practical application of theory that comes through the interaction of language and reflection and action. This is also particularly difficult for me, for I understand too that I am deeply immersed in the conditions of ideology and education, and must fit these conditions into a personal theory of teaching.

C. A. Bowers in "The Problem of Individualism and Community in Neo-Marxist Educational Thought" identifies this search for purposeful praxis, this continuous introspection, as the need to deal with the "vexing problem of whether the teacher can be considered an 'organic intellectual' capable of escaping the press of his [or
her own cultural conditioning" (365). Bowers argues that the individual teacher is invariably circumscribed by larger social constructs; therefore, "[t]o be human . . . is to express autonomy from these conditioning forces, and this is achieved as the individual's powers of critical awareness are awakened" (Bowers 368). What Bowers is suggesting is that the praxis of critical awareness is not just something that drives course plans and syllabi, with some evaluation of each student at the end of each semester. Rather, he seems to be implying that the process of critical reflexivity is urgently needed throughout all of teaching, from the individual teacher to more global levels of education.

Based upon Bowers' argument, I will use classroom research to extend critical pedagogy into reflective teaching and learning. Ultimately, I would hope to make substantive conclusions about the fundamental relationship between critical literacy and committed social action—the relationship between questioning attitudes and the liberation and transformation of the intellect and the spirit into social commitment. Victor Villanueva, Jr., in *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, explains that relationship in this way:

The basic idea is to present the cultural in such a way as to have students question worldviews, [and
thus] become critical. Action presupposes a need for action. Questioning what is commonly accepted makes clear the need for action. Among the things that are commonly accepted is the canon. (99)

Self-reflection, according to these understandings, is very much of an active process that is closely associated with texts and literacy abilities within the classroom.

Drawing on these fundamental premises, I will conduct an ethnographic study to understand how, in the classroom, I can translate critical literacy into more effective teaching practices. In particular, the focus of this study will be to observe how texts are employed in the classroom to either promote or inhibit questioning attitudes in both students and teachers. For example, if the state mandates the textbooks used at various levels of public education, does curriculum merely adapt to the dominant ideology? Or if the individual teacher has the latitude to select particular texts for particular classroom situations, what criteria does he or she actively and consciously apply to those texts? What method and manner of reflection goes into that selection process on the part of the "autonomous" teacher, specifically in terms of the purposes of literacy? What does he or she hope the texts will produce in the learner? Should literacy skills go beyond providing the ability to read
and write? Do those abilities also connote social responsibility and participation? But more important, though, is whether the process creates the first principle of critical literacy in teachers themselves. To what extent do dominant ideologies and assumptions influence that process of textbook selection and use?

The first principle of critical literacy necessitates deep, persistent questioning. Since critical literacy is integral to my research, the primary method of this project will be a critical ethnography. Such critical ethnography will require not only observing, but also the questioning of specific rationales underlying the use of texts in the classroom, which will be the main focus of my work. As a result, not only will this study be directly concerned with the ideological implications that are conveyed overtly and covertly in classroom texts, the study will also focus on what is not in those texts as well as what is. For as sociolinguist Gunther Kress has rightly pointed out,

difference as such does not distinguish one set of texts from another: what does distinguish them are the areas of difference. A question such as, "What kinds of discourses are in contention here?" will prove to be revealing. In relation to texts from educational institutions it is important to understand
what discourses of knowledge, of morals, of authority, of gender, of power, appear and which of these are dominant in constituting the texts. (18)

In light of this, not just ethnography, but rather critical ethnography seems to be the research tool with which I can closely examine the "areas of difference" located both in texts and in teaching practices.

**Ethnography as a Research Tool**

A commonly accepted explanation of the ethnographic approach is contained in the following definition: ethnography attempts to describe "a society's customary behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes," with the ethnographer being defined as "a person who spends time living with, interviewing, and observing a group of people so that he or she can describe their particular behaviors, thoughts, and general patterns of life" (Ember and Ember 357). Both of these definitions describe research activities that have grown out of anthropology. Ethnographic observation has certainly been a primary method of research in cultural anthropology since people like Margaret Mead, Claude Levi-Strauss, Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, and later Clifford Geertz directly studied the behavior of people in groups. Consequently,
numerous informative texts have been written on the theory and procedures that underpin ethnographic field work. Additionally, many cultural anthropological studies have demonstrated the value of such a methodology in validly describing and interpreting significant patterns and variations of human behavior.

Much has changed over the years in the development and use of ethnography as an anthropological research tool. For example, Malinowski noted very early on that an observational methodology enables the researcher to honestly record, and respond to the participant's true point of view, to understand the participant's relationship to life and the world, and to realize, respect, and more fully appreciate the participant's unique world view (Spradley 3). Geertz qualifies Malinowski's description nicely by also identifying the highly contextualized nature of ethnographic observations. In acknowledging the interpretative quality inherent in such a methodology, Geertz maintains that

yet another aspect of the self-reflexive, where-am-I, where-are-they, nature of anthropological writing [that] emerges with a peculiar clarity: [that is] the way in which such writing about other societies is always at the same time a sort of Aesopian commentary on one's own. (22)
The ethnographic researcher must be aware that all such studies have or should have the end objective of not only understanding complex societies and human behavior, but also learning and profiting from the observed differences and similarities of others. As Spradley notes, "field work involves the disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in ways that are different. Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people." (3, emphasis is Spradley's)

Spradley rightly points out, as does much of the current literature, that ethnography as a research device can and must be employed as a learning, questioning tool for the ethnographer. The evolving conception of anthropology suggests a critical rather than a purely objective science; such an innovative conception also signifies ethnography as not being merely an observational method, but rather as being a critical research activity in itself.

This emerging distinction between ethnography and critical ethnography is important to my study because the latter is self-reflective, creating a dialogue with the other that calls one's own social assumption and norms into question. Therefore, my using a critical ethnography will allow me to concern myself primarily with how
ethnography serves to describe, and even critique, human behavior as it is revealed through language. Of most importance to my discussion is how ethnographic study is used to observe the ways in which human behavior mediates, and is thus mediated by, language use. As a teacher, I am vitally concerned with how the individual uses classroom observation as the catalyst for self-reflexivity, and how this introspection provides one with a vital link to learning and using language as the primer for critical literacy. Ultimately, however, I am concerned with how the teacher as ethnographer comes to learn from his or her own observations of the dynamics of language use, and how his or her teaching behavior changes based upon those observations and the ensuing self-reflexive dialogues.

With regard to the dynamics of language use in the classroom, many contemporary linguistic studies as well as ethnographic projects have begun to look long and hard at the interaction between society and language. Of more significance to my work, though, is the way in which such research calls into question the often oppressive power struggles that go on beneath the surface of language use. The linguistic research studies conducted by William Labov with Black English point out the power imbalances inherent in language use. Labov's findings indicate that many
non-standard English dialects exist in our culture, but through processes of class and economic differentiation, such "non-standard dialects tend to be socially stigmatized, even by those who feel most comfortable using them" (167). Basil Bernstein locates this socialization process much more specifically in the area of education. He asserts that,

class inequalities lie in the distribution of power and in the principles of control between social groups which are realized in the creation, distribution, reproduction and legitimation of physical and symbolic values which have their source in the social division of labour. (304)

Such "inequalities" in the distribution of power and control can be observed more closely in the connection between language education and social disadvantage. According to Bernstein, the linguistic codes that different classes of children learn at home act very much as "positioning devices" in the broader culture. That is, the "distinctive forms of communication, which transmit dominating and dominated codes" almost always predetermine the success or failure of those children when they become students (Bernstein 305). As a result of his extensive sociolinguistic studies in England, Bernstein maintains that
there are serious consequences for the children of the lower working class when they come to school because elaborated code is the medium of instruction in schooling. When schools attempt to develop in children the ability to manipulate elaborated code, they are really involved in trying to change cultural patterns, and such involvement may have profound social and psychological consequences for all engaged in the task. Educational failure is likely to be the result. (qtd. in Wardhaugh 318)

Bernstein's findings have recently come under criticism as being inaccurate, and perhaps as being unintentionally racist. But as Villanueva has pointed out, Bernstein's studies are important in understanding the differentiation that occurs in the use of dominant, preferred languages (110-113). Additionally, the situation itself demonstrates the need for critical research—that is, research that is critical of its own assumptions as well as its object of study.

Indeed, several recent ethnographic studies involving language and literacy have done much to expand and critique the work of Labov and Bernstein. One of the most noted of these is Shirley Brice Heath's work concerning the socialization patterns of literacy—a study which offered landmark findings to the field of sociolinguistics. In
Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms, Heath describes in depth her ethnographic research conducted in two Piedmont, North Carolina, communities. Heath is precise in her observational explanation of how language is learned differentially within and outside of educational institutions. According to Heath, social structures limit how children use language; consequently, the more constrained and restrictive a child's social structure is, the more that child's language use will be limited. As she notes, "[c]hildren in Roadville and Trackton came to have very different ways of communicating, because their communities had different social legacies and ways of behaving," particularly within the community of school (11). Such differentiation had ongoing consequences for the nonstandard language user of the area—consequences that played themselves out in the "schools, commercial establishments, and mills; [where] mainstream language, values and skills were the expected norm" (Heath 4).

Heath's work points out, as many other studies have subsequently done, that a good deal of differentiation exists in education, as well as in language use and language learning. Even though these studies are seldom self-critical and the researchers too readily accept the norms that they are observing, such studies indicate that
the descriptive nature of ethnography can help expose those patterns of differentiation.

More specifically, however, I am more concerned in my research with what happens inside the English classroom. Of most significance to the design of my research project are those studies and projects that describe how the power dynamics of the society, culture, and language are continually at work in the individual classroom. More recent discussions in the fields of English and composition have also revealed the ethnographic study to be a research tool that is particularly useful in exploring how power is reproduced in language learning, literacy use, and composition instruction.

In addressing this issue specifically, Stephen North's *Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field* points out the way in which English teachers, as practitioner/researchers, can use ethnographic study as a means of classroom observation, research, and interpretation (272). In their ongoing proximity to both language and learning, English composition teachers assume an optimum observational position in gathering pertinent data and offering valid interpretations. According to North, in the initial phase of any ethnographic classroom study, the composition teacher as both practitioner and researcher identifies the parameters of the research
environment. At that point, without a preconceived hypothesis, the researcher then designs a study by which he or she may objectively observe while altering the context as little as possible. This phase is informed by previous studies, and the researcher has only general, tentative notions of what he or she might find. Based on this, the researcher is able to gather relevant data, interpret patterns or themes, and disperse, apply and/or retest the findings of the study. Given the nature of ethnography, the researcher can successfully accomplish such studies within the confines of individual classrooms and specific teaching contexts (North 277-79).

North then outlines this pattern for ethnographic inquiry in the following way:

1. Identifying Problems: Finding a Setting
2. Entering the Setting
3. Collecting Data: Inscription
4. Interpretation: Identifying Themes
5. Verification
6. Dissemination (284)

North's outline provides a rationale that informs my own research study. I perceive the Interpretation and Verification phases to be fundamental to critical ethnography. At these stages of the ethnographic study the researcher creates the critical synthesis--the
self-reflexivity, the constant introspection, the ongoing questioning of how and why something does or doesn't work in the classroom. North's theory of ethnographic study certainly seems to invite the individual teacher to have the courage to look more critically at what he or she is doing in the classroom, and more importantly why it is being done.

Additionally, North attempts to isolate the strengths and weaknesses of the ethnographic method as a viable tool of observation. He does this by describing and analyzing the way in which the particular research approach makes observations—another aspect of his discussion that is crucial to my own project. Due to the relative newness of the method, the existing research is somewhat thin, especially in the very new realm of critical ethnography. Because of this, a fundamental goal of ethnography should be to determine correlation—that is, to clearly define how different ethnographic studies inform, relate to, and build upon one another. Such correlation creates a research arena in which variation and variables are the focus and in which research is a process of "investigating and then presenting accounts of alternative meanings, . . . [but] with emphasis given to finding the patterns that will make sense to the members of [a specific] community" (North 303). This research point
is fundamental not only to the individual researcher, but more importantly to the larger community of researchers. The research question often involves determining not only how the information gained provides the foundation for questioning self-reflection and critical examination on the part of the observer and the observed, but also how the specific variation is relevant to the common.

Many of these same ideas, especially with regard to the English composition classroom, are more fully developed by Janice M. Lauer and J. William Asher in Composition Research: Empirical Designs. As the two authors point out, ethnographic studies provide a "conception of knowledge as being a social construction." As such, ethnographic approaches allow research to become "a collaborative search, [involving] interpretation and reinterpretation of complex acts in context" (40). Lauer and Asher go on to define the method as a qualitative description that "examines entire environments, looking at subjects in context...with a minimum of overt intervention" (40). Like North, they maintain that one of the primary requisites of ethnographic study is the ongoing need for reciprocity--the continuous need for correlative studies which replicate and even extend a given hypothesis to other contexts. Lauer and Asher
see this as "the regrounding of hypothesis in repeated observations, further interview, and the search for disconfirming evidence" (40). This process is important in demonstrating the interrelatedness of ethnographic studies, especially when the focus of such research work is language learning and the classroom.

Considering these important ideas, I will discuss in the remaining sections of this chapter how new ethnographic theory calls for more critical studies of language classrooms.

**Limitations to Ethnographic Methodology**

It is generally accepted that to achieve the optimum conditions in ethnography, researchers must carefully plan how to create a reliable and valid relationship between participant, observer, and the situation, and thus establish a workable research environment. As the cultural ethnographer Hortense Powdermaker has described the process, the researcher "traditionally immerses himself [or herself] in [the research context], learning, as far as possible, to think, see, feel, and sometimes act as a member of its culture" (9). Lauer and Asher describe the process in this way: "The researcher often becomes a participant observer, a member of the classroom or
other situations being studied" (39). At the same time, the researcher must remain theoretically and clinically detached, and in so doing must be especially careful not to impose his or her existing knowledge and suppositions on the research environment because doing so will significantly distort the findings.

Therein lies a prominent problem with the approach. The manner in which the researcher interprets the findings of the ethnographic study is always influenced by broader ideological pressures. Whether it is in the area of cultural anthropology, or sociolinguistics, or education, or English composition, the researcher must always rely on the use of an ideologically laced, power-laden language system for interpretation. Too often, under these circumstances, the reality that is being observed has a tendency to become artificially described in a scientifically and objectively detached way. In the quest to be and remain clinically objective, and thus "neutral," we as researchers separate ourselves from the subjective, self-reflexive insights of our work, even of our own selves; essentially, we displace ourselves from the wonderful gray area of introspection that liberatory theorists have repeatedly told us is vital to critical learning and critical teaching.

In an insightful critique of ethnographic methodology,
Dr. Ray C. Rist discusses the implications of this research contradiction in terms of education. Rist maintains that the "loss of intellectual excitement" generated by the ethnographic research technique can be directly attributed to ever-increasing attempts to maintain an artificial scientific quantitativeness in the methodology (8). Furthermore, Rist states:

Recent advocates also seem less likely to be cultural critics or to identify themselves as somewhat marginal to the social system. It has been one of the hallmarks of the ethnographer that sufficient distance was maintained from one's cultural setting in order to study it with "suspended judgment." Many who are now using the method are far from marginal--either to the educational profession or to the society. The result is that ethnographic research is now frequently done without any emphasis on values or on exploring the underlying cultural framework of the organization in question. (9)

The descriptive and/or quantitative elements of the approach become ends in themselves. Consequently, these ends become too tightly constrained by the so-called "objective," value-neutral empiricism that critical theorists see as pervading, even distorting, educational
The researcher is forced by this inherent imperative to make broader generalizations based upon these erroneous, short-sighted assumptions, resulting in a paradox that complicates the researcher's task even further. I think that Stephen North picks up on this problem quite well, especially in the areas of composition and the English classroom. He warns that such perspectives serve "to rigidify, to hinder the investigator's ability to see things in context" (285). North discusses at length many of the prominent inconsistencies in the method. For example, in the initial phases of any ethnographic study, the researcher often has his or her own preconceived notions of the environment. For the researcher to suspend the creation of a hypothesis is difficult; yet this suspension process is critical in effective ethnography. The researcher also brings into the context of the research environment many unanalyzed assumptions, "the baggage from her [or his] own imaginative universe" (287). These predispositions continually compound the problem and invalidate the assumption of "objectivity." In addition to these difficulties, there are inconsistent methods of data collection and interpretation in field study. The means by which the researcher extracts information from the target environment can and too often does alter
the context. Also, the researcher's necessarily subjective interpretation of so-called "objective" data often gradually begins to move the study out of the original circumstances from which it was gathered, thus further distorting the results (288-301).

Related to this are several basic principles that Lauer and Asher point out in their analysis of the problems inherent in ethnographic methodology, especially regarding the composition classroom. As the two authors argue, ethnographic approaches too often create the situation in which only large-scale empirical studies are considered valuable. In reality, though, there is a wealth of research knowledge in the microcosm of the individual classroom as well as the macrocosm of broad-based research (46-48). And certainly the microcosm of the classroom is an appropriate context for the ethnographic study. But, as anthropologists have warned about ethnography, the more the researcher imposes his or her presence on an environment being observed, the more that situation will be altered. Thus a "true" picture of the classroom culture under study can never be captured. To try to overcome this problem, the researcher must define his or her role as researcher in the project and must strive for a minimum of intervention, either intentional or unintentional, on the research site. Additionally, Lauer
and Asher, in the introduction to their text, further caution that one of the difficulties of effective ethnographic research, particularly in the composition classroom, is the idiosyncratic nature of writing and student writers. This diversity can extend from individual writing behaviors and habits to the wide range of backgrounds that different writer-students have, all of which affect and modify their writing abilities (4-7). If not conducted with great care, the ethnographic approach in the composition classroom can very easily cause the researcher to make hasty generalizations.

But perhaps the most prominent deficiency of the ethnographic study is the ongoing denial of its methodological limitations, at least with regard to educational and composition classroom research, and particularly with regard to this study. As Rist, Lauer and Asher, North, and many others point out, there is a clear research danger that ethnographers, in attempting to model the so-called objectivity that is the mainstay of other methods of empirical research, will also attempt to remain falsely value-neutral. The illusionary condition of "neutrality" is clearly impossible with ethnographic methodology. The ethnographer, by trying to assume a position that is supposedly free of the distortions of subjectivity, in actuality takes a perspective that is
severely limited and narrowed by artificial notions of positivist-oriented objectivity. Certainly when the ethnographer fails to acknowledge this distortion, the research process becomes spurious. Consequently, the major criticism of the method seems to be that it carefully avoids broader issues by not truly coming to grips with the ethics and values of the knowledge it produces.

However, recent theoretical insights into the areas of language, education, and society suggest that a methodology based on critical ethnography would certainly do much to compensate for these problematic areas. These observations, which I will now discuss, have provided me with some valuable cautions and insights for using critical ethnography in my own study.

The Need for Critical Ethnography

A crucial question in education involves understanding whose interests are served in the classroom. Such an analytical understanding, one which can and should be closely allied to critical literacy, can only come about when one consciously chooses to explore the ideological implications of teaching and learning, particularly in one's own classroom. As James Berlin asserts, "[a]ll students in a democracy need school experiences that are
participatory, critical, values-oriented, multicultured, student-centered, and research-minded" ("The Teacher" 13). For the individual teacher to provide less almost assures students of continued nonparticipatory, powerless roles in the broader culture. Critical literacy seems to provide the individual teacher with the means to accomplish that deeper understanding of the political nature of education, the understanding upon which more democratic, egalitarian teaching and learning are based.

In "Informing Critical Literacy with Ethnography," Anderson and Irvine are even more forceful in underscoring the need for critical literacy and critical understandings. They maintain that

Illiteracy and school failure are no doubt partly due to problems at the classroom, institutional, and community levels, and solutions are rightly being sought there. But in attempting to account for inequality in micro-and meso-level interactions, interpretive studies fail to address the structure of opportunities that await [school] children in the world of work. . . . [T]he current division of labor assures economic success for some and failure for others, and it is, at least partly, up to schools to mediate this allocation of success and failure.

(84)
And because these mediations occur as covert, unconscious acts of omission rather than overt acts of commission, the critical ethnography provides the means for the close, questioning observation of the ways in which pedagogy incorporates class, gender, and racial biases.

As a consequence, a sound definition of critical ethnography can, I believe, be developed based upon Berlin's assertions, as well as those of Anderson and Irvine: A critical ethnographic study can be defined as one in which the ethnographer uses his or her literacy and observational skills to question the meanings hidden within the contexts being studied. A more operational definition of the critical ethnography might read as follows: The critical ethnographer questions and probes the research site in search of hidden meanings, for the purpose of questioning unanalyzed assumptions. The critical ethnographer's search for these hidden meanings and unanalyzed assumptions must take place along the points of social and cultural rifts and dislocations that are most apparent in issues of class, race, and gender. Too often the patterns of broader cultural and social meaning that become impacted within and fester along these fracture lines are smoothly covered over by the ideological falsehoods of the dominant group or groups. This phenomenon is especially true in the area of education.
The task of the ethnographer, then, becomes very specific, given these precise definitions. He or she can and in fact must interpret the outcome of his or her study by "critically" questioning and discussing—indeed, grappling with—the underlying ideological implications and the unanalyzed assumptions that rise to the research surface.

Deetz and Kersten, in "Critical Models of Interpretive Research," state flatly that "critical ethnography is explicitly ideological in its approach to research." According to these two educational theorists, "critical ethnographers attempt to ascertain why a particular meaning system exists by examining the conditions that necessitate its social construction and the advantages afforded certain interests" (160). Ethnography, by its very nature and perspective, provides the critical means by which the research can get inside of these "meaning systems."

In addition to this, Anderson and Irvine have suggested that critical ethnography is an innovative classroom research method that points to new directions in compositional, and even educational, inquiry. As they perceive the situation, "[c]ritical theorists agree with interpretivists that social reality is a construction, but they focus on how current social constructions are the product of unequal social relations and conflicts of interest" (82). Further, Anderson and Irvine maintain
that ethnographic researchers are too often inherently unwilling or unable to deal with the entrenched "macro-structural causes" of social inequality and imbalance (84). Also, these authors have pointed out that it is only within the questioning process that we find the means for raising and engendering social responsibility and critical consciousness in students. Anderson and Irvine make the distinction with critical ethnography that

[although its methodology is similar to that of interpretive ethnography, it insists that neutrality and scientific objectivity are, in fact, highly political since they tend to maintain the status quo by not raising questions of unequal power relations in research itself. (86)]

The method then becomes a close analysis of not only what is contained and sustained in curriculum and texts, but what is systematically left out.

In their text Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Research, Carr and Kemmis add a good deal to extend a definition of critical ethnography. In the chapter entitled "Action Research as Critical Educational Science," they posit that ethnography can only be successful if it critically accomplishes the following:

1. Rejects positivistic notions of rationality, objectivity, and truth in favor of a dialectical
view of rationality. . . .

2. Employs the interpretive categories of teachers' "language frameworks." . . .

3. Is continually aware of how interpretations are often distorted by ideology. . . .

4. Identifies and exposes those aspects of the existing social order that frustrate rational change. . . .

5. Is practical in the sense that "findings" are grounded in the reality of participants. . . .

(179-80)

Under these conditions, the problems within and outside of education are laid bare to close ethnographic scrutiny instead of being hidden under layers of supposed objectivity and rationality, and thus perpetually denied.

These criteria certainly make more sense when one considers the dynamics of critical literacy. Anderson and Irvine describe critical ethnography as being the individual teacher's conscious search for critical classroom methods--those which tenaciously search out the inequalities and the excesses of privilege that are embedded in, and thus sustained by, the curricula and teaching. This questioning search itself then becomes the paradigm for critical, reflective teaching and learning, on the part of both teacher and student. The
student and the teacher alike are provided with the methods and opportunity by which to question and critique the texts and contexts of the classroom. This process becomes even more relevant when one considers the classroom approaches advocated by liberatory educational theorists. Freire, Shor, and Giroux, as well as others, have demonstrated convincingly that critical approaches to teaching and learning, as well as to research, allow for the greater opening up of texts and contexts. For within a true probing, questioning, problem-posing process of education, the murky ideological depths of "rationality," of knowledge, and of teaching and learning can continually be stirred up and agitated--thus bringing to the surface issues vital to both the teacher and the student.

In applying this critical process to research, Colin Lankshear and Peter McLaren point out in Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern, critical ethnographers have begun to use their own critical literacy skills to identify the ways in which institutional arrangements and policies can contribute to illiteracy and inequality (28). Their work serves as a forceful call for increased individual, classroom-based observational studies that make use of critical literacy skills in ethnographic studies. When one considers that critical literacy is a key component of critical
ethnography, then the methodology comes into sharper focus. Critical reading and writing provide ethnographers with the access and means for the critiquing process. This is true not only in the language contexts that critical ethnographers study, but also in terms of the critical literacy approaches that they use in accomplishing such studies. Therefore, through the close, questioning analysis of the teacher/student/context relationship in the classroom, critical ethnographers truly let language read and write, and thus comment upon, itself. Critical ethnographers are empowered to use their own literacy abilities to expose some of the ideological, material, and economic forces that maintain intellectually oppressive relationships in the classroom. At this point, I think, the methodology becomes a true application of the Freireian call for using the word to read the world, especially as it is manifested in classroom dynamics.

Within these critical contexts, then, teacher/student/textual relationships become central to the critique. To illustrate this, I use the following example. Too often the myth is blatantly purveyed that if only one has enough education, he or she will be successful in the broader culture. Education is continually vaunted as the key means of success in our culture. However, the fabricated link that is established between education
and personal success is an ideological lie. When one looks at this myth, one finds a glaring contradiction in that the myth itself violates the very structure of the capitalistic system which spawns it. Education is itself not open, so it is not a neutral passage but rather a barrier. One needs only to imagine a triangle or a pyramid as the operative model of the capital-based, free enterprise form of the economy: the very structure of this system disallows any substantial movement by or displacement of people from bottom to top, by education or by any other means. Some individuals who are smart and work hard can advance, but they are the exceptions that prove the rule—not the rule of open access but of education as a barrier. The only true movement in the capitalistic-based culture is in reality the ongoing unrest within the often rigid class strata of the pyramid: the unrest that must be continually defused with an abundance of alcohol, television, narcotics, lotteries, and a lust for cheap material possessions. To tell all people that they have ample, "equal" upward mobility along the diagonal lines of that structure—that they need only work hard and get a good education—is to perpetuate an ideological lie created in support of the text of "the American dream." This is the "dream" that far too many minorities, women, and lower-caste citizens are often excluded from in our
so-called "free" society.

In the classroom, then, such myths are too frequently reinforced through the discourse practices of the academic world—the texts and textbooks that tacitly, subtly reflect and reinforce the reality of the dominant culture. In this situation the teacher too often becomes an active, willing agent in the sorting process—a gatekeeper, if you will, strategically placed along the yellow-brick road leading upward from failure to success within the American economic structure. In the same context, the students become willing participants in the process—that is, they are duped and manipulated into active and willful participation in their own subjugation process. Ironically, they are made to believe that if they fail, it's their fault for not being smarter and working harder. More importantly, though, the classroom texts in this situation also become another tool that facilitates the sorting process.

In observing the above situation, one would need to make a crucial methodological distinction: Traditional ethnographers would be concerned with the dimensions of "what" and "how"; a critical ethnographer would be deeply concerned with not only the "what" and "how," but would also be deeply involved with understanding the dynamics of "why." The critical ethnographer would, I believe,
be looking closely at how literacy abilities can be used to question such ideological assumptions, especially in terms of how those assumptions are represented in texts. For example, why does the capitalistic economic system need that broad-based, underpaid pool of humanity to keep recycling itself unquestioningly, generation after generation? What is the human cost of that reproduction? Why does that continual process of recycling and reproduction always take place along the lines of race, class, and gender? What is the nature of "strategies of containment" and "scraped-plate economics"? Why does the capitalistic system of free enterprise, in actuality, contradict egalitarian democracy? How is this juxtapositioning so easily smoothed over by the cultural accumulation of a network of ideological myths, lies, and false assumptions? In the classroom, how do texts and contexts continually represent and misrepresent these larger cultural imbalances?

This questioning process is an essential element in critical ethnography. Therefore, the use of the critical ethnography in my particular study involves the close, questioning observation and interpretation of pedagogy. I want to look closely at how the curriculum and classroom practices of other English instructors at various levels of composition instruction provide the
contexts for texts. More specifically, I plan to explore and critique the ways in which texts are used in the classroom, especially in terms of how those texts either promote or inhibit critical literacy on the part of students.

In the remainder of this dissertation I will be describing in more detail how the preceding theories, principles, and techniques have come together in my own critical research study.
CHAPTER FOUR
CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD STUDIES
AT YAVAPAI COUNTY SCHOOLS

In the following chapter I would like to discuss in depth the overall parameters and conditions of my ethnographic case studies. However, I must make the following qualifications. The rationale and overall principles for this critical observational study, which were described in depth in the preceding chapters of this book, were followed as closely as possible. However, there was some variance as the study developed, most of which was caused by logistical problems that occurred. These variances will be described as their importance warrants. Given this qualification, what follows is a fuller explanation of the ethnographic research I conducted at various grade levels and at different schools in Yavapai County, Arizona.

Parameters of the Study

1. The scope of the study:

In this study I have attempted to observe and discuss
critically, yet in a necessarily limited fashion, the way in which texts are used in different English or composition classrooms at various levels of education. In order to further explain my research, I would like to refer to a model for teaching literature in the classroom. Proposed by Thomas P. Miller, Composition Director at The University of Arizona, this model has been adopted for use in the university's composition program. Derived from the classical paradigm of communication, this model (see Figure 3.1) describes

![Diagram of a Model of Texts in the Classroom]

Figure 3.1: A Model of Texts in the Classroom.

the process of creating and communicating knowledge as being circular or cyclical. In communication, learning, and the creation of knowledge, this generative process
is continually at work: The reader's experiences form his or her assumptions, which then form his or her expectations, which then go on to ultimately reform and modify his or her experiences in terms of the conventions that have been internalized in the process. However, what this past/present/future model doesn't fully acknowledge and portray are the social and cultural forces that are continually at work on the reader, essentially through ideological influences. I suggest that this model should be modified to more fully reflect what Berlin has identified as the Social Epistemic theory of communication and knowledge making. He has observed that knowledge is socially constructed and, as such, communication must be discussed as "a political act involving a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation" ("Rhetoric" 488). Yet, as he further points out in clarification, "the perceiving subject, the discourse communities . . ., and the material world itself are all the constructions of an historical discourse, of the ideological formulations inscribed in the language-mediated activity of a particular time and place" ("Rhetoric" 489). The subject is himself or herself a socially constructed entity that "emerges through the linguistically-circumscribed interaction of the individual,
the community, and the material world" ("Rhetoric" 489).
Based on Berlin's conception of the social-epistemic dimensions of communication, knowledge, and learning, the previously illustrated circular model of language and/or texts in the classroom must be modified to reflect the ideological pressures of the broader culture (see Figure 3.2).

![Figure 3.2: A Revised Model of Texts in the Classroom.](image)

This modification is particularly important to my study for two reasons. The first is that I am concerned specifically with the English composition classroom, a place where this circular process is very much observable in the texts and the contexts of any given class. The
second is that my primary concern is with obtaining a close, critical observation of the ways in which this circular process of textual understanding is subverted or manipulated by those broader ideological influences. I think that these reasons are crucial because, as Kretovics has noted, texts are all too often used unproblematically within the framework of mainstream education. As a result, texts often come to arbitrarily define human roles and functions, many times in very negative ways. Kress expands on this conception of the nature of classroom texts, especially with regard to teachers and students. He points out that, given the ideological pressures in educational situations, "[t]he teacher's function . . . [becomes] like that of the political leader; . . . [his or her purpose becomes] to construct students as particular kinds of readers, . . . with particular kinds of reading positions" (18).

Certainly we as teachers always do this, even if we adopt a critical stance or reading position. The point is that teachers need to be continually self-reflexive and thus self-critical. This point is extremely important in my study because I intend to try explaining how texts become, and continue to be, one of the main sources in education for the unquestioned transmission of dominant ideologies, especially those that perpetuate privilege,
injustice, and inequality in the broader American society.

However, my explanation will only be valid if I have adequately explored all of the practical dimensions of critical literacy--both my own and, at the same time, those of the teachers and students who are the subjects of my study. The end result of this project, then, will be to use my literacy skills to raise my own critical understanding and consciousness, as well as those of my reader. In so doing I hope perhaps to contribute to the growing body of liberatory educational theory that is specifically concerned with promoting critical literacy and classroom practices that liberate rather than restrict.

I have found that critical ethnography has been the only viable research tool for achieving these ends in my study. In using a critical ethnographic approach in my research, I began my work by attempting to achieve as much distance and objectivity as possible, though as I have previously pointed out these constructs are extremely artificial and represent an impossible ideal. The ideal of my work is self-reflexivity, an awareness of the social construction of knowledge, and a commitment to act toward a more just society rather than a commitment to uphold abstract methodological categories. Also, in the design, implementation, and interpretation of this project, I have tried to recognize, define, reflect on,
and account for my own prejudices, values, and experiences because these continually colored my interpretations. Consequently, based on these qualifications, and on my review of existing literature and theory concerned with critical pedagogy, I have come to affirm the pressing need to go beyond the obvious, the superficial—the need to grapple, from a critical perspective, with the broader power imbalances and social inequities that are reproduced in the classroom. Additionally, I intend to make this research project proactive rather than passive. In maintaining what I perceive to be the true purpose of critical ethnography, the final analysis of this study is concerned with challenging rather than substantiating. Finally, because my ultimate goal is a greater understanding of classroom practices, my critical emphasis will be on how these practices can ultimately inform my own teaching.

2. The focus of the study:

Working from such a critical perspective, I have attempted to describe the often ambiguous relationship of texts to knowledge and learning within the classroom, and how that ambiguous relationship too often reproduces power imbalances and social injustices beyond the classroom. How often, for example, does a given teacher
consciously use the cross-purposes and multiple levels of texts to subvert rather than continually transmit dominant ideologies and oppressive social assumptions through the conduit of the classroom? Do most teachers ever question how and why texts continually reaffirm the hidden agendas of the dominant cultural forms? Are students provided with the means by which texts become a grounding place for the intellectual practices of contention and deconstruction—and even confrontational inquiry—that are so crucial to critical learning? Do students and teachers alike explore the full potential of texts? Do they jointly, collaboratively search for the point at which the text itself becomes an occasion for critical questioning in the classroom, and in the broader culture? Are students silenced by texts in the classroom, or do texts give the students voice? How can the individual teacher best use texts to create change and transformation both inside and outside of the classroom? At what point do we as teachers allow students to question not only the "what" and "how" of our teaching, but also the "why"?

In attempting to understanding this deep relationship between ideology and texts, Marxist critics have pointed out that texts are "means of production, developed in direct and complex relations [that are primarily concerned
with] extending social and cultural conditions--those conditions . . . [which are] deeply political and economic" (Williams 54). Henry Giroux has localized these claims directly into educational theory, and his ideas have done much to inform and influence my study. Because of this, an initial discussion of his ideas is important at this juncture.

According to Giroux, current philosophies of education, and likewise unreflective teaching practices, allow the collective attitudes, values, and norms of the dominant ideology and power-holding classes to be readily transmitted through the learning and socialization practices of schools. Giroux identifies this dynamic as the teaching of a "hidden curriculum" (Ideology 18). Giroux defines this hidden curriculum as a subtle, covert ideological agenda--one in which the conditions of education always reinforce "the social relations of the work place, the final outcome being the reproduction of the social and class divisions needed for the production and legitimization of capital and its institutions" (Theory 57). When education involves such strategies of containment as norming, tracking, standardized testing, evaluation and grading, illiteracy, and "special education"--those educational concepts that are replete with exclusion and privilege--students are channeled quite
effectively into what Giroux identifies as the "hierarchy of the work place" (Theory 60). Additionally, such a curriculum of "correspondence" is meant to take students and transform them into workers who correspond to the needs of the capitalistic work place. Such curriculum can only be knowledge-based and information-oriented, and can only result in producing uncritical, superficial learning that "is reduced to the memorization of narrowly defined facts and isolated pieces of information that can easily be measured and evaluated" (Schooling 180).

Given this context, the reification of dominant ideologies can be easily disguised within educational agendas. However, Giroux moves far beyond previous neo-Marxist critical assumptions. He maintains that educational institutions, though being instruments for the reproduction of dominant ideologies, also in the same instance provide "terrains of contestation" wherein critical educators can resist the tyranny of unquestioned, unanalyzed assumptions (Ideology 3).

Giroux's insights about the hidden curriculum, and his ideas about the potential for texts as terrains of contestation, are important elements in my study. In understanding how these ideas are played out in the composition classroom, I have attempted to look closely at the elemental parts of that classroom: the teacher,
the student, and the text or texts used within that context. To understand the relationship of these essential elements, I have employed in my ethnography the technique called "triangulation." Lauer and Asher describe the technique of triangulation as a "multiplicity of observations" that provides for the "varying [of] observations and [the gaining of] multiple perspectives . . . [through] repeated observations, further interviews, and the search for disconfirming evidence" (40). In using triangulation, I have searched for significant patterns of interaction between the teacher, the student, and the text(s) in the classroom. I believe that embedded within these patterns of intersubjectivity are the ideological assumptions and practices that are the focus of my research work.

Triangulation, then, plays a key part in not only my critical examination of the interrelatedness of all three aspects. It also is crucial to my understanding of the broader implications involved and to my close questioning of the inherent ideological network of classroom relationships. As well, the use of multiple perspectives has allowed me to collect data around, and make interpretations from, those problematic classroom issues that Giroux has brought to light--the hidden curricula and the terrains of contestation.
3. The context of the study:

To develop a situated analysis, I chose to conduct my research in the geographic area of Prescott/Yavapai County. The county and its component school system lend themselves nicely to such a study. Located in the central part of the state of Arizona, Yavapai County is a rural area with approximately 110,000 residents spread across more than 8,000 square miles. A majority of residents live outside the primary metropolitan areas--Prescott and Verde Valley--with many smaller towns and areas of population isolated by mountainous terrain. The main industries in the county are mining, ranching, forestry, and tourism; however, a dramatic influx of people into the county in the past several years has also drawn in a number of smaller manufacturing firms to the major towns. This migration of people to the country is rapidly altering the demographics of the area as well.

The county school system is composed of seven independent school districts, which collectively contain seventeen high schools, thirty middle schools, and fifty elementary schools. The post-secondary school system is composed of four institutions of higher education: Yavapai College, Prescott College, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, and several satellite campuses of Northern Arizona University, which is located in
Flagstaff, Arizona. All of these institutions have main campuses in Prescott. Prescott College and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University are four-year, private institutions. The Northern Arizona University satellite campus is a bachelor degree-granting institution. Yavapai College, a two-year community college, is the only public institution of higher education with its main campus located in Yavapai County. As such, Yavapai College serves as a feeder school to the major state universities of Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, and The University of Arizona.

According to The 1994 Census of School Enrollment, the student population of the county was, and probably will remain for the present, quite homogenous. Except for the peripheral influence from the large Native American reservation within the county, most of the students in the public education system are Caucasian. This situation changes very little at the post-secondary level of education (10).

In addition to these circumstances, I chose this particular area because of the contacts that I have within the various school districts there. As I began my field work, I was in the middle of my second year of teaching at Yavapai College. Because of this, I was able to establish a good rapport with the English faculty there,
as well as with various other English teachers within the district. Therefore, I was able to obtain their full support and cooperation in accomplishing my study.

It is within this broader context that I worked to develop a critical ethnographic perspective. In gathering data, I feel that I was successful in establishing and maintaining systematic research methods that were consistent between observations. These methods also allowed me to achieve the "multiple observations" of triangulation that I was striving for. The following is a fuller description of these methods.

Initially, I sent out a survey to establish a group of English teachers who were willing to participate in the study (see Appendix A, Participant Contact Letter/Background Questionnaire). The primary levels of instruction at which I was looking were the high school, the community college, and the four-year college. The study itself was limited to five teachers and their classrooms, one at the high school level of instruction and four at the college level. The preparation for this study involved an initial survey of a variety of teachers who I thought might want to participate (see Appendix B, Field Study--Teacher Version). These surveys attempted to determine each individual teacher's rationale for using specific texts in the classroom. From those volunteering
to be involved, I randomly selected one participant from each of the three levels of education. The exception to this was the community college, where I selected two volunteers. I began each observational situation with an open-ended interview with the participating teacher. I interviewed the selected teachers about their professional backgrounds and their teaching philosophies. More importantly, however, I asked them about their understandings of texts and of the way texts are chosen and used in classroom, particularly their own. This initial interview was followed by two to three visits to the classroom of each participating teacher, based upon his or her schedule and time constraints.

During these observations I attempted to determine the ways in which those teachers consciously used students' writing, reading, speaking, and listening abilities to accept or question the assumptions conveyed by the text(s) in the class. While conducting this phase of the study, I attempted to capture as much "thick description" as possible—essentially, the teacher-to-student, student-to-teacher, and the teacher-to-teacher interactions with regard to the texts in the class. At the conclusion of the observation phase, I then gave a second set of surveys to the students to determine their assumptions about the texts that were used in the class (see Attachment C, Field
study--Student Version). The study was then concluded with a series of personal interviews with individual students and with each teacher.

In the final analysis of my work, I focused on the correlation of all of the surveys, interview data; and "thick descriptions" that I had gathered during the study. In so doing, the element of triangulation became a key concept in providing me with a basis for critical perspectives in my project. The descriptive notes of the interviews and classroom observations were compared with the two versions of my survey--student and teacher--and with the teachers' background statements. Based upon these multiple observations, I tried to identify the points at which critical questions could be asked about the dynamics of each teaching/learning situation. These questions involved several key issues in my study: the part that texts play as methods of promoting or silencing students' critical voices in the classroom; the extent to which texts point to, or instead disguise, hidden curricula in the classroom; the role that texts play in either exploring or avoiding possible terrains of contestation in the classroom; and other areas of concern that were evident, either overtly or covertly, in each individual teacher's use of texts in the classroom. These focus areas provided me with a viable framework for my
interpretation of the research implications. Finally, my ethnography was consciously conducted from a critical perspective, in that throughout the study I attempted to use my own literacy skills to question the implications of the whole project rather than giving a "detached" analysis of the discrete, contingent parts.

**Overall Conditions of Observations of the Study**

The field work for this study was accomplished during the fall semester of 1994, and the spring semester of 1995, with follow-up interviews and discussions completed during late March and early April of 1995. I accomplished a total of twenty classroom visits, along with twelve individual teacher and student interviews. During the field work, I administered five teacher versions of the Field Study Questionnaires (see Appendix B) and over 100 student versions of the Field Study Questionnaires (see Appendix C). In addition, I spent approximately twenty-five hours in initial teacher contacts (see Appendix A), approximately one hundred hours in conducting the actual classroom observations and personal interviews, and approximately one hundred hours in transcribing and synthesizing the observational description notes. As was outlined previously, this field work was done at
various educational sites in Yavapai County in Northern Arizona--specifically Prescott High School, Yavapai College, Prescott College, and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

The following is a more detailed description of each of the individual study sites--the classes visited, the teachers and students involved, and the texts that were part of the classroom work.

1. The high school:

I began my field work at Prescott High School in Prescott, Arizona--the largest high school in the county. The teacher that I worked with has been at the school all of her twenty-year teaching career. She currently has a Master of Arts degree in English and has approximately fifty additional graduate hours. Her areas of teaching interest are English literature and expository writing. Besides being the department chair, she presently teaches Junior Honors English, Senior Level Language and Composition, and Senior Level Contemporary Fiction.

During my study I observed several class sessions of the Junior Honors English class. The primary text for the course was the Prentice Hall edition of *Literature: The British Tradition*. Supplemental readings included Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Robert
Bolt's *A Man For All Seasons*, and T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. Although the primary textbook is selected every six years by the school district, the supplemental texts are selected by the teacher. She periodically adds and deletes texts to and from this list, depending on their integration and compatibility with each other and with the primary textbook. Additionally, the primary textbook is used extensively because of good support materials, including a variety of critical activities for all levels of readers. Lastly, when asked what she hoped students would gain by reading these particular texts, the teacher responded that "students should accomplish an appreciation for the heritage of British literature," and that the texts would serve to "humanize" the students.

There were about thirty to thirty-five students in the class, and a preponderance of the class time was spent in either lecture/large group discussion or small group discussion. The particular segments that were being studied during my visits were titled "Search For Meaning" and "Choices and Consequences." Each thematic reading arrangement was built around a mixture of poems, plays, short stories, and novels. The readings for the "Search For Meaning" segment included twenty-four eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British poems, along with the
supplemental text *Murder in the Cathedral*. Works such as Blake's "The Lamb" and "The Tiger," Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," and Shelley's "Ozymandias" were the focus of the class session. In "Choices and Consequences" there were several more eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poems, as well as some of the works of the twentieth century, such as MacNeice's "Sunday Morning" and Reed's "Naming of Parts." The major reading emphasis for the segment was Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

The teacher's main purpose in each learning activity was to have students reflect on "methods of search" and philosophical inquiry that were evidenced by the authors in their various works. She would give some background context to each poem or longer work, along with some structural and linguistic analysis. She would also attempt to draw out student response as to the "meaning" of each work. Student interest always seemed to be high and a good many of the students participated in the class discussion.

2. The community college:

The next segment of my field work was done at Yavapai College, which is the county's community college. At the College's Prescott campus I worked with two different full-time teachers in conducting my research. My primary
area of interest, of course, is the two-year institution, so therefore I wanted several diverse areas of instruction and texts to study at the community college level of instruction. One of the instructors that I worked with taught English 242, Introduction to Shakespeare, and the other taught English 102, Freshman English Composition II. Observing both of these classes allowed me to obtain a broader perspective on texts and reading/writing relationships in the community college English classroom.

The first teacher that I worked with has a Master of Arts degree in English literature. He has been teaching for almost seven years, with the past three of those years having been spent at Yavapai College. He presently teaches, or has taught, Pre-College English, Freshman English Composition I and II, and various literature courses. Although this teacher has taught all levels of community college composition (pre-college, college, and college transfer), his areas of teaching interest are English literature and developmental writing. During my study I observed several class sessions of the Introduction to Shakespeare class. The primary text for the course was the Bevington edition of The Complete Works of Shakespeare. Primary readings for the course were: As You Like It, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Macbeth, King Lear, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and The Tempest. The
students also chose and wrote on secondary readings and criticisms. The teacher noted that because the course was a survey class, he selected the most popular works of the Shakespearean genres of comedy, tragedy, romance, and history. The purpose for using these texts in the classroom is that students will gain an "understanding of, a feel for the Shakespearean landscape." Through a concentrated study of Shakespeare's comedy and tragedy, students would acquire new insight into the human experience. The teacher's stated purpose for the selected readings was to help students "develop some cultural literacy" and to "deepen their sense of aesthetic appreciation." His goal was "to enable students to arrive at some understanding of human nature" and in so doing they might eventually "come to view the world through the 'eyes' of another culture--which has many benefits."

Alternative understandings of the texts were possible, but only to the extent that those "multiple understandings" were plausibly grounded in the text itself.

The class that I visited several times was an evening class and was composed of ten students. The work being studied while I was there was Hamlet. The class time was spent in student oral presentations and in a modified lecture/large group discussion format. Oral presentations were based on what the individual students had researched
regarding a particular Shakespearean work or specific criticism about the work. Group discussion in the class was based on questions that the students had about the play/text itself. A good deal of background material and contextual information was provided by the instructor to help generate class discussion. In addition, the instructor used several excellent videotapes of various segments of the play, thus furthering the students' understanding of those texts. Though the class size was relatively small and attendance was irregular, student interest and participation always seemed to be good.

The second teacher with whom I worked has two degrees in English and a doctoral degree in American Studies. Her teaching experience spans the last twelve years, all of which have been part-time positions with the exception of two one-year, full time visiting professor appointments. All of her teaching experience has been in support of her being a student. As she noted, "These material conditions are important. Many years on campuses with a kind of tenuous relation to them are quite different than many years on the tenure track at one campus." This teacher's areas of interest/specialization are cultural studies/women's studies/multi-ethnic literature. All of these specific areas, she stated, "always affect the way I teach composition, which represents the lion's share
of my teaching experience." Lastly, she is more drawn to teaching argument in composition class, although she enjoys teaching writing through teaching literature. These ideas, along with the standard "required textbook" lists at the various schools where she has taught, provide her rationale for choice of textbooks for the classes she has taught.

This rationale is obvious in her selection of texts for her composition courses. In addition to using a handbook and a style guide as secondary texts, the instructor frequently uses Hunter's *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. She said of this book, "I hope that students can replace their sound-bite understanding of the debates we're living through with some more solid knowledge... I think many students come away with at least an acknowledgment that competing, diametrically opposed public philosophies are equally grounded in American history and values, and that the assertions of each philosophy that the 'other' is immoral or un-American is fallacious." However, in the English 102 Freshman English Composition II course that I observed, the instructor was using the Barnet edition of the *Literature for Composition* reader, which was the departmentally sanctioned textbook. She noted that this literature-based textbook "gives us an opportunity to
think critically and out loud about the big questions: the ones with no fixed, simple answers, the ones that human beings in every generation have puzzled over."

To supplement this reader, the teacher also used Tony Kushner's two-part play *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* and *Angels in America: Perestroika*. Of these texts she said, "Kushner's drama is a rich, fascinating text that ... ranges over a host of topics including democracy, justice, love and death, Judaism, Mormonism, AIDS, homosexuality. ... and the promise of, and limits to, the American dream."

I had the opportunity to visit her class on several occasions. This instructor worked hard at using the course texts to bring students into the debates and compromises of the classroom. The class size was relatively small—there were usually eight to ten students present in the sessions I attended. The majority of the class time was spent in class discussion of assigned readings from the *Literature For Composition* textbook, with supplemental handout copies provided by the instructor. Other lecture, discussion, collaborative group work, and library activities were done in support of the out-of-class writing assignments.

One major unit being studied during my observations was titled "The Pop Culture." As the teacher noted to
the students in the lecture, there are texts other than literary texts: "a television show is a text that can be analyzed; a pair of jeans is a text; a grocery store is a text. What can you learn about yourself and the culture you live in by applying analytical tools to the products of popular culture?" The other major segments that I observed were a short fiction/essay analysis and a group poetry assignment. The students seemed to be engaged by the texts and were willing to try to make connections with other texts and with their own lives during the class discussions. The teacher always asked students to go beyond the obvious and superficial, and to seek the multiple "levels of communication" that are such a vital, integral part of language. Throughout the writing and supplemental reading assignments, the students were continually encouraged to choose alternative perspectives in their work, and to consciously search for and explore "different ways of reading and writing."

3. The four-year college:

The next phase of my field work was completed at Prescott College, a small, private, four-year liberal arts college in Prescott, Arizona. The school is somewhat non-traditional in its academic approaches, as is very much evident in the school's English/writing courses.
The English teacher that I worked with there was teaching a freshman level writing "workshop" class. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Holistic Health and a Master of Arts Degree in English, with an emphasis in writing. She has been teaching English and "Master Student" courses for the past several years at Prescott College and at Yavapai College. Up until the semester that I observed her "workshop" writing class, all of her teaching experience was primarily with pre-college English courses. Her areas of English interest are contemporary works and nature writing, and her area of specialization is teaching writing by using "alternative approaches."

In her writing workshop class the teacher uses the fifth edition of Harper Collins' *The Little, Brown Handbook*, as well as Zinsser's *On Writing Well*. In her selection of texts for the course, she noted that she primarily disliked using texts, so she had decided to choose two that weren't texts in the "traditional" sense. The handbook is used for reference while the Zinsser text "is very readable and might be something students would even read had they not taken the course." The teacher also stated that she would like students to "feel a sense of safety by venturing out in their writing and to know that error can be recognized/remedied through a quick look at the handbook." Finally, the teacher believes
that students will, through a variety of texts, come to a better understanding of reading about writing, and writing about reading, and that such activities can even be interesting. Therefore, the teacher relies extensively on a range of supplemental readings, ranging from contemporary magazine articles to classic essays such as George Orwell's "A Hanging," to poems such as Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," and films such as Defending Your Life. In addition, the students often bring in their own reading materials for use in the class. Interestingly enough, this teacher seems to be experimenting with nontraditional approaches to traditional texts.

The class sessions that I observed were very small, which allowed for a good deal of one-on-one work with the individual students. The purpose of these "foundational" workshop classes is similar to that of pre-college English classes at many two-year and four-year colleges. All students who do not pass Prescott College's Writing Certification Examination are required to take one of the workshop classes in order to bring their reading and writing abilities up to college standards. The writing workshop course is the only English class that is required at the college; all other English courses at the school are elective. The economic structure of this private college allows for these small courses, which have a capped
enrollment of ten. As a result, a good deal of individual, one-on-one teacher/student interaction is built into the curriculum. This close relationship between the teacher and the student certainly maintains the "workshop" nature of the class.

On my first observational visit, the students were between writing assignments: They had just finished a traditional evaluation/argumentative paper and were brainstorming and prewriting on ideas for a purely argumentative paper. The later classes that I visited were focused on the development of the argumentative writing assignment, as well as the revision of previous papers. For the argumentative paper the students were told to select an issue with which they had personal involvement and genuine interest, one which would enable them to (as the teacher noted) "Think globally, act locally." In support of this assignment, the students read and discussed a fictional essay by Richard Dooling titled "Bush Pigs." The students were also required to find two related articles from the library. Running in tandem with the writing/reading assignments was an extended grammar exercise in which the students collaboratively created and presented in class an element of grammar.
4. The university:

The final phase of my field work was completed at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, a private, four-year school specializing in degree majors in the field of aeronautics. At Embry-Riddle the Freshman composition program is taught within the Humanities Division, in a two-part sequence. The first part is Freshman English Composition and the second part is Freshman English Literature.

The teacher that I observed at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University has been teaching as an adjunct instructor at the institution for ten years. She has a Master of Arts degree in English, as well as a Master of Arts degree in Education Administration. Her academic areas of interest in English are English composition, English literature, and speech communications. She currently teaches Freshman English (Humanities 122 and 123), English literature, and Technical Report Writing at Embry-Riddle, as well as Freshman English 101 and 102 at Yavapai College.

In teaching the two-part Humanities composition sequence, the teacher uses texts that build upon each other between the semesters. In the first semester she uses the fifth edition of Harper Collins' *The Little, Brown Handbook* and Behrens and Rosen's *Writing and Reading*
Across the Curriculum as the primary texts, with the supplemental texts being Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and *Biplane*, and Blake's *Dances with Wolves*. According to the instructor, these texts provide the student with critical reading, writing, and thinking skills, and "provide food for oral discussions." Additionally, the texts "teach the writing process, give instructions and ideas for argumentative writing, and introduce the study of literature, which is the second phase of the instruction." The primary texts used in the literature portion of the sequence are James A. Michener's *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* and *Return to Paradise*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. According to the teacher, these texts enable students to gain an appreciation of various genres and styles of literature. Her rationale for choosing these particular texts for class was that "they demonstrate human conflicts and effective writing, in a sense of both classical and alternative styles." In addition to building student literacy skills, the combination and sequence of the texts is meant, according to the syllabus, "to increase the students' appreciation and enjoyment of literature."

During the course of my studies I had the opportunity to visit both her first and second-semester Humanities
122 and 123 classes several times. The difference in the context of the private, specialized institution like Embry-Riddle from that of the other schools I visited was very evident. The class sessions were almost always full, with the average attendance being between twenty-two and twenty-five students. The composition of the class was very homogenous, with the majority of the students being white, male, and middle or upper class. Student engagement seemed to be always high, and participation was always actively encouraged and given. The classroom atmosphere was relaxed and friendly, and the teacher maintained a solid rapport with her students, one which was based on mutual intellectual respect.

While I was there, the unit being studied focused on the novel as a genre, and the class work involved a close textual analysis of longer literary works. The texts being studied were Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and two of Michener's works--*Return to Paradise* and *The Bridges at Toko-ri*. The class discussion centered around the essential themes of the works, and how those themes were sustained by the language of the texts. Students worked in paired groups and then informally presented their findings to the class in general discussion. This verbal analysis was done as a model for the writing assignment that the students were doing out of class.
Summary of the Research Agenda

During the several months of conducting these ethnographic studies at the research sites, I gathered enough raw data to fill a number of books. My task at this point in time, however, is to distill this information into a workable form. While truly striving to not write to my own agenda, I will in the following chapter be selecting and discussing specific teaching instances that support my basic assumption in this research study: that critical teaching techniques must involve the tying together of literacy skills to the close questioning of the broader ideological meanings of texts. Consequently, while there is a good deal of interesting information that I would like to deal with, I will structure my analysis around the critical questions that I feel have emerged from my study.
CHAPTER FIVE
SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:
THE CRITICAL QUESTIONS RAISED

In keeping with what I perceive to be the spirit of critical ethnography, my observational descriptions will include an analytic questioning of the teaching practices and classroom methodology that I observed during my study. In so doing, I will be trying to locate specific contradictions between values and practices in teaching—those contradictions that are most conducive to self-reflexivity and learning on the part of the individual teacher. Additionally, I will in the concluding chapter be drawing implications, as well as making recommendations, based upon the inferences coming from my ethnographic "stories." My ultimate objective will be to find new teaching practices that I might personally adopt, and to identify new possibilities for future research in my own classroom.

Before beginning, however, I feel the necessity of re-establishing the fact that this study is limited in scope, and will be dealing with the particular rather than the universal. I will be focusing on specific methods used in affirming or challenging assumptions about texts in the classroom. Finally, this study is critical in
nature—that is, it was conducted in the sense of "critical" as being questioning, not disapproving. The following chapters are not meant to censure or find fault with the individual situations, but rather to question in an open manner and make inferences based upon the observations made. Moreover, through the entire chapter I will be using my own critical reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills to question, analyze, and reflect on the incidents that I observed. My primary purpose in doing this is to refine my own pedagogy and classroom practice, and to ultimately be a better teacher. I don't know many of the answers, and, what is more, I don't know if they are even knowable. What is of primary importance to me is the questioning process . . . the inner, self-reflexive process of critical dialectic.

Texts, Contexts, and Hidden Curricula

In this beginning section, I would like to try and determine some of the critical questions that I might apply to texts in my own classroom. What questions lead to a better understanding of what and whose agenda is represented in texts? What values underlie the engagement between student, teacher, and texts—the values that might be different from those professed?
"Our texts are so heavy, so ponderous, so very expensive."

Inasmuch as texts themselves are an integral part of course work in any classroom, I am very concerned with how they symbolize or sustain a hidden curriculum. As educational constructs, texts can too easily purvey knowledge as stable, measurable, impersonal, and value-free, and can "eschew social conflict, social injustice, and institutional violence . . . for social harmony and social consensus" (Giroux, Ideology 53). Because such hidden agendas are deeply embedded in texts, an appropriate question might be, "Why do we use the texts that we do in any given teaching situation?"

The instructors in my study seemed to base their textbook selections on a the set of assumptions called the "literary tradition"--a term that several of the teachers in the study used regularly. Certainly the canon of reading texts that the teachers referred to represents a long and rich history of Western thought and culture, and is a body of texts that is relied upon heavily in most if not all English classrooms. The "great books" pedagogy and "enduring works" philosophy seem to have created their own unique mythologies. As a result, teachers not only teach closely the texts that were taught to them, they also seemingly teach those texts in much the same ways that those texts were taught to them. Such
For example, during the exit interview with each teacher I asked the following questions: First, "What are some of the critical questions that we can and should apply to texts, especially in determining the rationale for using such texts in the classroom?" Second, "Based upon students' work with the course texts, what should they not only know, but also attempt to do and be when they leave the class?" The teachers' answers were very much like the answers they gave to two similar questions on the Teacher Survey: "What is the rationale for your choice of texts?" and "What do you hope students will accomplish or gain by reading these particular texts?" The teachers' answers almost invariably centered on the vague universals of the class, with responses like "The students become better critical thinkers." In other cases their answers concerned the rather nebulous aesthetic dimensions of the course, with responses like "Students acquire sensibilities and cultivate good taste." With the exception of one of the community college instructors, none of the teachers that I interviewed could really give a solidly reflective, philosophical rationale for why
they chose the texts that they did. This lack of true introspection could have been the result of a misunderstanding of my questions or the manner in which I presented the questions. However, I suspect that their answers were at least somewhat the product of an assumed literary tradition by which certain texts serve to be privileged over other texts. The value system of that literary tradition appears to be a hidden agenda in itself, continuously at work in the English classroom.

This assumption of the existence of a specific literary tradition—an assumption that most assuredly works as a hidden agenda in the adopting of texts for classroom use—can also be seen within the textbook industry. The "literary tradition" that is so much a part of the English classroom is at least partially dictated and encouraged by textbook publishers. Without this ease in reproduction of consistent, readily accepted texts, the profit margins of textbook sales certainly might not be maximized. The means of production of textbook manufacturers are not so much dictated by how literary works will change the human condition, or by moral or pedagogical or philosophical considerations, but rather are predicated on how much profit these texts will generate for the publisher.

Teachers and students alike hint at these problems
with the means of production, but there is never any real, open questioning of the underlying dynamics that drive textbook use in the classroom. I saw this in the comments made by several students about the literature collections they were using. As one student noted, "Our texts are so big, so heavy, so incredibly expensive." Indeed, not only are many of the texts physically difficult to carry around, and even more difficult to wade through, they are very costly. One of the teachers mentioned that at one time she had used a series of smaller, less expensive paper-bound collections of selected works. Later, however, she opted to use the larger, more expensive hard-bound textbook version because "the paperbacks kept coming apart when the publishers began to use less glue on the binding" -- the purpose of which could easily bear closer questioning. In addition, the market relationships of the industry of textbook manufacturers also very much influence textbook adoption processes at the secondary level of education. According to the high school teacher, the large, collective purchasing bases that make up the Texas and California educational systems have allowed those two states to dictate textbook content, at least at the high school level. As another instructor noted, independent book buyers also play a part in the textbook production process, especially at the college level of
instruction. Publishers frequently reissue textbooks, often at higher prices, so as to make older issues worthless to independent book buyers. The student is always the one who pays the price for these market practices, and often in more than monetary ways.

As these observations indicate, in what is supposedly an intellectually informed, learning-oriented process, the market considerations of supply and demand too often have a significant impact on which textbooks are presented to students in the classroom. Given these circumstances, who truly benefits most from these conditions--the students or the textbook suppliers? Return on investment in the textbook industry seems to play a large part in determining what students are taught.

"We have learned to always find a deeper meaning, even when there isn't one."

A good deal of the classroom work involves a quest for some transcendent "meaning" in texts. Two critical questions kept emerging during my research: "What values are encompassed and interlaced within the 'meaning' of texts?" "How can one begin to break down 'meaning' in order to get at the hidden values impacted in that artificial construct?"

In accomplishing this, one must realize that much
of the supplemental language of texts works from an objectivist, value-neutral format. For example, within the Literature for Composition text, the students were given the "tools" for "unpacking" literature. Understanding involved "strenuous explication work on the text." In very much of a businesslike manner, the students could "attain" meaning if only they applied the concepts of "theme" or "character" or "situation" or "point of view" or any other analytic category appropriate to the understanding of a text. A good deal of emphasis was placed on the "prepackaged" insights contained within the text to facilitate "literary analysis." The logic of the terminology was that each concept was a different, unique device for excavating meaning from a text.

Not only did the use of the standard "literary devices" dominate many of the discussions of texts, but also the privileged position of the author or the text was always apparent. The social dimensions of the construction of knowledge were seldom addressed in any of the classroom exercises. The author stood alone, as did his or her text. Understanding was a process of digging into texts and mining the "hints" and "clues" that the author had "artfully" placed there--the subtle plants that enable the reader to "find the answers" rather than restructure them. Indeed, as one student noted on
her questionnaire, "We have read a lot and learned not to just read for pleasure. We have learned to always find a deeper meaning, even when there isn't one." The teachers continually emphasized decoding the riddles of the text, and seldom attempted to provide any type of ideological or socially meaningful context to their students' search for meaning.

During one class discussion on feminist literature, for example, a student stated very pointedly, almost as if in frustration, "This is the first time I've ever heard of these books. Why didn't we ever study about these stories and these poems in history class, for instance? What's the big secret?" This student's comment was perceptive in that it questioned our own inability as teachers to attain connectedness with the broader culture. The student seemed to be specifically asking why as teachers we fail to make connections and why we try so desperately to keep knowledge confined to those discrete domains known as "disciplines." Our unwillingness to search for the deeper meaning of intertextuality is, I believe, a strong comment on how much the ideological myth of individualism and individuality permeates not only the American broader culture, but education as well.

This decontextualizing process was again evident in one of the classrooms that I visited during an analysis
of poetry and a discussion of the nature of poetics. The instructor used a videotape titled *Where Poems Come From* as the introduction to an extended poetry writing assignment in her class. A number of contemporary poets were interviewed about how they define how and where poetry originates. Most talked about their idiosyncratic notions of rhyme, image, structure, inspiration. Several talked about how "the poem is a vehicle" and about how "the poet creates divine space." It would seem that such overly individualistic, romantic constructs would lend themselves nicely to a critical discussion of what space poetry fills in the solving of the world's ills, or if indeed that is one of the functions of poetry. At one point in the videotape, for example, Ishmael Reed began to deconstruct some of the ideological assumptions about poetry. He spoke very poignantly of the idea that he as an author was a *product* of what America was and is--a product formed by the hewing contradictions of democracy and slavery. Louise Gluck, after reading her very powerful feminist poem "Mock Orange," talked about the power of language to name and describe human experience from new, more uncomfortable perspectives. Allen Ginsberg asked why any deeper "appreciation" of poetics shouldn't begin with the way that words use the user, and a deeper probing of the ideological ways in which the poet can become lost
in the world of his or her own self-reference to the "other." Unfortunately, however, the focus of the class discussion that followed the videotape was focused on the "how-to" of poetry and on the "consumption of the arts"--on the "pleasure of the text" and on the "unpacking of themes."

As these brief anecdotes indicate, it seems that a primary concern of individual teachers should be that an entire system of values underlie classroom texts and contexts. If this is the case, shouldn't teachers consciously and persistently analyze and deconstruct those value systems that so impact their teaching? The classroom is not a value-free, scientifically objective zone of neutrality. Some group's values will ultimately prevail, good or bad, right or wrong.

"Self analysis is the basis for comment on the outside world."

In this part of the study I found that teachers for the most part ignore the covert ideological implications of texts in their classrooms. That is to say, the teachers never asked the very basic critical questions: "How are my students situated in the conversation of the texts I am using?" and "How do these texts critically engage my students' experiences?"
This was most evident in the ways in which the teachers often avoided reading and/or writing assignments which pointedly required students to bring their critical literacy skills to bear upon the texts. Except for the few incidents that I will describe later in the chapter, teachers seldom constructed assignments based on the students' critical questioning skills. In very few of the class sessions that I observed were the texts themselves critiqued or questioned as being slanted, elitist, or otherwise ideologically biased. In most cases, the writing and/or related reading assignments were low-risk adventures on the part of students. Most of the literacy skill tasks were constructed so as to explicate the theme and therefore somehow "decode" the meaning. There were very few self-critical elements built into the assignments--that is, questions which critically challenge the prominence or hidden agenda of the text or texts in question.

An excellent illustration of this is a text that was used in one of the college classrooms--Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. The instructor used this book because the students, as novice aviators, strongly identified with the story, particularly the free spiritedness that was symbolized by the seagull--Jonathan Livingston Seagull, the personified main character of the story. Yet it seems
that any valid analysis of the text would necessarily need to critique the romantic notion of individualism that the book portrays. After all, Jonathan Livingston Seagull, in his quest for higher levels of existence, was far detached from the mass of gulls that were condemned to plundering garbage scows "beneath" him. The classroom focus on the text, however, revealed nothing about the possible fallacy of individualism and how such a false notion relates to the human condition. Nothing was mentioned about the method of privilege by which one lone, "special" gull is allowed to soar high above its teeming, scavenging brethren, to soar detached and unaffected. There was no critical questioning of the way in which sentimentalism, elitism, and pastoral escapism are constructed into the text. As the teacher pointed out, the students, as novice pilots, "really loved" this text. Yet the students were never allowed to question their own experiences. They were never provided the context by which to ask some very crucial questions: "Why do some fly first class while many others walk the aimless streets of destitution, homeless and hungry and dirty?" "Why is the seagull in the story so glaringly white and its behavior so pompously male?" "What is the relevance of the notion that what happens to one happens to all?" The elements for its own ideological deconstruction lie
within the text itself. Yet these elements were left untouched, unquestioned, inaccessible to the students in their reading and writing assignments.

This same type of omission was also obvious in the second part of the course when the instructor used Michener's novel Return to Paradise. The major writing assignment was based on the students' close analysis of two of the major themes of the novel--themes which she extracted directly from the text. The first was based on the passage "good men find loveliness, weak men find evil" (Michener, Return 19); the second involved the passage "the careful artistry of writing a good story" (Michener, Return 189). The teacher drew the students' attention to these segments of Michener's novel, and then told the students that these were the major, underlying themes of the story. An important dynamic was very evident in the classroom: The teacher, not the students, had the power to construct and construe the themes in texts. Certainly the students were neatly provided by the teacher with two very basic, pre-established Western assumptions: the first was that there is always a binary opposition between good and evil in our culture; the second is that there always need to be present the means and methods of achieving, differentiating, and evaluating "the good." However, what are the consequences of using culturally
determined terms like "good" and "bad" and "weak" and "loveliness" without a situated historical definition?

Using these ambiguous terms as their criteria, the students were required to discuss and support (both orally and in writing) their interpretation of one of the two themes that the teacher had provided. In preparation for the writing assignment, the students initially worked in pairs. Based on their reading, each pair of students collaboratively found specific segments, passages, and events in the story line that supported or elaborated on the two variations of theme. After presenting their findings orally to the class, the students' assignment was to further develop their ideas in individually written literary analysis essays.

Most of the students responded obediently to the task at hand by finding characters and situations which adequately illustrated the "good/beautiful" and "bad/weak" constraints of the assignment. Yet several of the students seemed to want to move far beyond those constraints. One student pointed out that much of the history of the South Pacific islands in Michener's novel was comprised of colonialism, economic exploitation, and brutal slave trade--those "uses" of the islands that for centuries pillaged the native culture and society and had left it without a sustainable infrastructure. Another student
pointed to his reading of a segment of the text that dealt with how the power and wealth of the island were still currently concentrated in the hands of a select few. Somehow, though, the focus of the oral presentations and the writing assignment discussions always seemed to return to the symbolism of characters, the beauty of the island's tropical rain forest, the significance of the story line, or Michener's sense of aesthetics.

Still a third student, in trying to respond to the theme of "the artistry of writing a good story," raised the question of what the nature and the function of the storyteller was in the broader society. In writing a "good" story, according to the student, "Self-analysis is the basis for comment on the outside world. . . . The writer must look inside before looking outside . . . must criticize self before being about to criticize others." The student tried very hard to understand the nature of self-reflection in relation to Michener's "theme" of "good" writing. Yet the teacher's response was of a literary nature: "The whole point is that the narrator learns and it is through the narrator that we learn."

But do we? As these several students began to suggest, unless we are allowed to more fully probe issues, and our intrinsic relation to those issues, don't we just absorb other people's assumptions? If students pick
other, more critical "themes" out, why aren't those issues valued and pursued? What are the poetics of colonialism, for instance? What does the intertextuality of Michener's work say about usurpation and about such burning contemporary problems as Haiti or Jamaica or Cuba or the Dominican Republic? Doesn't his work need to speak to current situations like Rawanda or Somalia or other African countries that were ravaged for centuries and then left by their exploiters to die? In being what Michener, and even the teacher, perceives to be a "good" person or a "good" writer, doesn't one need to establish intertextuality in both a spatial and temporal, even human sense? Texts, as in this case, seem to be used for the systematic imposition of a certain narrow set of ideological, ethnocentric cultural values--values that all too often go unchallenged in the classroom.

Texts and the Dynamics of Classroom Talk

I think that many times we as teachers have forgotten, or perhaps never knew, several very important questions: What is the purpose of the inquiry that we ask our students to do? How is that purpose relevant to our students in terms of giving them voice in the world? To whom is that purpose of most importance, them or us? To whom does
that purpose give most power, them or us? To not answer these questions is to reinforce the strategies of silence that exist not only in the classroom, but in the broader society as well.

Teacher talk: "I told you that that character personified evil"

Much of the talk and non-talk in the classes that I visited emanated from the treatment of texts as "privileged" discourse. The high school "honors" class, for example, focused on British literature, and the implication was very much present that to study such texts should certainly be deemed an "honor." Appreciating the tradition of British literature was supposedly somewhat of a catalyst in "humanizing" the students. The ideological assumption of the "great books" being only accessible to "the best and the brightest" was certainly at work in many of the classroom situations that I visited.

This same sense of "awe" was also a part of the Shakespeare class, only on the part of the students. When asked what they had gained from the texts, the students' responses were almost uniformly uncritical: "I gained a new appreciation of the true literary gift Shakespear [sic] created for people to enjoy"; "I learned all about Shakespearean plays"; "I gained a better
understanding of Shakespear [sic] and his writings. I also learned to enjoy and appreciate his works better"; "It makes people think and use their imagination." These responses were very much mirrored in the ideas of the teacher, who hoped that the students would accomplish "some cultural literacy." In attaining cultural literacy, students are supposedly able to understand important cultural values. Yet, in the same instance, students are not able to also question the rationale for those values. This situation, I think, too often sets up the conditions for "canned" or contrived responses on the part of the students--those responses that students think the teacher wants to hear. This is particularly true of classroom texts.

I found that quite often this privileging of texts allowed for very specific "teacher telling" in the classroom. Teacher comments such as "I'll tell you what I think about the metaphor of death in the play" and "I told you that that character personified evil" were not at all uncommon. Comments like these always placed students in the passive role of receivers of interpretations, rather than in the active role of interpreters. Students were seldom encouraged to openly question or challenge texts, or actively seek alternative understandings. I never once heard the students asked
specifically, "What do you think?"

I also found that another aspect of teacher telling came about through the density of texts. The complexity of texts, as well as the relevance of those texts to students, was often only accessible through the interpreter, the intermediary--the teacher. In many classes that I observed, students often tried, almost desperately sometimes, to bring class discussions back to the relevance of the "here and now." That is, they tried to make sense of complicated texts by relating the texts to their own experiences. But the discussions always somehow kept returning to the texts themselves. In one class discussion of "The Wanderer," with its very difficult structure and archaic language patterns, a student raised a question about the homeless people immersed in today's American society. However, the teacher's explication kept returning to the terms of "honor" and "loyalty" embedded in the text, and the teacher talk never passed below a very high level of abstraction. In this case, as in many others, the focus of the learning was on the text as icon or artifact rather than the text as catalyst for critical questioning of the here and now. As with this example, teacher talk never allowed classroom discourse to become more than monologic interpretation, never promoted honest dialogic negotiation.
With regard to classroom texts, then, teacher talk and teacher telling really seem to reflect an unanalyzed understanding on the part of teachers as to why they select and use particular texts. To illustrate this point, I will relate a comment made by one of the community college instructors. In selecting texts for a course, she held that for a student to enter a text is for him or her to "enter into a dialogue with one's culture, to mind-wrestle with writers about what it means to be human, to love, fear, imagine, hate, grow, change, crave, suffer, hope, believe, desire, create." Certainly the response is much more eloquent and poetic than those I received from the other teachers. But it goes beyond this--it speaks rather of a profound sense of self-reflection, even soul searching, in the processes of selecting textual materials for the express purpose of giving students critical consciousness and critical voice.

Student talk: "For me, reading poetry is very much like someone throwing a brick at my head!"

Teacher talk and teacher telling often facilitate the condition of passive listening, and thus student silence, in the classroom. This is because students come to the classroom having already been effectively, systematically silenced. As one teacher noted, her
and I think that this is generalizeable to most of the students that I observed during the study. According to the teacher, "These students have been conditioned to silence and passivity, have been carefully taught how to please and say the right thing in order to get the grade they need." This silence and passive acceptance was also evident in many of the platitudes that were in the students' written responses to the question "What did you accomplish or gain by reading these particular books?" which was asked on the Field Study--Student Version. As one student wrote: "I've learned lots of poems and short stories, bringing me some semi-good moral lessons, but also some entertainment." In contrast, another student wrote quite candidly: "I get what the teacher wants me to get, nothing more . . . even if my opinion is different. Therefore, I generally choose nothing more than the status quo."

Why can't good teaching aim to break through that thin veneer of pragmatism, especially through the use of texts in the classroom? Why can't students be critically directed to the chaos of texts? This chaos is where more fundamental learning and higher-order questioning take place, where more questions are raised than answered, and where the disparity between language and reality is explored.
In a closely related area, the language of the classroom texts also seemed to have very much of a silencing effect on students. As an illustration, the students in both the high school and the college classrooms I visited spent a good deal of class time in watching different videotaped versions of the Shakespearean plays being studied. In addition, the teachers and individual students read aloud various segments of texts. Both of these teachers stated that the purpose of these language exercises was to help the students overcome the language density and appreciate the complexity of the images. However, the students' responses always were somewhat thin, particularly in the sense that critically meaningful discourse seemed to always be just beyond them. At best many of the responses that were given were too often seemingly rehearsed or parroted, or perhaps even learned, and were delivered in what was deemed to be the appropriate level or register of language. At worst the responses were cliche-ridden and based on established or expected assumptions, as evidenced by the high school student who said she "felt the poem . . . really experienced it."

In contrast, another student stated quite frankly that "I appreciate your [the teacher's] interpretations because for me reading poetry is very much like someone throwing a brick at my head!"
The last student's comment is certainly relevant, especially in terms of its poetic denial of the poetic. How can we even begin to look at language complexity and density critically when we spend ten minutes of class time on a complex poem like "Ozymandias" and then flit off to "The Second Coming"? One student read "Sailing to Byzantium" aloud, and promptly made the following summary: "Syntax error! Cannot compute! Re-boot . . . Re-boot!" The force with which these very dense forms of texts are hurled at students too often disallows any critical response from them. They simply have the wind knocked out of them, in an intellectual sense. I can't help thinking that instead of continually throwing those "bricks" at our students' heads, perhaps what we should do is help them take those bricks and throw them through the plate glass windows of our unanalyzed assumptions--those that abound in education and in the broader culture.

My point here is not to say that the language and texts should be always and immediately available to students. What this does indicate, though, is that if we are going to take students into the forest of language and texts, we should at least take a little time and tell them why they are there and what they might find--that is, if we even know ourselves. If we make them grope
in the darkness and uncertainty, we should let them know that suspending certainty is often times good, is often times productive. We should not, however, give them the "certainty of tradition" or other ideological lies that allow us to whistle in the darkness. And in the process, shouldn't we be modeling or practicing what our students need to be doing--using questioning attitudes to suspend certainty and all-too-easy answers? In not doing so, we continue to tacitly engage in silencing strategies.

Another of these strategies of silencing was evident in the application of student literacy skills to the texts they were using in the classroom. Many of the reading and writing tasks of the classes that I observed seemed to encourage passive acceptance rather than the active, critical, questioning engagement of texts. For example, in another class that I visited, one of the writing assignments was to translate several of the short soliloquies at the end of each act of Macbeth. The purpose of the exercise was to "slow the students down . . . make them more aware of the language . . . and give them access to the complex structures of the work." Certainly such translation exercises do exactly this. However, as an extension, such exercises in the simple transcription and reinscription of privileged "text" can also merely serve to sanctify that text. A more meaningful exercise
might involve a closer look at variations of language—particularly of the valorized nature of high and low language that is so evident in the texts of Shakespeare and other texts and authors of the canon. This line of inquiry could very easily follow with the historicizing of privileging processes—those processes that often become transparent in language-based inclusion and exclusion.

Even when the students' responses and questions were working at odds with the assignment, these variant responses were somehow brought back into line with the requisites of the original assignment. This is quite obvious in the questions that students brought to the Macbeth writing assignment, which was to analyze a major character in the play. One of the students wanted to talk about how the elements of "reason and passion" were so clearly eclipsed by greed in the persona of Macbeth, and how that balance played against "choices and consequences." Another asked about what the relevance of Macbeth's "tragic flaw" was to the people of today, or if it was just a literary myth. The students' own points of inquiry seemed to be important issues that would be the gist for substantial written engagement of the text. Yet the focus seemed to continually turn back to the "brilliance" of Shakespeare's technique and creative talents in shaping his characters, of his careful crafting
of "gloomy illusions" in the play.

Given the nature of avarice in contemporary capitalistic society, I was surprised that Macbeth's greed would not serve as a critical textual disjunction--that is, serve as one of those points in the text that allows for the breaking down of the text itself. What is the relevance of Macbeth to, say, Charles Keating? What is the relationship of wealth and power to competition and the profit motive? What are the ideological limitations that would prevent such a comparison and contrast? What is the nature of greed and the will to power that has driven people, over the centuries, to the point where they are today?

In a more general sense, however, I think that this leads to an important question in education: "What are the uses and means of literacy by which students are given the strong voice to ask the questions that need to be asked?" Teachers, it seems to me, need to continually ask this recurring and critical question.

Texts as Terrains of Contestation

During my research work, one portion of the study seemed to yield the most potential for informing my teaching practices. There were a number of sites of
contradiction at which point my own assumptions and expectations were challenged. Surprisingly, several of the teachers that I was observing demonstrated a number of what I perceived to be critical teaching practices.

Such critical teaching practices involve the posing of problems in knowledge and the exposing of the conflicting values that operate in the classroom. This problematizing of often sterile knowledge is a crucial element in teaching and in the classroom. As Giroux has very aptly explained, problem posing in the classroom must continually take place through critical literacy and dialectical questioning—concepts that need to be interwoven into all curricula. Critical, problem-posing, methods of teaching challenge the fossilized notion that knowledge is value neutral; as such, these methods serve to "reveal the myths, lies, and injustices at the heart of the dominant school culture" (Teachers 7). The pedagogy Giroux advocates serves to directly subvert the oppressive influences of dominant ideologies.

It was interesting for me to observe how on several occasions these teachers, either intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or unconsciously, actually contested and destabilized not only their assumptions, but those of their students as well. Therefore, because this was very much of a learning experience for me, my
discussion in this portion of the study will concentrate on what I perceive to be individual teachers' use of critical teaching practices. Though these teachers did not overtly exhibit such teaching practices extensively during my study, they appeared to be, at least in some instances, purposefully pushing against the texts that they were using.

"Is an abstraction worth dying for?"

On several occasions the texts that were used in the classroom were nicely, artfully turned in upon themselves. The most interesting interchanges were those in which the texts were probed and questioned with regard to what they did not say as well as what they said.

In the Introduction to Shakespeare class, for example, the teacher started a discussion of The First Part of King Henry the Fourth with what he called a look at the "critical debates" within the play itself. "Critical," in this sense, was defined by the instructor as being "important." However, as the class progressed, the term took on a very different meaning—one which involved "critical" as meaning the close, analytic questioning of the underlying assumptions carried in texts.

The instructor opened the class period by presenting a long and insightful explanation of the chronology of
the King Henry plays and of The War of the Roses. After this, though, the instructor pointedly asked the question "Is an abstraction worth dying for?" He suggested that perhaps Shakespeare's play was a comment on the irrationality of the abstraction called "honor"—an ideological misrepresentation that continues to plague people and societies even to this very day. To extend this line of "critical debate," the instructor read aloud the following passage in which the greedy, contradictory Falstaff speaks of the phenomenon of honor:

[h]onor pricks me on. Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honor? A word. What is in that word "honor"? What is that "honor"? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon. (Bevington 798)

The students' common response to the teacher's prompt was to bring the abstraction of honor into their own frames
of reference--the Vietnam War and the Persian Gulf War. It was within these two fairly recent events that the students most took issue with the abstractions of honor and dying for a cause. With this positioning of the Shakespearean text into the "here and now," the students could begin to engage the many negative political and social implications of those three specific wars, as well as other wars that people fought in the name of "honor."
The student discussion at this point continued to become more animated. Even though the instructor kept trying after a time to bring the interchange back to Falstaff and Shakespeare's play, the students kept for the longest time returning the "critical debate" back to more contemporary contexts--those which they had more or less been directly affected by.

As the discussion progressed, the instructor pointed to several "subtexts," as he called them, within the play. One such subtext involved the idea that the common man could quite easily be "impressed" into the king's army, and thus arbitrarily be turned into "cannon fodder" during the battle. Another subtext focused on the fact that ultimately the upper class was the true beneficiary of any war, and that "honor" was a ruse perpetrated by that ruling class. Falstaff had, after all, profited greatly from forcibly recruiting "volunteers" to fight for the
A student made one exceptionally interesting comment during the discussion. She perceptively noted that "Perhaps this [the play] was Shakespeare's way of questioning what was going on in the civil war . . . and with the society and the class structure of the time." But instead of fully playing out the connections between the student's observation and the material, economic, and social representations of the text, the teacher inevitably returned to the play for "answers." The discussion moved on to such textual concerns as "the political maturity of Hal," the "artful balancing of extremes by Shakespeare," and the "effective use of literary devices in the play." After all, as the teacher pointed out at the conclusion of the discussion, "Shakespeare is hard to pin down."

It was difficult to determine if the teacher was testing easy conclusions or was teaching these conclusions to circumvent the more complex nuances of the text. What is more important, though, is that this critical interchange indicates that students often intuitively understand that within each text lies the seeds for its own deconstruction, and that, as such, texts ultimately invite a deeper, more critical questioning of the assumptions they carry. If this is the case, shouldn't
we as teachers vigorously, relentlessly, even irreverently explore how any given text can and should be used to test its own assumptions? As this teacher so nicely demonstrated, the best texts are those that criticize themselves—the texts that actually push against existing and received ideological beliefs and presumptions.

"It takes an entire village to raise a child."

This pushing against existing assumptions was also found in several of the extended classroom discussions. As one of the college instructors artfully demonstrated, terrains of contestations can and should be the points at which teachers begin to deconstruct and eliminate those ideological systems that have for so long effectively silenced students. Although the teacher claimed that her task in the classroom is to teach the close explication of literature, she also noted that "too often we are held prisoner—no, held hostage—by these texts." Her method of breaking free of textual constraints is quite simple, yet extremely effective: In engaging her students, she continually plays texts against themselves in the classroom. Often her connecting of dissimilar texts is at those critical points of feminism, racism, or class biases—those fracture points that promote contestation through the juxtapositioning of contrary issues or ideas.
This careful juxtapositioning, then, is what gives students voice in the classroom.

For example, in her segment on the analysis of a short story, the teacher started the class with a discussion of Grace Paley's "Samuel," a story centered around a young boy who is tragically killed in a Chicago subway accident. After a considerable amount of critical probing of the implications of the story, the students' rudimentary responses involved surface-level cliches such as "each human life is unique." The teacher, however, kept probing the significance of Paley's work by bringing in other stories, such as Toni Cada Bambara's "The Lesson," and by raising questions about the concepts of community and responsibility. When the teacher asked about all of the adults that had stood by and watched the young person's unnecessary death, one student said that the story reminded her of an African saying that she had recently heard in her sociology class: "It takes an entire village to raise a child." This in turn led to a critical questioning of the notions of tradition and learning, to which another student made the observation, "When an old person dies, a library burns."

Still another example of this marvelous method of the juxtapositioning of texts and contexts was when the teacher positioned Bambara's "My Man Bovanne" against
Hughes' "Harlem." The language play that is continually at work in the two texts was explored in depth during one particular class session. During the opening of that class session, one of the first responses that came from the students was "Bambara sounds very Black!" The discussion turned to an explanation of how dialect gives body to the understanding of the texts. The teacher then challenged the students to think differently about Hughes' brief description of people in his short poem, and his own search for alternative perspectives in "the dream deferred." This led to a discussion of class in both of the poems, of the historical connection with the Black Power movement, and with the issues of feminism and sexuality in Bambara's essay. The teacher recalled the issues of class and power relationships in Bambara's "The Lesson," which the students had just discussed in the previous class period. Within the historical contexts of these two short works, the students talked about and considered in depth the ways in which language shapes perceptions and the ways in which language use serves as a class-based marker. The teacher further problematized the discussion by bringing in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," which is replete with issues of gender and race. Toward the end of the discussion, the teacher asked the students about how the stories and the storytellers
related back to their prior observation that "it takes a village to raise a child." Finally, the teacher ended the class discussion with the following prompt: "There are many women in the stories we have read--black women, brown women, white women. What picture of 'women' does one get from these stories? Is it a valid picture? How does it compare to the pictures of women that we see around us in our culture?" These were to be the "interrogative points" that would provide the students access to the texts for the next class discussion.

As the teacher later explained to me, this process was her method of "literary analysis based on the discussion of cultural contexts." She noted that when students start to understand the sets of cultural expectations and experiences that they bring to texts, as well as those that are carried in the texts, the students are better able to make sense of not only the texts, but also the world they live in. As her approach demonstrates, textual explication without critical questioning results invariably in students passively acquiring a very conventional, extremely traditional brand of knowledge. Some of this is certainly fine, but as she noted, "We must continually look for and question the contradictions in texts. . . . We must continually work for a clearer understanding of the
significance of the linguistic symbols we use."

In all of her class sessions, the teacher kept pointing toward, while never pointing directly at, alternative understandings. She was very emphatic in claiming that her purpose is to help students be attentive readers, and to help them find clues to the meanings of texts. However, she also noted that she tries to ground her teaching in American studies; she consistently employs a sociological and historical approach in helping students to question their American identity, and to explore the human and cultural politics of life. This approach has been the primary element in helping her achieve and maintain a critical perspective.

"Weren't women searching for 'meaning' too?"

I found that the closest, clearest practical application of critical literacy was in the textual responses that were grounded in the students' own lives and experiences. For instance, in one class that I observed, the students were required during the semester to keep a dialectic journal, in which they freewrote about how the classroom texts related to their own experiences; the teacher responded to these freewritings on a regular basis. This type of reflective, autobiographical writing seems to be that which best
relates students' lives to the textual world that they are attempting to enter.

The journal freewriting connected texts to student lives at a very deep level—much deeper, in fact, than class discussions of the texts indicated. This is because the teacher continually asked the students to write down and expand on the questions that they had regarding any given author or text they had read. The students would then further expand on those questions by connecting the texts to their own contexts. At this point the critical issues and problems that were affecting their own lives came to the surface. Many of the numerous concerns that confront young people today appeared in the journals, according to the teacher.

During the follow-up interviews with some of the students, I was allowed to look at several of their journals. I found a number of interestingly critical questions in their reflections. In the Search for Meaning segment of the class, one young female student, after reading text after text that had been authored by men, wrote extensively about the lack of women's voices in the readings. "Weren't women searching for 'meaning' too?" she asked pointedly. She further noted in her journal that even when women did write, they "sounded too much like men." Another student questioned the
shifting values and morals that were represented in a work such as Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." He wondered in his journal about the notions of class and elitism that are symbolized by the nobleman's visit to the graveyard represents, and how those representations relate to today. A third student asked in his journal how the works of the Restoration and Romantic Age and the Victorian Age related to the current struggles of third-world nations: "What was and is the common experience?" he asked. Still another wrote, "After reading 'A Man For All Seasons,' [sic] I thought long and hard about what 'things' I would be willing to die for. What about all of the foolish 'things' that people die for?"

During the semester the teacher had maintained a questioning dialectic with the students by writing her comments and questions in the margins of each student journal. Through this she was able to draw out, at least from a few of the students, alternative understandings of and responses to the texts. The teacher asked students to question the ways in which the texts not only related to their own lives, but also connected to what they had learned in other history and social studies classes. "Doing this," the teacher explained, "helps students to see texts in both broader and narrower contexts."
"If I Had a Hammer (and Some Old Tires, and Some Dirt), I'd Build Me a College."

The questioning of the connections of students to texts was also apparent in another one of the classes that I visited. Because the teacher had a very astute understanding of how to build on the perceptions and passions of her students, her classroom practices were certainly another good example of the application of critical literacy.

Her class was a composition course in which the students' own writings were often used as texts in the discussion, as well as in the writing and reading assignments. On two occasions the teacher in this college-level course had students read and write about already completed student papers from other classes, and from other semesters. One of the student papers was titled "If I Had a Hammer (and Some Old Tires, and Some Dirt), I'd Build Me a College." This was an argumentative paper on the use of recyclable materials in the construction of new buildings on the campus. Another student paper was a documented research paper titled "The Comfort of Home," which argued for home birthing as an alternative medical procedure.

The instructor tied these two essays in with the "critical writing assignment" that the students were
currently working on: Each student was to write a personal argumentative essay on an issue with which he or she was (or had been) personally involved. As the instructor told the students, "You will want to tackle an issue that closely affects you and is not so enormous that your argument becomes wildly abstract." Some of the issues that students were dealing with included such things as homeopathic medicine, organic farming, and the growing resistance of disease organisms to antibiotics.

What was interesting was that the instructor, in the middle of the assignment, had the students read the fictional work "Bush Pigs," by Richard Dooling. This story is about a returning Peace Corps worker who relates the culture shock and reverse culture shock that he experienced in traveling to and from the United States and the third world nation of Sierra Leone. The text was a sharp, often bitter comparison and contrast of the two extremely opposite cultures. The story was, as the teacher noted, the skillful use of fiction as an argumentative text. In one part of the story, for instance, the Peace Corps worker describes the Africans as "breathing skeletons in rags, putting one foot in front of the other . . . flies swarming in their eyes, crawling in and out of bleeding sockets . . . holding out their hands to me" (Dooling 82). Later, in contrast, Dooling
describes the Americans in a restaurant as "very large, pink people in evening dress, laughing, bowing over tables heaped with food, ice buckets, bottles of wine wrapped in towels and nestled in silver coolers, baskets of fresh-baked bread, and plates smeared with half-finished entrees" (Dooling 84). The teacher made the point that even the subtexts that run through the story are concerned with broader issues. She noted that in the text the worker states, "I had forgotten that the American unconscious is inside. In Africa, it's outside the body, in the bush" (Dooling 82). Having done this, the teacher asked the students to question where the value systems and concerns of the people described were. Several of the students discussed at length the way in which the essay questioned the absurdity of materialism and consumerism that drives our society, and of the self-centered ethnocentricity that is such a part of our culture. In closing, one student noted that the text itself took on very much of a third world approach--that of story telling.

The use of this published text was integrated nicely with the student texts in that the students were shown that their own texts could and should be based on critical questions of "Why?" What was also interesting was the fact that the student-authored texts were approached as any other texts in the class were, with close consideration
given by the students to the issues that were conveyed in the texts. Yet the student texts themselves too often seemed to carry their own ideology of "political correctness" with regard to the promotion of environmental issues--an agenda that is very much a part of the college's philosophy. At no time did the essays get into the more elusive areas of class, gender, or race--areas that cannot be ignored in any discussion of the environment.

When I shared this observation with the teacher, she agreed that perhaps this could be another way in which the students' texts could be turned back in upon themselves. She believes that writing and talking about student-generated texts, both those that they write and those that they select to read, allow her to connect the world of the classroom more directly with the world of the students. As she maintains, most students have been "turned off" by traditional textbooks because the questions these texts ask are "consistently superficial and obvious." According to this instructor, "Teaching is certainly always a 'subversive activity,' one in which texts must continuously speak to the passions of the students, must always address themselves to the perceptions of the students." She concluded by saying, "Whether it is their texts or someone else's, I always try to use texts that upset my students, that make them mad, that disturb their
lethargy. . . . This is where they find their voice 
. . . in the critical spaces of 'Why?' and 'Why not?' 
that we strive to create."

It is interesting to note that this teacher's 
classroom practices were clearly one of the most effective 
applications of critical literacy that I observed in my 
study. Yet the teacher herself was not familiar with 
the concept when I asked her about it. It appears that, 
just as with students, some teachers intuitively perceive 
the need for such question-based reading and writing 
experiences, then build on that critical need.

**Triangulation: Errors in Expectations**

In this final segment of the chapter, I would like 
to deal with other issues that I uncovered during my 
research study. These are the issues that I could not 
foresee in constructing and implementing the project-- 
issues that only became obvious to me as the study 
progressed. And these are important issues because of 
the further critical questions that they raise.

The major development that I will be focusing on 
in this part of the analysis is the interrelatedness of 
my data, particularly in the areas of teacher and student 
surveys and interviews. I found that there was a wide
gulf at all grade levels between the teachers' expectations and the students' perceptions of what classroom texts should accomplish. I believe that explaining and accounting for this broad differentiation will give me better insight into understanding the first three categories of this chapter.

My primary research methods involved observation supplemented with questionnaires and interviews. Though these were very effective means of gathering information and data, I need to acknowledge the drawbacks. The contexts under which I administered the questionnaires were limited and limiting--the constraints of time and lack of specificity of the part of the questions didn't allow for a depth of analysis. In addition, all of the student and teacher responses could probably have been more developed if the participants had had more time and length with which to expand their answers. Finally, I need to concede that my observational and interview notes are subject to the ambiguities of interpretation.

With these things in mind, I now would like to focus on the very relevant area of ethnographic triangulation—that is, interpreting the relationships between the observational perspectives used in the gathering of information. In this discussion, I feel it is valuable to compare the responses of each individual teacher's
version of the field study questionnaire to his or her students' responses on the student version of the same questionnaire. The first related question on both versions of the questionnaires involved discussing what would be accomplished or gained when students read the texts for the course. The second related question asked what the students' overall feelings were with regard to the course texts, and what those texts told them about the world in which they live. In applying triangulation to my analysis, I used the descriptive notes from my observations, as well as my notes from the individual teacher and student interviews, and then compared this information to the responses contained in the student and teacher questionnaires. The following is a synthesis of that information.

My observational information and the aggregate responses to the questions do reflect a common characteristic. These findings indicate that there is a superficial understanding, on the part of both teacher and student, of why any particular text is used in any given classroom. In almost all cases, the teacher's expectations were nowhere near the responses that were expressed by the students. Even given the often arbitrary, ambiguous nature of students' evaluative responses, the divergence between the two areas of response in this
portion of my study was extremely broad.

A good example of this is Tony Kushner's *Angels in America: Millenium Approaches* and *Angels in America: Perestroika*, two texts that were used in one of the college classrooms. The teacher had selected these texts because she was "inspired by the production of the plays and hoped that the texts would allow students to discuss gay/lesbian life in the context of a multicultural America." One student wrote, "*Angels in America* is probably well-suited for this course. However, since I really didn't read it, it is difficult for me to say." Another responded with "The only text that says anything about the world we live in is *Angels in America*. I think it is a one-sided and inaccurate view of 'our world'." Still a third wrote, "I did not know they [the texts] were supposed to tell us anything about our world. *Angels in America* probably does, but I haven't even read it." A fourth student noted, "I found the texts of very little help with the world I live in. But it is good to read about the worlds of others." The last student's inability to see the interconnectedness of worlds and lives seems to well symbolize most of the students' inability to see the interconnectedness of texts and of lives, not only in this class, but in almost all of the classes that I visited.
Oftentimes, too, the students' responses on the questionnaires were very vague and general, and somewhat platitudinous and cliche-riddled. One student wrote, almost as if he were copying off a handbill for a Shakespearean play, "I gained a new appreciation of the true literary gift Shakespear [sic] created for people to enjoy." Another wrote, "They [the texts] teach the morals of life." Also, some of the responses were very pointed and specific, and even served to directly contradict the instructor's expectations. For instance, in the class where the instructor hoped the text would "humanize" the students and give them a deeper "appreciation" for literature, one student wrote, "It [the text] is taken for granted. I lug it to class, and then open it to the right page and read." Another wrote, "What does the text say about the world? Most of the stories in it say that the world is a big, bad, ugly place full of suffering and pain. I guess I'll find out myself someday." All too often the gulf between the teachers' ideal and the students' reality was broad.

But yet many interesting observations did come out of the students' responses, even though their comments were somewhat far afield from the teachers' expectations. For example, one student, in expressing her distrust of texts, noted that "most just contain facts--facts and
boredom." She further wrote, "It is up to the teacher to teach, not the text. Teachers who turn texts into the class Bible tend to be dull and uninteresting, thus making it difficult to learn." Another student in the same class noted, "I do not feel any particular way towards these texts. I have learned very little from them as compared to what I have learned in discussion and from the questions we talk about in class." Another student talked almost poetically about the relationship of texts to the individual and to communal existences. Many of her peers wrote about such things as texts teaching them "the lessons of life," as well as giving them "broader knowledge of the world" and the knowledge that "life is what you make it." However, she was much more introspective. She wrote, "In a way, the texts taught me more about my inner self . . . about my own inner frontiers. But that too is illusionary, a fallacy. . . . Just as with Tao, 'No man [person] is an island.'" Along the same line, another student wrote, "I learned [from the texts] to critique myself rather than others. 'May you always be so busy in life that you have only time enough to critique yourself and not others.'--Author unknown."

All of these responses, student and teacher alike, were interesting to read. And, indeed, observing how
these responses were played out in the exchanges between student, teacher, and text was even more enlightening. However, I believe that there is a broader meaning behind these interactions and relationships. What these responses point to, more than anything else, is that we as teachers need to continually assess and reassess the effects that our classroom approaches and materials have on students—not the effects that we would like or hope for, but the actual effects themselves. My study indicates that teachers are too often uncritical of the assumptions under which they teach. Of even more significance is that these teachers are equally uncritical of the ways in which the texts that they use in the classroom always tacitly convey those assumptions, unanalyzed or not. Both of these conditions serve to substantially weaken the overall effectiveness of teaching, no matter how "good" that teaching may be.

I think that this is important because critical reflection is a process that allows for the peeling off of the layers of ideological varnish that distort the significance of teaching and of texts. Such reflectional activities are important; current research indicates that truly effective teachers are those who continually ponder and evaluate their own classroom performance. As both critical ethnography and triangular observation
demonstrate, an active formula for successful teaching seems to be an ongoing cycle of assess/reflect/adjust.

If my study is at all representative of what goes on in many classrooms, then very little of this ongoing assessment/reflection/adjustment is taking place, especially with regard to texts in the classroom. If this is the case, critical ethnography provides teachers with an ideal method by which to accomplish independent classroom observation. As my study has also demonstrated, critical ethnography can serve as an effective means of self-assessment, especially in applying observation, reflection, and re-innovation on a very practical level in the classroom. The remainder of this dissertation will be a discussion of some ways that can be accomplished.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION:
FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this final chapter I would like to critically reflect on the significant findings of my research study. During this critical reflection I will talk about the implications of those findings with regard to two specific areas: The first involves my own teaching practices and research interests; the second concerns other teaching and research areas. Finally, I will finish my discussion with what I believe to be relevant recommendations and final thoughts.

Significant Findings

I begin this final chapter by acknowledging some of the limitations of the study. These limitations certainly need to be discussed as possibly having affected my interpretations. Also, looking at these limitations, as well as the issues that they point to, will allow me to identify and discuss several critical questions that have emerged from the study. These are the generative questions that provide the foundation for further inquiry.
The most immediate of these limitations involves my inability to make this research more universal. Though I have attempted to use a "critical" ethnographic approach, I now know that my work lacks the "thick description" that is so necessary when one comes to drawing conclusions from such studies.

Several factors contributed to this shortcoming. My study was not truly representative and as a result I am unable to confidently make broad pronouncements about education and teaching in general. I have tried to make my study representative by using a broad base of schools and teachers, but the scope of my work has been limited to only one county among many, in one state among many, and in one nation among many. Also, I now know that my research methodology needs to be refined and sharpened so as to attain better reliability and validity, and thus make my findings more generalizeable. The scope of my study started out as being too broad and the terms of the study were not adequately defined. For example, I did not explicitly differentiate between texts in literature classes and texts in composition classes. Consequently there often was too much diverse, and sometimes conflicting, information available to me. This resulted in my observations becoming extremely time consuming, demanding, and often problematic. Additionally,
I have seen that there are many variables that impact such studies—even simple things like class size and each individual teacher's style had an effect on my ethnographic interpretation. Therefore, the critical question that emerges at this juncture concerns how to make my research at once both more ethnographic in nature and more critical in substance.

In a less practical, more philosophical vein, I fully realize now that the role of ethnographer is difficult to define. The perception of the ethnographer as an "invisible," detached observer is a fallacy—one which definitely must be recognized and accounted for when ethnography is used in research. In this sense, one of the major issues that came up in my critical ethnography concerned the ethics of my questioning the teaching methods and approaches of my colleagues. The subjects involved in this study were good, capable, professional people who were doing a conscientious job of teaching their subject matter. Yet there was a certain ethical tension in my classroom observations—that is, how could I question my own teaching assumptions without questioning, or seeming to "criticize," my subjects' existential assumptions? I think that a closer dialogue with my subjects regarding my own research agenda would have helped ease this tension somewhat. Such discussions, along with careful
introspection on the part of the observer, should be ongoing throughout the "critical" research process. Of most importance, however, is the fact that this issue certainly demonstrates how one can all too easily assume the false "observational" role of the unaffected, unaffected ethnographer.

Yet given these issues, questions, and limitations, I believe that my study has yielded some interesting and useful results. Though most if not all of my findings will be somewhat idiosyncratic and useful primarily to me, my initial findings have provided me with a good deal of insight into the teaching profession in general. As well, these findings have allowed me to critically analyze my own pedagogy and teaching practices. Based on this, the following is a discussion of my research work in terms of interpretations and recommendations.

**Implications of the Findings**

1. Individual classroom praxis:

   One of the paramount issues of my study involves how my work relates to the area of praxis, or how these findings directly apply to my own classroom. Based on a critical analysis of my study, I have learned that I need to continually keep in mind that textbook creation
and selection is an industry in itself, replete with extremely powerful economic and political constraints. Texts and authors of texts, being integral parts of that industry, have their own agendas as well. I need to also remember that teachers are sincere but are often uncritical of the constraints under which they teach; indeed, they are equally uncritical of the ideologically charged, powerful nature of the texts that they use in their classrooms. Through my observations I have come to better realize that texts must be the catalysts of learning and knowledge, not an end in themselves. Therefore, I need to continually analyze how and why the texts I use in my classroom provoke students into using their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking abilities to question the world in which they live. I need also to continually understand the part that texts play in this process. Lastly, I need to always be aware of the language and context density of texts, and to be sensitive to the idea that students often need time to work their way through the critical dimensions of texts and contexts.

In terms of specific applications and practices, I think that my research addresses the unreflected use of classroom texts. The traditional consumption model of textbook use—that is, the practice of plowing through as many texts as possible in a semester—doesn't hold
up in most classrooms, especially the composition classrooms. This is because, no matter how much English teachers agonize over it, students will never share our voracious appetite for texts. My findings correspond well, I think, with Shor's current philosophy of teaching and texts. Shor advocates the practice of teachers organizing courses around a "participatory and negotiated syllabus which frontloads student discourse and themes." Building on this, classroom texts must work to develop "generative themes from the students." How do the classroom texts help them to "discover the problematic issues of their lives, those which they care deeply about?" How are texts instrumental in helping students talk about "the vital issues that trouble them, issues which they can work on in a critical way, connecting personal context to social context" (Shor, Letter)?

Based upon my study, and upon the ideas of people like Shor, Freire, and Giroux, I envision critical teaching as encouraging students to conduct their own critical ethnographies in which they question the contexts of their own worlds. This approach would certainly be based upon the students' writings; in fact, their ethnographic studies could even be bound together to become the class textbook itself, and thus the readings for the course.

I think that using such practices work in a truly
liberatory fashion. They call into question many traditional approaches to texts in the classroom, such as the entrenched tradition of literary analysis. More importantly, though, when we use such teaching practices, we are sincerely attempting to reveal the illusions we have about the harmony and stability of knowledge and learning--those illusions that are so prevalent in the classroom. My research has shown me that through the ongoing processes of questioning, problematizing, and destabilizing texts, I have the potential to inspire critical consciousness, in both the students and myself, within the contexts of my own individual classroom.

Additionally, I believe that my research findings are not only relevant to my own classroom but are applicable to other areas of education as well. There is a definite need for more follow-up studies in the areas of critical literacy and texts, in my own classroom and in the classrooms of other teachers.

2. Other sites for critical ethnography:

The generative nature of the issues and questions raised in my study indicated that critical ethnographies are well worth the time and work that is spent on them. The triangulation that is interwoven into the fabric of ethnographies appears to be an effective way by which
teachers can effect the three-phase evaluation process of assess/reflect/adjust in their teaching. Critical ethnography, by its very nature, also provides the context for a network of professional interaction.

Such interaction is important. We as teachers are seldom truly provided with the opportunity to just sit and observe and quietly reflect on our practices, much less critically interact with our colleagues about those practices. Consequently, one of the objectives of my research will be to extend further my own observational studies, and to encourage my colleagues in the profession to do so the same through critical ethnography.

I say this because just the act of viewing other teachers at work in their classrooms is extremely informative. Too often, I believe, we get bound up in the "texts" of our own "contexts" and we are unable to see beyond our own small domains. We cannot appreciate what our colleagues at the middle school, or the high school, or the community college, or the university, or even in the adjoining classrooms for that matter, are doing on a day-to-day basis. I would argue, therefore, that the ethnographic study is a viable means of breaking down the barriers that stand between and within educational institutions. Additionally, what makes the critical ethnography an effective research tool, from my perspective
at least, is the way in which it promotes self-reflexivity in the selection of new teaching approaches and materials. The critical questions and critical circumstances promoted by self-reflexivity facilitate a question-based literacy on the part of teachers; this critical activity allows them to use literacy skills to read and write and think about more effective teaching.

Besides professional interaction and development, another important area where the application of critical ethnography would be effective is in teacher training. New teachers can and should be made aware of the power that self-observation and critical reflection have on their own teaching methods and approaches, as well as those of other teachers. As McLaren and Lankshear have pointed out, this type of critical teacher training enables [the teacher] to rearticulate the role of the social agent so that he or she is able to make affective alliance with forms of agency that will provide new grounds of popular authority from which to speak the never-ending narrative of human freedom.

... [E]ducators must not abandon their rootedness in the struggles of the popular classes. (414)

Indeed, teacher training which incorporates the methodology of critical ethnography allows teachers to acquire an initial sense of the political nature of teaching.
Such innovative measures serve to support a substantial revamping of educational philosophy, goals, and methods—those that have traditionally been founded on positivism and knowledge-based pedagogy. Giroux identifies such measures as those which help teachers become "transformative intellectuals." This is the situation in which the teacher, as agent for political and social change, acquires and thus provides students with the "knowledge and skills needed to address injustices and to be critical actors committed to a world free of oppression and aggression" (Teachers xxxiv).

Critical ethnography can be interwoven throughout all elements of teaching—preparation, praxis, and professional development. In using and developing such questioning approaches to teaching and learning, teachers focus on the differences and similarities between groups of existential people. Such approaches are, in the final analysis, attempts to understand the problems and conflicts that result in the social, economic, and political interactions between those groups of people. Ultimately, though, I have found that we, meaning both students and teachers, need to become critical ethnographers so as to closely question the texts of our classes as well as the broader contexts of our lives, and then act on the answers and non-answers that we get. The critical
ethnography has become for me as a teacher synonymous with the imperatives of critical literacy and liberatory education.

**Recommendations and Final Reflections**

In this research study I have attempted to search for a redefinition of literary works in the composition classroom--one that defines literary texts as those which more than anything else critically destabilize our often overly comfortable assumptions about our reality as being the reality. Such texts are those which facilitate the personal student/teacher involvement and exchange that active, engaged learning calls for. But more importantly, such texts are those which promote readings based in contradictions and questioning, are those which make us all--teacher and student alike--continually reflect on, challenge, reevaluate, and reassess our own assumptions about the reality in which we live. Effective use of texts in any class requires the courage to: use literary texts which lend themselves to a critical, questioning dialogue about the ideology that they either convey or challenge; redefine literature as any text that reads against the status quo; and critically reflect upon the ways in which all written texts either tacitly reinforce
or boldly push against the boundary lines of inclusion and exclusion, of justice and injustice, of dominance and oppression in culture and society.

Given these criteria, then, what we need to be doing as teachers is not reifying some incomprehensible edifice called "literature"; but rather we should be actively, continually searching for ways in which texts can enable the student to critically read, write, speak, listen, and think, and thus question her or his assumptions and roles in the world. What we need to more fully explore is the notion of texts as being instruments of power and powerlessness in both the classroom and the broader society. This approach goes far beyond such pedantic notions as "literature" and "literary theory." As Robert Scholes points out so profoundly in *Textual Power*,

[w]e have an endless web here, of growth, and change, and interaction, learning and forgetting, dialogue and dialectic. Our task as teachers is to introduce students to this web, to make it real and visible for them . . . and to encourage them to cast their own strands of thought and text into this network so that they will feel its power and understand both how to use it and how to protect themselves from its abuse. (21)

Scholes' argument is, as is the argument of this paper,
that we need to approach texts as being repositories of ideological assumptions.

In *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation*, Paulo Freire and Antonio Faundez make this point with even more force. They write,

Critical understandings require that reality be 'read' through an analysis of the social praxis of students, of which productive activity is a basic dimension.

Hence comes the impossibility of divorcing literacy education, and education in general, from production and, by inevitability, from wealth. (111)

Learning to read and write texts involves a fundamental, critical understanding of the economic, social, and ideological assumptions to which the texts refer. For it is those assumptions which continually work to deemphasize the dynamics of critical reflection and thus intellectual liberation.

1. Critical reflection and the process of liberation:

Many contemporary educational theorists are actively committed to revitalizing the conditions and practices of education--that is, to creating the conditions wherein students become active, critical participants in the construction of their reality rather than passively having that reality constructed for them. Under these conditions,
knowledge is defined as being legitimized by particular institutions and ideologies, is acknowledged as being particular versions of truth and reality. Consequently, effective pedagogy is that which continually uses the problem areas inherent within ideology as the focal point for students' critical inquiry. Such pedagogy is that which uses language as the basis of critique and is that which engenders question raising and social consciousness in students. Only through such pedagogy can knowledge-based "liberal education" be transformed into critically based "liberatory education."

From this synthesis a new understanding of the purposes and ends of knowledge and education emerges: The "why" of teaching and learning inevitably informs and thus takes primacy over the "what" and "how" of teaching. Essentially, this synthesis redefines the individual teacher's position and role in education, especially in terms of citizenship education.

In a National Conference of Teachers of English presentation titled "Philosopher to Moderator: The Shifting Paradigm of 'Ethos' in Education," Kathryn Rosser-Raign discussed the teacher's role in the classroom. She argued that there is a dichotomy of perceptions--that is, the classical notion of the teacher as philosopher or the current perception of teacher as moderator. The
moderator merely facilitates the passive acquisition of knowledge without considering the moral implications of that knowledge; the philosopher teaches knowledge as being laced with values and beliefs and as being constructed by broader social forces. Her conclusion was that the ethical position and moral stance of teachers is directly related to not only what and how they teach, but more importantly to the "why"—a proposition that deeply affects all teachers at all levels of education.

If the end result of eight or thirteen or seventeen years of education is to produce the self-interested, passively cooperative, "good" drones that are necessary for the survival of the capitalistic economy, then all that is needed in the classroom is a technician—a transmitter of unanalyzed assumptions, a broker in the clearinghouse of facts, a purveyor of fixed, static knowledge that is objective and sterile and detached from any notions of value and power and community.

But if what is required by a truly egalitarian, democratic society are critical, active, responsible participants, the role of the teacher shifts dramatically, becoming one which philosophically dictates that all aspects of language—reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking—be implemented as the means for critical dialectic in all classrooms across the curriculum. For
language is the filter through which all knowledge, from all disciplines, must pass. That process becomes tighter, more purposeful, when language is used to problematize, to challenge the underlying assumptions of that knowledge.

In a classical sense the role of the teacher could be identified as phronimos--the true teacher is one who, based on the shared knowledge and value of the society, creates the means for students' practical, ethical participation in the broader world (Self 130). If knowledge is socially constructed, teachers have the capability and the responsibility to facilitate both the deconstruction and the reconstruction of that knowledge. They have the responsibility to explore the potential for change that is inherent in the shifting values of a community's knowledge, and to continually turn knowledge back upon itself in order to fully mediate ethical, responsible participation in an increasingly more troubled world.

The individual teacher's critique of broader ideologies takes the form not of a passive resignation to the status quo, but an awareness of and a questioning attitude toward the larger implications of those ideological constraints. Giroux sees this very much as a positive, energizing process of self-reflection and self-criticism, one which can also be very much a process
of renewal:

If teacher educators . . . are encouraged to think about the self-formative processes that underlie their own thinking, this may also help them to reflect critically on the constraints that limit the possibilities that they are attempting to develop and implement. (Ideology 157)

The process is, essentially, a critical awakening to the broader realities in which one operates.

The more one can recognize the interpellating effects of dominant ideologies, and thus identify the political, social, and economic powers and forces that are relentlessly at work, the more one can free oneself from its effects. Only in this way are individuals as teachers and educators really able to exercise free will and non-dictated choice. This is particularly applicable to instruction and the classroom. Liberatory educators claim that all teaching is ideologically bound, and that teachers can be, and too often are, easily duped into being purveyors of the dominant ideology. When one recognizes this reality, then one must also necessarily realize the need for resistance education, the responsibility of which rests in the individual teacher's ability and willingness to question the totality of all dominant ideologies, even to the extent that he or she
severely, continuously, questions and tests his or her own ideological assumptions. In so doing, the teacher is thus better able to allow students to be aware of their own choices, options, and responsibilities, thereby incrementally promoting the broader transformation of society. If all teaching is ideologically bound, then using and teaching choice, responsibility, and critical awareness will enable all participants—both students and teacher—to at least begin trying to wrench the ideological from the pedagogical.

Giroux argues that "ideology must be viewed as a dialectic, [a critical dialogue] including consciousness, meaning, and material practices, and in particular including the categories of struggle and power" (Ideology 114). These areas of contestation and fields of resistance are found in the paradoxes and hypocrisies, in the contradictions and disjunctions, that are integral to the educational system. In essence, says Giroux, this teacher dialectic speaks to the existence of contradictions that are a part of every age. Its message is neither a celebration of relativity nor cynicism, but rather an acknowledgment that the search for the truth must begin by seeing beyond the false harmony between subject and society. Such "harmony" must be seen
for what it is: a piece of ideology that smoothes over the existence of those contradictions that call into question the meaning and consequence of our work as educators and the role that such work has in reproducing the inequities that mark the larger society. (Ideology 114)

It is from this process of self-understanding and self-actualization that true change and liberation in the classroom transpires.

Shor and Freire discuss the effects on pedagogy and classroom procedures of such a realization. In A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education, they maintain that when individual teachers come to grips with the constraints under which they work, the character of the teacher in the classroom necessarily shifts from capitalist authoritarian to one of liberated authority (93). Such a shift is radical--dangerous for some, treacherous for many--for it necessitates the relinquishing of control, of efficiency, of silence, of knowledge dispensing, of passive participation on the part of students.

This critical shift connotes a myriad of ideas, as well as numerous responsibilities and possibilities, and involves a renewal and revitalization of conditions and practices. For liberated teaching engenders openness,
question raising, and ingenuousness, and requires the creation of conditions wherein students become active, critical participants in the construction of their education, rather than passively having that education constructed for them.

2. Self-awareness and critical praxis:

The voices for this new, critical literacy, and for radical, liberating pedagogy, are sounding forth forcefully; if one listens carefully to them, one can find freedom in the realities of teaching and in the discourse of possibility, and can thereby construct his or her own critical praxis of theory and knowledge and teaching—what Giroux calls a "comprehensive critical theory of education" (*Ideology* 63).

Giroux asserts the "need for curriculum theorists and other educators to reexamine the most basic assumptions and values that guide their work" (*Ideology* 123)—those personal pedagogies that are laced with preconceived notions of class, gender, race, and social relations, of which such things as literacy and power acquisition and ideological consolidation are an integral part. Berlin calls for a "social-epistemic rhetoric [which] offers an explicit critique of economic, political, and social arrangements" ("Rhetoric" 490). Ann Berthoff, in asking
if true teaching and learning are still possible, says, "Yes--if [they are] conceived as dialogic action in classrooms which are philosophic laboratories for the study of meaning" (9). There seem to be a growing number of dissident, enchanting voices that are calling for a radical revision of theory and practice, for a revolutionary, critical pedagogy and praxis that are at once both individual and universal.

Such a critical pedagogy of resistance necessarily provides a strong rationale and foundation for liberatory learning and teaching. Teachers need no longer be duped into complicity, into becoming agents of oppressive social orders. Rather, teachers can free themselves from such agency and roam inquisitively through what Giroux identifies as the vast terrains of contestation and fields of resistance. Teachers must be liberated to teach, and in so doing learn and relearn and relearn again, that the vast minerals of knowledge and truth are composites of the rich soil of those fields. They must be freed to teach, and at once learn and relearn and relearn again, that within those unexplored fields, just as there are the sign posts and the boundary markers and the land mines and the trip-flares and the sharpened barbed wire of larger social orders, there are also the subtle, personal thickets of individual freedom and responsibility.
What liberatory educators have to say formulates an unavoidable imperative. Once detached from the polemics and totality of ideological dominance, and put into a strictly ontological context, what these theorists say has exciting and far-reaching implications for education in general and for teaching specifically.
Dear Colleague:

My name is John Paddison and I am an English Instructor at Yavapai College. I am writing to ask for your help in completing a research project that I am involved in.

I am presently working on my doctoral degree in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English (RCTE) at The University of Arizona. Having completed my course work, I am now in the process of writing my doctoral thesis. My dissertation will involve a close study of how textbooks and texts are selected and used in the classroom. A good part of my field work will be ethnographic studies of different English classrooms, at different levels of education. Therefore, I am trying to enlist participants and gather as much preliminary information as possible before completing the actual study.

In light of this, I was wondering if I could impose on you to take a few moments to fill out the attached questionnaire and return it to me. I would be very grateful for any and all information that you can provide, and I will be more than happy to share the results of this study with you after it is finished.

Thanks in advance for your help!

John Paddison
English Instructor
Yavapai College
APPENDIX A--Continued

PARTICIPANT CONTACT LETTER/BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

___ No, I am not able to participate in your research project.

___ Yes, I would be willing to participate in your research project.

NAME:

SCHOOL:

TELEPHONE NUMBER:

BEST TIME TO PHONE:

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:

YEARS OF TEACHING:

AREA(S) OF ENGLISH INTEREST/SPECIALIZATION:

CLASSES PRESENTLY BEING TAUGHT:
APPENDIX B

FIELD STUDY--TEACHER VERSION

NAME_________ Course_________

1. What texts are used in this course?

2. What is the rationale for your choice of texts?

3. Have you changed the texts for the course in the past two to five years? If so, why and how?

4. What do you hope students will accomplish or gain by reading these particular texts?

5. How do students feel about these particular texts?
APPENDIX C

FIELD STUDY--STUDENT VERSION

NAME________________________ Course________________________

1. What texts are used in this course?

2. Why do you think that these texts were chosen for this class?

3. What did you accomplish or gain by reading these particular texts?

4. How do you feel about these particular texts? What do they tell you about the world that you live in?
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