Critiquing Critical Pedagogy: A Multidisciplinary Theoretical Inquiry

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation posits that while critical pedagogy reflects composition studies’s understanding of how students learn to write in significant ways, it is also characterized by several limitations that can undermine its efficacy. Essentially, critical pedagogy does not comprehensively address the need to provide scaffolding from more traditional pedagogies, the influence of peer relationships on student engagement/agency, the rejection of empowerment through engagement with disciplinary discourses, and the tendency of political issues to favor the instructor’s knowledgebase over students’, to the point of hindering student-centered learning.

In order to form a theoretical response to these limitations in critical composition pedagogy, this dissertation examines scholarship in critical pedagogy, other pedagogical traditions and models, cognitive psychology, and rhetoric and composition. Chapter 2 argues that critical composition instructors should structure their course around solicitations of student experiential knowledge and offer scaffolded practice for students’ making meaningful choices through initially providing structured choices. Chapter 3 reviews the significance of cognitive psychology research on young adult neurocognitive development, specifically in terms of scaffolding critical pedagogical concepts and responsibilities for students, as well as cultivating strong, mutually agentic peer relationships. Chapter 4 argues that critical composition instructors can help students cultivate agency and critical engagement through textual relationships and disciplinary discourses by drawing on both classical and modern rhetorical scholarship, with the enthymeme in particular as a potentially valuable rhetorical tool for multidisciplinary discourse analysis. Chapter 5 reviews the limitations of critical pedagogy that I have
identified, and also what a general response to these limitations should look like in practice. I then discuss a pedagogical model I designed around these limitations and responses. I review and reflect on what aspects of my pedagogy worked well and what did not, possible reasons for why certain elements did not work in both my practice and theorizing, and how those elements could be addressed in subsequent theorizing and practice.
DEDICATION

To my loving wife Jennifer and my parents Michael and Margaret, for the many ways in which they have shown their love and support for me, my education, and my journey as a teacher-scholar.
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Preface

This dissertation grew out of an attempt to reconcile several of my interests in the field of rhetoric and composition, as well as several influential research opportunities I pursued during my doctoral program.

Since I was first introduced to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I have been fascinated with critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy’s discussion of the civic nature of education, its critique of power structures, and the methods it employs to engage students in their learning processes all resonate with me, and inspired me to attempt to incorporate them into my teaching. As a new instructor, however, I gained a deeper appreciation of the risks that critical pedagogues such as Shor take in negotiating course policies, as well as the potential pitfalls in engaging one’s students politically. This is particularly true in terms of holding myself accountable for my political biases and discussing issues with students who either held different views or were not as familiar/versed in them (or sometimes both).

I also found that students who are more accustomed to traditional, overtly structured pedagogies can sometimes interpret components of critical pedagogy (e.g. negotiating course policies and assignments) as laziness on the instructor’s part, and may not see overt instruction/guidelines as an instructor’s imposing authority on them, but rather implicitly trust that the instructor knows what she is doing and they should comply. These observations formed the impetus of my examination of critical pedagogy.

Additionally, having worked as a writing consultant for a number of years, I am well acquainted with scholarship in Writing in the Disciplines (WID), which focuses on composition’s potential for interdisciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, in both my
years as a writing consultant in Houston and a composition instructor in Reno, I have worked with a number of students who are immigrants and/or first generation college students. Students from these backgrounds tend to view the value of higher education in terms of its leading to a successful career. While this runs counter to critical pedagogy’s view of education, it also seems wrong for instructors to dismiss this viewpoint out of hand (particularly in the interest of student agency and student-centered learning). As a result, I became interested in whether the professionalization and civic aspects of education can be synthesized.

As I was researching and experimenting with critical pedagogy and WID in my teaching, I was also conducting research in cognitive psychology as part of a project with Dr. Macauley. This research focused primarily on young adult neurocognitive development, and how different environmental factors and relationships can influence adolescent and young adult thinking. I linked this with my concerns about scaffolding critical pedagogy for students familiar with more traditional learning environments.

Finally, in order to synthesize these research interests, I came up with the idea of an empathy-based pedagogy. Empathy entails attempting to actively engage with and immerse oneself in different points of view, which I characterized as analogous to critical pedagogy’s emphasis on critical dialogue and student-centered learning, WID’s emphasis on adapting composition concepts to the discourses of other fields, and first-year composition instructors’ potential to positively affect young adult neurocognitive development. I presented facets of this research at several conferences for other disciplines, such as design, climatology, and urban planning. My experiences at these conferences and the scholars I met further convinced me of the potential value of
pursuing these research threads and attempting to synthesize them with one another. Ultimately, (as is reflected in this project) these interests and experiences, in tandem with one another, developed the trajectory of my goals as a researcher and teacher in this project.
Chapter 1: Critical Pedagogy in Composition Studies

Introduction

As a first-year composition instructor participating as a writing specialist attached to an applied sciences department, I experienced firsthand the challenges that misconceptions about composition pose toward its collaboration with other fields. These misconceptions arose in the conversations I shared with both faculty and students. Among my conversations with faculty, a common refrain was that their primary interest was teaching content, i.e. pure disciplinary knowledge, but that they were forced to focus on writing since their students had not mastered the skills first-year composition was “supposed” to teach them. As a result, while faculty were receptive to my expertise and supportive of my efforts, there was a tendency to regard those efforts in terms of ensuring students mastered the writing skills they wanted them to have prior to entering their classrooms—what I refer to as a “cure” conception of first-year composition’s purpose. I found it difficult, in turn, to successfully communicate that evaluating a writer’s skill level cannot be divorced from audience and discursive context in favor of a homogeneous, abstract standard.

There are several problematic implications within the conception of first-year composition as a “cure” for unsatisfactory student writing. First, this conception implies a one-time application: the instructor somehow teaches a writing skill to students, and thereafter they are able to demonstrate/replicate that skill in any and all writing situations without further assistance. This completely ignores, however, the dynamic nature of rhetorical elements within a discourse, including the way discourse and genre conventions are interpreted and constructed by participants. Second, regarding first-year
composition as a “cure” for unsatisfactory student writing simultaneously subordinates the students to me as an instructor, and also me as a compositionist to other disciplines.

Both relational paradigms reflect a more traditional view of education, in which one party possesses all valuable knowledge that the other is meant to absorb and operate within, not to engage with and question reciprocally. My experience, however, did not characterize the reality of either relational paradigm. As an outsider to the field, I relied on both students and faculty for an understanding of their field’s discourse conventions. Without their insights on these conventions, I could not have provided effective guidance on adapting composition concepts and techniques to these specific contexts.

My reflections on these discussions led me to reexamine critical composition pedagogy, which emphasizes cross-contextual application. As the term implies, cross-contextual application refers to students’ ability to appropriate course concepts for their own purposes and adapt them to rhetorical contexts outside of the classroom. In particular, first-year composition curricula often revolves around generic but adaptable assignments and exercises designed to isolate specific but universal parts of the composing process. This is based in part on the premise that these parts of the composing process can be found in most if not all rhetorical situations, so that students can then learn to apply these skills in other contexts. However, since the majority of the students and faculty I worked with did not feel that student writing reflected sufficient preparation in first-year composition courses, I argue that it is necessary to reevaluate the pedagogical approaches critical composition instructors use to teach these skills, and combine them with scholarship in other fields related to how students learn best. This
project and its theoretical inquiry are based on my exploration of this argument and attempt to reevaluate these pedagogical approaches.

**Critical Pedagogy: Strengths and Limitations**

Critical pedagogy offers a great deal of valuable insight for reevaluating first-year composition pedagogy in terms of promoting students’ empowerment and cross-contextual writing abilities. Indeed, critical pedagogy links these two concepts on the premise that student empowerment through cross-contextual application ensures that students should be co-creators of course materials, content, and trajectory. In other words, a critical learning environment is characterized largely by students’ ability to apply course concepts in ways that are beneficial and relevant to their own goals, not just the instructor’s.

Critical dialogue, another essential component of critical pedagogy, also facilitates instructors’ and students’ exploration of the power structures within discourses, as well as problem-posing strategies for engaging with them. By articulating the conventions, customs, and practices of institutions in questions and answers, the relational dynamics of power structures are rendered concrete and transparent for students. This concretization and transparency, in turn, enables students to think critically about the ramifications of these dynamics and how they might be altered. Similarly, critical pedagogy’s emphasis on student-centered learning and student problem-posing reflects the necessity of collaboration between first-year composition students and instructors. This collaboration provides a more realistic means of developing students’ abilities to apply composition skills in discursive contexts more
relevant to their interests and goals, both through helping students to consider their interests and goals through writing and providing the instructor with student input.

Additionally, as part of the university’s institutional and interdisciplinary culture, first-year composition instructors are expected to introduce students to academic discourse (and by proxy, academic culture) and then teach them how to engage in it. Composition studies has long argued that the connection between thinking and writing, a central focus of composition, is where learning occurs; thus, composition has long been considered an essential feature of college training.\footnote{Berlin, James A. \textit{Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985}. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987. Print.} Similar to critical pedagogy’s emphasis on student-centered learning, composition instructors have also traditionally been expected to anticipate and incorporate students’ experiential backgrounds into their pedagogy. This incorporation is meant to ensure that composition retains its relevance and utility in the “real world”; especially as the “real world” changes\footnote{Ibid.}. In other words, college composition instructors are encouraged to teach general writing skills and concepts specifically in terms of students’ growth. Student growth, in turn, refers to students’ ability to think critically about texts, as well as their ability to cross-contextually apply writing concepts in accordance with their interests and goals. For this reason, critical pedagogues tend to situate student engagement in terms of students’ knowledge-bases in relation to socioeconomic and political issues, for the purpose of critiquing the power structures relevant to students’ lives and experiences--power structures such as academic discourse.


\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
This situatedness, however, also has the potential to undermine critical pedagogy’s focus on student engagement. Despite the best intentions of critical pedagogues, political and socioeconomic issues have just as much potential to be more reflective of instructors’ interests and knowledge-bases than the students’; nor do classroom discussions of these issues mitigate the instructor’s authority in the classroom, and thus students’ potential reluctance to disagree with the instructor for the sake of critical dialogue. In other words, while an emphasis on civics can provide a means for students to cross-contextualize their experiences with larger communities and power structures, an overly civic focus also has the potential to overly reflect the instructor’s values and knowledge-base, and thus correspondingly undermine student engagement.

Operationally, I define student engagement as students’ active participation and investment in coursework and course outcomes. This active participation and investment, in turn, derives from students having meaningful input in course design and how course concepts are applied in relation to their personal goals. Student engagement also entails that students find value in providing this input. While this definition reflects critical pedagogy’s basic tenet of student-centered learning, it says nothing beyond the importance of student choice about what discourses and subjects are most conducive to student-centered learning and engagement. In contrast to critical pedagogy’s understanding of student engagement, I argue that first-year composition implicitly links student engagement with learning to participate in academic discourse. I base my argument on the premise that an understanding of fundamental writing concepts and discursive conventions is essential to students’ ability to appropriate and critique them. This is evidenced by the recurring expectation among expert participants in various
genres and discourses that students demonstrate an understanding of genre and discourse conventions by conforming to them, as was the case with the applied sciences faculty with whom I worked. In other words, students’ critiques of power structures must be rooted in an understanding of the fundamental components and discursive conventions of these structures, and this understanding is best demonstrated through adhering to and replicating them. While critical pedagogy rightly asserts that student growth and engagement must transcend such adherence and replication, it does not sufficiently acknowledge how these practices can form the basis of students’ informed and nuanced critiques of these power structures.

As a field, composition studies has several characteristics that make it well-suited for examining and attempting to address these limitations in critical pedagogy. These characteristics include its general knowledge of the writing process; the disciplinary and experiential diversity of its classrooms; composition instructors’ ability to collaborate both with their students and expert participants in other writing contexts; last, an emphasis on relationships in both the community of the classroom and larger external communities. Ultimately, forming a potentially more effective critical composition pedagogy necessitates a review of critical pedagogy’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to how students learn and engage through writing. Important strengths of critical pedagogy include:

1. **Promoting awareness of teacher authority through course design and course materials.** Introducing students to exercises such as critical dialogue and problem-posing often serves to render the instructor’s influence on the classroom
environment transparent, thus increasing students’ awareness of potential opportunities to engage with the course and adapt course concepts.

2. **Revealing the importance of student engagement in informing instructors’ teaching.** When students have opportunities to provide input on course design and feedback on classroom exercises, instructors gain valuable insight into their practice, how course concepts can be adapted across contexts, and what potential adjustments can be made to improve the course.

3. **Illustrating connections between engagement, agency/empowerment, and the ability to provide input on the course through meaningful decision making.** Critical pedagogy posits that the more opportunities students have to influence the course design and topics, the more investment they have in their own learning process. It also posits that seeing their suggestions taken seriously by the instructor through responsive enactment increases students’ confidence and willingness to engage more critically and creatively.

4. **Encouraging student analysis of institutions and power structures.** Focusing directly on power structures helps students contextualize their own knowledge-bases and provides opportunities for student problem-posing and critical dialogue.

5. **Grounding the value of course concepts in terms of their potential for application in larger, unfamiliar contexts.** This is particularly important in that students’ abilities to cross-contextually apply course concepts is a practical demonstration of their empowerment, critical thinking, and mastery of course content independent of the instructor.
As promising and potentially valuable as these strengths are, however, they are undermined by several significant limitations in traditional applications of critical pedagogy, some of which I have discussed previously:

1. **Not sufficiently addressing whether students are prepared for the responsibilities that critical pedagogy entails, and the problems that can arise from this.** Critical pedagogy inherently depends on student engagement to function properly. However, when students’ experiences with formal education are largely characterized by more traditional pedagogies and the passive roles they prescribe to students, their inclination will likely be to continue their passivity. Students unaccustomed to critical pedagogy could even potentially interpret instructors’ attempts to abdicate authority as laziness or a lack of preparation, or otherwise mistrust the instructor’s sincerity in soliciting student input.

2. **Inherently casting the instructor’s authority in the classroom as solely the product of position, and therefore problematic.** Critical pedagogy tends to regard the instructor’s authority in the classroom solely as a liability to effectively practicing critical pedagogy. In other words, the instructor’s authority is an obstacle the instructor must constantly be aware of and encourage students to challenge, and nothing more. This conception frames the instructor’s authority in terms of their institutional and traditional power. For the most part, however, it does not include the instructor’s authority based on their knowledge and expertise relative to the students’. I argue that this aspect of the instructor’s authority has the potential to be valuable in co-creating a critical learning environment,
specifically as a scaffolding device. In education, scaffolding refers to the practice of breaking down larger assignments/concepts into more manageable components for students. For students unaccustomed to critical pedagogy, then, instructors can offer their expertise as a means of providing support/structure when students need it, without dictating the choices students make. However, critical pedagogues can also potentially undermine the integrity of a critical learning environment with their expertise, as the next limitation examines.

3. **Being overly political and/or favoring the teacher’s knowledge-base, to the point of undermining student-centered learning and student engagement.**

Critiquing power structures in the context of specific political and socioeconomic issues is likely to favor the instructor’s knowledge-base over the students’, which inadvertently reaffirms the centrality of the instructor’s authority. Students are also naturally attuned to instructors’ opinions on these issues when they are discussed in class, which can discourage students from engaging when disagreements arise in discussion. This also encourages students to defer to the instructor rather than offer and explore their own contributions, and doubt the sincerity of instructors’ attempts to solicit student feedback.

4. **Focusing too much on empowerment in terms of teacher-student relationships while ignoring the impact of peer and textual/discursive relationships on student agency and empowerment.** The dichotomy of teacher and student often renders the latter as a monolithic entity in the classroom in opposition to the instructor’s authority. A monolithic conception of students, in turn, foregrounds the instructor’s conception of students in terms of their own
perspective and the relationships they have with students. Since critical dialogue is an integral part of students’ cultivation of agency, it follows that peers can have a potentially significant impact on students’ willingness to engage, explore, and assert their knowledge-bases in the classroom independent of the instructor.

5. **Rejecting the idea that students can be empowered through mastering discourse conventions.** Critical pedagogy fails to consider the relationship between students’ mastery of discursive conventions in their chosen fields with students’ agency, engagement, ability to critique power structures, and cross-contextual problem posing. The civic and environmental issues that critical pedagogy traditionally focus on typically revolve around disciplinary communities and institutions, and it is difficult to separate the power structures of these discourses institutions from their knowledge-bases (as is the case with the instructor’s authority in the classroom). In other words, asking students to comprehensively examine and address a societal issue without examining/drawing on the discourse conventions of related fields of study is comparable to asking a jazz musician to compose an innovative piece of music without considering scales or chords.

In order to provide a more in-depth examination of the strengths and weaknesses of critical pedagogy I have identified, the remainder of this chapter will focus on a review of the scholarship and discourse of critical pedagogy. This review will link critical pedagogy’s discussion of issues such as student participation, engagement, and problem-posing to first-year critical composition. Through an analysis of scholarship from prominent critical pedagogues, it will also provide examples of the strengths and
limitations of critical pedagogy that I have posed. From there, the chapter will conclude with an outline of how subsequent chapters will pose potential solutions to each of these limitations, drawing from other pedagogical traditions and fields of study.

**Critical Pedagogy: Review**

Critical pedagogy, an educational movement of which composition studies is a part, has long debated the value of developing a pedagogy that reconciles students’ interests, knowledge-bases, and needs with teachers’ goals of preparing them for larger disciplinary and societal contexts; and, if such a pedagogy is valuable, how to do so. Generally speaking, critical pedagogy’s approach, per the Freirean tradition, has been to teach writing by framing writing assignments and projects as posed problems, with students having both the authority and responsibility for finding solutions to them. Ideally, problem-posing delegates authority in the classroom to students by making them responsible for generating class topics and then responding to them comprehensively. Problem-posing also values students’ experiential knowledge-bases and provides them opportunities to reflect on and discuss these in the classroom, for purposes the students themselves determine. Consequently, successful problem-posing requires that instructors actively solicit student insights and feedback and create opportunities for reflection. Such solicitations, in turn, are contingent on student participation and feedback.

The success of critical pedagogy’s problem-posing approach in composition thus depends on the instructor’s ability to accomplish two things:

1. The instructor must be able to effectively solicit and validate student experiences to generate course resources/texts and student writing. Freire emphasizes this in
Pedagogy of the Oppressed, arguing that students learn best and are most engaged when they are able to make meaningful choices in the classroom (48).

2. Instructors must encourage and create a space for students to reflect critically on writing assignments, their own writing, and, at times, even the course design itself. In other words, because student learning is primarily derived from student engagement, and student engagement in turn is primarily derived from students making meaningful choices in the classroom, the instructor should teach students how to make meaningful choices. Instructors can do so by providing opportunities for students to engage in problem-posing and critical dialogue. Additionally, instructors can teach students to make meaningful choices by getting them to examine the choices both they and the instructor have made as thinkers and writers, and then evaluate the outcomes.

For both of these instructor goals, however, it is essential to recognize that they are largely contingent on students’ willingness to provide the instructor with critical feedback, their willingness to reflect on and respond to the instructor’s ideas/choices, and their willingness to conceive, articulate, and refine through discussion any potential alternatives to the instructor’s ideas/choices when students do not feel engaged. Without student input, instructors cannot assess and facilitate the development of classroom relationships, which are needed to create a critically reflective and responsive environment.

Ultimately, critical pedagogy’s framework focuses on helping students achieve measurable (and often immeasurable) improvement in their ability to posit and think through problems; and, in doing so, empower students to achieve their own goals as
independent thinkers and improve our society. Composition studies in particular is well-suited to critical pedagogy’s framework because it is virtually unique among disciplines in its degree of adaptability and the variety of genres, purposes, and discourses it has evolved to navigate and address.

In discussing the strengths and limitations of critical pedagogy, Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed offers a seminal starting point. In this foundational work, Freire examines the relationships between educational systems and their corresponding societies, as well as how societal power dynamics are represented (and unfortunately replicated) between teachers and students. Primarily, Freire argues that classrooms should serve as sites for dialogue sessions between teachers and students to dissolve these hierarchies in the classroom, for the purpose of transferring this dissolution to larger contexts. However, he qualifies this by asserting that teacher-student dialogue sessions should also be conducted in a manner that reflects the organic and complex nature of these divisions (65). In other words, critical pedagogy must be cognizant of and responsive to traditional power structures in order to successfully dismantle them. To ensure this, Freire posits that classroom learning should be derived from the outside world and students’ experiences within it.

Freire contrasts this model of education with what he refers to as the “banking model.” In the banking model, teachers (whom Freire casts as representatives of the oppressor class) are regarded as the sole possessors of valuable knowledge. Said valuable knowledge must then be transmitted to the students (the oppressed class), with no contextual basis outside of the classroom. Above all, Freire emphasizes that this model casts instructors’ choices and knowledge-base as “correct” and the standard by
which students’ thoughts and efforts are measured. Naturally, this contradicts critical pedagogy’s emphasis on instructors encouraging and trusting their students to make their own decisions and value judgments. Anything less than that emphasis is anathema to praxis and the goal of liberation through education (75). Further still, the methods of the banking method imply a lack of understanding and/or valuing of student engagement in the learning process.

Freire's discussion of the importance of critical dialogue in student-teacher relationships is significant in several ways. For instructors, critical dialogue provides an opportunity to solicit and affirm the value of students’ experiential knowledge-bases, as well as an opportunity to solicit student feedback to enhance the instructor’s understanding of the limitations of their own perspective. Freire’s call for teachers to constantly reexamine their motives and excise any hierarchical thinking from their practices illustrates teachers’ responsibility for facilitating positive experiential growth in students, as well as cultivating their willingness to engage. It also demonstrates that teachers are never a neutral presence in the classroom. Teachers should not only come to recognize and appreciate the knowledge and experiences students bring to the classroom, but also come to recognize their own values and limitations as educators. These limitations can then be consciously supplemented with or addressed through critical dialogue and classroom relationships.

Freire's concept of student-centered learning also reinforces the idea that learning must be grounded in reflection and practice. As critical dialogue solicits and examines students’ interests and knowledge-bases, it also has the potential to prompt students to consider how their insights can be applied cross-contextually. Freire asserts that the
learning process must be auto-catalytic; i.e., true learning entails students liberating themselves through pursuit of their own interests and values, rather than those of the teacher. Consequently, Freire’s pedagogy frames the teacher’s role as responding to students and learning how to solicit and channel student interests and ideas into generating and critiquing course material.

Unquestionably, Freire’s pedagogy and its focus on dialogue has heavily and positively impacted subsequent scholarship in composition studies and pedagogy. However, Freire’s representation of teacher-student relationships contain simplistic, and therefore potentially problematic, assumptions. First, while the teacher’s institutional authority over students is certainly worthy of consideration, Freire has a tendency to regard the instructor almost solely as an obstacle to the students’ ability to learn and engage. This entirely ignores the possibility that the instructor’s knowledge-base could be channeled effectively in order to further students’ acclimation to engaging in a critical learning environment. Freire also does not mention the potential influence or effects peer relationships can have on critical dialogue and the classroom environment, which suggests the need for a more nuanced understanding of classroom relationships.

Second, and correspondingly, while Freire discusses the overall pedagogical strategy of problem-posing in great detail, Pedagogy of the Oppressed is less informative from a tactical standpoint due in large part to an inherent difficulty problem-posing education faces. Specifically, based on the demographics and experiences of the students and teacher, it is incredibly difficult to predict what will form the basis of teacher-student relationships in any given classroom. While the teacher’s institutional authority over students is often the prevailing power dynamic in the classroom, it is not the sole power
dynamic. In the larger contexts of professional sectors and society, hierarchical relationships are determined by a number of power dynamics, including race, class, gender, orientation, institutional/organizational rank, experience, knowledge, etc.\(^3\) It is even possible for an instructor who belongs to one or more marginalized groups to be teaching a classroom of students belonging to one or more correspondingly privileged groups. Furthermore, the prohibitive level of costs associated with a college education results in student populations that tend to disproportionately represent members of privileged demographics.

Ultimately, Freire’s depiction of critical dialogue between teachers and students is an authentic one. However, determining effective means for eliciting critical dialogue remains a question whose answer is inherently contextually-based in the interests, experiences, practices, and goals of classroom participants. Critical composition pedagogues’ first step, then, should be to solicit students’ insights and reflections on each of these, and encourage students’ further exploration of their ideas through critical reflection and dialogue.

Since *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*’s publication, scholarship on the practice of critical pedagogy has progressed significantly. Ira Shor, Freire’s collaborator and fellow critical pedagogue, has generated a great deal of scholarship on his tactical approach to executing Freire’s pedagogical strategy. His scholarship directly works with and builds on Freire’s, transferring critical pedagogy from the context of rural Brazil to American college composition classrooms. Indeed, the progression of Shor’s scholarship reveals an

evolving and increasingly sophisticated approach to forming effective, mutually responsive classroom relationships through critical pedagogy. This same progression, however, also reveals the recurring limitations in critical composition pedagogy and their potential to undermine instructors’ efforts to create a critical, student-centered learning environment.

In *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, which Freire and Shor wrote together, both critical pedagogues present their views on teaching writing in the form of a dialogue with each other, inductively drawing general principles of liberatory teaching from their teaching anecdotes. While they acknowledge the differences in their own experiences—Shor’s students were mostly working- and middle-class students in New York while Freire’s were mostly peasant- and middle-class students in Brazil—they cite many common tenets of liberatory teaching that explore the formation of productive and positive classroom relationships. Shor and Freire agree, for example, that critical dialogue is essential to rendering and checking the teacher’s authority, as well as posing problems relevant to students’ knowledge-bases and interests. Both pedagogues also agree that instructors should constantly reflect on their teaching methods and how they may inadvertently be asserting their own perspectives over those of their students. However, both Freire and Shor also assert that education is irrevocably political, and that the instructor's primary task is to establish goals for the classroom and choose content to engage/solicit student interests. (9-14). While instructors choosing content (at least initially) can be potentially valuable in terms of helping students acclimate to unfamiliar aspects of critical pedagogy, an overt emphasis on political issues may not necessarily reflect students’ interests. Additionally, even if political issues are reflective of students’ experiences, they still have
the potential to privilege the instructor’s knowledge-base over the students’, and thus re-center the classroom around the instructor’s perspective.

Shor and Freire also illustrate the risks instructors must be willing to take to encourage students to think and speak critically about course materials and practices. Such risks include admitting ignorance on certain subjects and being willing to negotiate course content with students. In particular, they emphasize that the instructor's job is to acknowledge the politics that go into their selection of course materials and structuring of assignments, and use these political principles to generate student questions rather than simply provide them with answers. However, while exploring how instructors can effectively engage with students through an open acknowledgment of their biases and choices is an important consideration of critical pedagogy, the potential detrimental effects of doing so should also be accounted for. For instance, the instructor’s acknowledgment of their biases on political issues does not alter the instructor’s authority in the classroom, nor does it necessarily entail a de-centering of the classroom towards students’ interests and knowledge-bases over the instructor’s (33-6, 45-8). Additionally, this further reinforces the notion that the instructor’s authority solely derives from an institutional basis, rather than expertise--expertise which could potentially be applied as a scaffolding asset rather than a liability to student engagement.

Consequently, I argue that shifting the focus from specific socioeconomic and political issues to the instructor’s developmental facilitation of classroom relationships, and also students’ understanding of how to engage in a critical learning environment, would further empower students and erode the kind of banking model authority both Freire and Shor indict. Such an emphasis also reflects the value their model of teaching
places on critical dialogue. In other words, instructors would not have to consider how their personal politics influence the curriculum through preselection of themes and topics as much if they focused instead on soliciting students’ interests and experiential knowledge-bases and then channeling them in contexts ultimately chosen by the students.

Shor provides further practical guidance for designing and facilitating critical learning environments for composition courses in his anthology *Freire for the Classroom: A Sourcebook for Liberatory Teaching*. In collaboration with Freire and other critical composition instructors, he explores the praxes and teaching philosophies critical pedagogues have applied in multiple teaching contexts. These critical pedagogues discuss issues such as student-generated course themes and materials, problem-posing education, and negotiating between student and teacher authority. In terms of the latter, Shor, et al., explore how negotiating can be especially useful in classes of different educational levels, student demographics, regions, and even other disciplines, including STEM (2-5).

I found several exercises and connections in Shor's anthology that reaffirm the strengths of critical pedagogy. Several articles, for instance, reaffirm the symbiotic connection between introspection (critical thinking and reflection) and interaction (critical dialogue) by linking Lev Vygotsky's and Freire's pedagogies, because the former focuses on internal individual realities and the latter on external social realities:

“These scholars [Vygotsky and Freire] intrigued us because they believe writing involves both cognitive skills and social learnings…[Vygotsky] postulates that learning to write involves the mastery of cognitive skills and the development of new social understandings…Freire maintains that the goal of a literacy program is to help students become critically conscious of the connection between their own lives and the larger society.” (*Liberatory Teaching* 88-9)
This framework reflects how students learn in both introspective and interactive contexts. It also suggests that cultivating students’ abilities to cross-contextually apply concepts they have learned is contingent on an understanding of students’ learning processes in each. Essentially, I argue that solicitations of student engagement in the learning process should factor in the connections between these contexts. Critical thinking and critical reflection form the basis of individual students’ participation in critical dialogue, and critical dialogue often has subsequent influences/effects on students’ critical thinking and reflection. An understanding of these mutually influential learning processes, therefore, could potentially lead to pedagogical strategies and classroom exercises that more effectively synthesize writing and discussion with one another, and scaffold critical pedagogical practices for students who are not as familiar with the connections between thinking, reflection, discussion, and writing.

A focus on connecting introspective and interactive learning contexts and processes can also encourage students to view engaging with larger, unfamiliar discourse communities as vehicles for agency and growth. Encouraging students to use writing to reflect on and assert the value of their experiences and interests can ultimately serve as a means for students to discern what their goals are and pose the problem of how best to progress towards them in their education. Instructors, in turn, can encourage students to align their educational progression towards future goals with pursuing the knowledge-bases of relevant discourses and writing contexts. In order to help students participate in introspective and interactive learning contexts more conscientiously, instructors should also be transparent in the purposes behind their solicitations of student feedback. As a
result, students can begin to establish a personally relevant trajectory for exploring disciplinary and professional discourses with instructor support rather than direction.

In *Empowering Education*, Shor draws from his teaching experiences subsequent to *Freire for the Classroom* to outline a pedagogical model for college composition. He expands on Freire’s description of critical dialogue, advising instructors on how to create an effective learning environment through conscientious and proactive negotiations with students on content, course structure, and policies (94-5). Shor’s pedagogy in this book further establishes teacher-student relationships as a key factor in composition course design and the generative basis for course topics and materials that promote student growth. He also reaffirms the value of student engagement and critiquing power structures through posed problems.

Despite his emphasis on classroom relationships, however, Shor freely acknowledges the obstacles (sometimes insurmountable) that he has faced in his teaching; particularly in terms of students’ lack of familiarity with critical pedagogy. For example, he identifies the conundrum of whether or not instructors should establish a predetermined structure through course policy on the first day. While students may inherently resent this as a show of force, they also often expect teachers to do so and doubt the instructor’s competence when no guidelines are pre-established. Often students are “awkwardly unsure how to behave” when instructors do not conform to traditional pedagogical norms, and prefer the familiarity and lower participatory demands of traditional pedagogy (157-8).

However, Shor does offer a set of practical guidelines for his classroom that instructors can use to navigate these tensions. These include opening the class through a
discussion of the instructor’s teaching methods and his/her preference for a dialogic, rather than lecture-based, pedagogy; issuing and negotiating learning contracts, initial problem-posed topics such as “what is good writing?” and multiple opportunities to revise papers for higher grades, supplemented by proffered tutorial sessions from the instructor (158-60). Thus, Shor ultimately provides many concrete, useful examples for how instructors could design a potentially valuable critical composition pedagogy grounded in scaffolding the responsibilities critical pedagogy places on students. He also focuses on how this scaffolding can help to cultivate student-instructor relationships, while also making an effort to address the many obstacles to doing so.

However, despite his account of the free rein he gives students, Shor's pedagogy appears to continue to be grounded in his interests and expertise in significant ways. He actively seeks to tie student interests and knowledge-bases to larger, practical societal contexts; however, these larger societal contexts are chosen by Shor, not his students. These include economic and political issues, as well as educational and democratic principles (248). Despite the contextual relevance of these issues to students’ lives, the power dynamics between teachers and students can jeopardize students’ comfort and trust in terms of engaging them in class through critical dialogue. While Shor’s positions on such issues are unquestionably well-informed, even students who have direct knowledge and experience with these issues may be unduly influenced and intimidated by his stances, given his position of authority in the classroom. For students who hold opposing viewpoints, Shor’s articulation of his opinions, however mindful and implicit, could even be alienating or counterproductive.
Consequently, I argue that it is essential for teachers to be aware of their classroom authority and primarily focus on helping students identify and explore the discourses and writing contexts that they feel best reflect and expand on their interests, both personal and societal, rather than specific societal issues the instructor feels should matter to them. Being in a subordinate position, students are often sensitive to their teachers’ predilections and opinions to an extent that they rarely disclose. Focusing on choosing discourses and writing contexts where course concepts can be applied can help instructors teach students how to make meaningful choices in the classroom without commandeering the trajectory of those choices.

Shor’s emphasis on political issues is ultimately reflective of his own intentions, which revolve around encouraging his students to become activists, with less emphasis on students’ personal and disciplinary interests and grounding student collaboration on this synthesis: “Critical-democratic teachers hope to lower student resistance by drawing on the students’ interests and by basing the curriculum in their… understandings… [however] Education should not be preoccupied with training for narrow job skills” (143). This ignores the possibility that disciplinary skill-sets and knowledge-bases can enhance students’ ability to pursue their interests and assumes that personal interests and goals are mutually exclusive rather than mutually enhancing. Shor’s dichotomy between the two also assumes that the instructor chooses the specific “narrow job skills” students focus on and not the students themselves (143).

In his next book project, When Students Have Power, Shor addresses the difficulty of negotiating teacher and student authority on democratic, mutually responsive terms. He asserts that teachers should use student knowledge and interests (as reflected
in student writing) to identify emergent themes/threads of discussion and "problem-posed" to elicit more in-depth inquiries from students. While Shor attempts to introduce his students to activism by exposing them to alternative media (and viewpoints in opposition to mainstream American media), he emphasizes the importance of allowing students to draw their own conclusions—"student-centered, teacher-directed" (85). Shor recounts his interpretation of several of his formative pedagogical experiences and how they prompted him to change his understanding and efforts to combat relational inequalities in the classroom that might interfere with student learning.

Among the most important concepts and principles Shor first developed in his teaching are the following: protest rights for students, which entail allowing them to critique class as it is happening; the instructor's responsibility to respond to student feedback and adjust curriculum accordingly; last, the formation of an after-class discussion group, which allows students to critique the teacher and reflect on what was successful and what went wrong in class. However, despite feeling that his course was a success and that he grew as a teacher, Shor constantly emphasizes the difficulty and discomfort teachers go through (and that he went through) when they experiment with relinquishing their authority for the sake of being responsive to students. He insists that this discomfort is essential for teachers to become aware of their traditional, undemocratic authority. Citing Dewey, he argues that instructors should also work to recognize and undermine power dynamics as they appear in the very structure of the classroom, inviting students to participate in democratic collaboration (33). Shor also notes that teachers must be patient and willing to experiment in the face of failure, as both students and teachers are likely more accustomed to traditional, more passive forms
of schooling (21). Ultimately, Shor casts the primary duty of the instructor as being solicitous of and facilitative to students’ interests, and being responsive to student feedback and classroom contributions (199-201).

In addition, Shor raises important considerations for critical composition instructors regarding the difficulties of becoming aware of one’s own biases and effectively addressing them in responses to student feedback. In *When Students Have Power*, he focuses in particular on the sacrifices involved with yielding authority for the sake of more productive and responsive teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, the kind of assignment and discussion frameworks Shor advocates are based on composition instructors’ anticipation of students’ needs, as well as how to identify/respond to them as the course progresses. For example, Shor counterbalances his encouragement of student empowerment and agency with actively preventing students being idle and requiring that their writing reflect a substantive effort to contribute to the course (99). In other words, students can choose not to be engaged in the course, but they cannot choose to be idle. Students are also responsible, at least in part, for finding an alternative means to be engaged in the course when the instructor provides students with such opportunities. This is significant in that it delineates the shared responsibility students have in course outcomes and the choices they make in a critical classroom.

It is important to note, however, that Shor’s account of his classroom is again confined to his own perspective, not his students’. “Student-centered, teacher-directed,” although a natural-sounding division of labor in the classroom, belies the potential for the latter component to compromise the former. In other words, how does the teacher direct the trajectory of the course and execution of assignments while simultaneously honoring
students as the originators and impetus for course design and topics? How can composition instructors facilitate their students’ transitions from more familiar, traditional pedagogies towards the problem-posing and dialogic emphases of critical pedagogy without complete appropriation of course content and the trajectory of cross-contextual applications? More daunting still, how can composition instructors extricate themselves from their traditional authority and engage in democratic negotiation with their students? Finally, how can students apply what they have learned in critical classrooms when they again encounter more traditional courses? These are all questions that teachers, including myself, have attempted to address in their pedagogies.

bell hooks examines some of the questions that Shor’s scholarship and pedagogy raise. Specifically, she looks at how critical pedagogy attempts to confront social tensions in the classroom that can inhibit student growth and the formation of classroom relationships. Beyond the classroom, hooks also examines these social tensions in the contexts of academia and society at large. Although hooks cites *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as a key and influential text in her scholarship, her focus on social tensions between students in the classroom distinguishes her examination of critical pedagogy from Freire’s and Shor’s. Unlike hooks, Freire and Shor tend to characterize students as a homogeneous, monolithic entity in a dichotomous relationship with the instructor. This characterization does not account for the multiplicity of relational dynamics in the classroom, and is effectively grounded in a totalizing preconception of the students.

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which runs counter to critical pedagogy’s goal of empowering students. Building on the work of these scholars--Freire in particular--hooks examines the following in her pedagogy:

1. The nature of disagreement in the academy;
2. How to situate experiential learning within academic theory (37);
3. The intersectionality between issues of race, class, and gender (39);
4. The role of radical material versus the conduct/ethos of the professor in creating an ideal learning environment (8);
5. How to acknowledge and reconcile the perspectives of students from different backgrounds without legitimating or overtly deriding any one particular perspective (11-17, 30).

Essentially, hooks’ work illustrates an often overlooked aspect of student growth in the formation of a critical learning environment: cultivating strong peer relationships. While these concepts carry connotations of a willingness and even an enhanced capacity for effectively incorporating and negotiating with student perspectives—as well as resulting in an increase in the instructor’s ability to understand their own perspective—they do not necessarily denote the challenges of doing so. In other words, as hooks advocates, a critical composition pedagogy that is truly responsive to students should acknowledge and address these harsh realities. Attempting to understand others, though noble, is not always successful or ingenuous, and thus it is important for instructors to be able to assess their attempts to do so and reflect on the outcomes, both positive and negative. In particular, composition instructors who attempt to form democratic
classroom relationships must not only account for differences between students’ and instructors’ *a priori* knowledge-bases, but also anticipate and encourage student growth as learners along different trajectories from the instructor’s. Even for well-intentioned educators, it is all too easy to preconceive students’ successful achievement of learning outcomes as resulting in a further alignment of their thinking with the instructors’; i.e., the very banking or traditional pedagogy these scholars warn against.

It is precisely this danger of inadvertently perpetuating a banking pedagogy that suggests the potential value of a multidisciplinary focus in critical pedagogy. Without student reflection and feedback, instructors are forced to rely on their own preconceptions of first-year composition students. Conversely, the more reflection and feedback they receive from students, the more instructors can foreground course materials, discussions, and assignments in a manner truly responsive to their students. A focus on students’ choosing to engage with specific disciplinary discourses in the composition classroom, therefore, could help to ensure that course materials are directly relevant to students’ interests, and help to prevent instructors’ framing student growth in terms of the instructor’s knowledge-base and desired outcomes.

Instructors in critical composition pedagogy must openly acknowledge how their authority manifests in their expertise as well as their institutional status. Like Shor and Freire, hooks points out that an effective teacher must adapt to the interests and demographics of a particular classroom, even if this compromises their traditional authority, as manifested in both instructor behavior and preconceptions of learning outcomes. Instructors can democratically adapt to students by soliciting their experiences to design a curriculum that teaches writing based on examining and reinforcing the
relational bonds that contribute to a more effective critical learning environment. Instructors can also use this knowledge in working towards helping students develop strong peer relationships, which in turn could promote students’ engagement.

hooks’s scholarship in Transgress also discusses the potential cross-contextual applications of student interests and experiences to larger social and environmental justice issues. These connections present a potentially valuable opportunity to use larger societal issues as posed problems that help students reconcile personal interests and experiences with their goals and the resources offered by different disciplinary knowledge-bases. Furthermore, the latter focus in particular can serve as a means to prevent the instructor’s perspective from dominating student exploration of societal issues, and also a means to foreground students’ ability to choose the issue(s) they explore. In this capacity, a focus on professionalization rather than directly on politics or ideology can promote student engagement and student-centered cross-contextual applications of course concepts.

Additionally, critical composition pedagogy often does not anticipate students’ lack of familiarity with cross-contextually applying their interests and knowledge-bases. Lindquist grapples with this problem by positing that teachers can help students productively navigate texts with which they fail to relate through affectively demonstrating their own relationships with course texts. For example, Lindquist notes in her classroom that several of her students who identified as working-class took issue with the way working-class people were portrayed in some of the assigned academic readings. In dealing with this divergence of perspectives, Lindquist implies that critical pedagogy favors rational understanding at the expense of emotional understanding, which she
claims to be equally if not more important for engaging with political issues in the classroom, as well as for students to form an understanding of a text through personal connection. Her proposed teaching strategy suggests that students’ emotional stances on issues can also inform instructors’ arrangement and presentation of their own stances. This reflects critical pedagogy’s emphasis on cultivating this awareness through critical dialogue.

The potential limitations of this strategy become apparent, however, when Lindquist further recommends that teachers should be willing to overtly display their emotional stance on issues when they feel strongly about a text covered in class. Specifically, Lindquist asserts that when instructors articulate their emotional understanding of an issue, it models for students the importance of expressing and reflecting on how personal interests and experiences can align meaningfully with course concepts and topics. Additionally, she argues that by demonstrating their stances on issues, teachers make themselves vulnerable in a way that encourages students to express their own views in kind, which in turn promotes classroom relationships (206-7). While this can be a valuable pedagogical strategy in that it attempts to acknowledge the value of students’ knowledge-bases, and encourages students to cross-contextually apply course concepts, I argue that instructors’ displays of emotional stances also have the potential to alienate students. I base my argument in part on the premise that such displays are also likely to reinforce the instructor’s authority, in that the instructor is displaying a strong opinion on a subject, on which students may either be unfamiliar or disagree with the instructor. Without focusing on their own mental processes of self-correction and criticism, instructors’ emotional displays of their opinions run the risk of becoming mere
expressions of authority in that they only share the “finished products” of their thought processes. Furthermore, for students who are not accustomed to critical pedagogy’s conception of education as political, instructors’ overt displays of political opinions can be perceived as unprofessional, irrelevant, or even detrimental.

Similar to hooks, Lindquist’s pedagogy emphasizes the power of drawing on student experiences to create an engaging and authentic learning environment that embodies the values of critical pedagogy. She concludes her classroom analysis by mentioning the potential difficulties of institutional relationships and other classroom logistics that might complicate her affective critical pedagogy. However, her methods also raise some important questions: how can critical pedagogues reveal their thoughts effectively when they still possess institutional authority? How does the teacher’s acknowledgment of bias facilitate students’ critical reflection processes? How do teachers clearly establish their opinions as separate from the curriculum and assignments for their students, in a way that the students trust? Is it possible for an instructor to showcase her thought process as a model for students while simultaneously claiming that model encourages students not to be influenced by it? Teachers who are not mindful of their classroom authority can potentially discourage students who perceive the instructor’s ethos as traditionally based despite the instructor’s attempt to construct a critical ethos.⁵

Nevertheless, Lindquist’s critical pedagogy reflects the necessity for critical composition instructors to be mindful of their bias in terms of its potential to positively or

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negatively impact student growth through classroom relationships. It also provides an important reminder for instructors to acknowledge that students are often quick to recognize their teachers’ biases and that these biases will almost inevitably affect the way students express themselves and relate to others in the course. Ultimately, the limitations of Lindquist’s pedagogy, as well as those of other critical pedagogues, inform my arguments that critical composition pedagogy has the potential to be enhanced by ideas from other fields and pedagogical traditions. These specific ideas include 1) a focus on a relational understanding of how classroom interactions and students’ critical thinking/reflections influence one another, 2) a focus on young adult neurocognitive development to form this understanding, and 3) a focus on discursive and textual analysis to help students exert agency through choosing cross-contextual applications meaningful to their interests and goals.

Criticisms of Critical Pedagogy and a Potential Response

My theorizing on how critical pedagogy’s limitations can potentially be addressed also derives not just from scholarship in critical pedagogy, but also criticism of this scholarship as well. Chris Wilkey offers an apt and useful critique of classroom relationships in critical pedagogy by challenging the assumption that first-year composition can “actually operate as a site for progressive social change” (3). He attributes this in part to the inherent social privilege most university students possess in relation to the general public. Wilkey also criticizes academia’s tendency to conflate teaching students how to critique hierarchical power dynamics in discourses with equipping students to use this understanding to challenge these dynamics as activists
outside of the classroom (3). In other words, critical pedagogy, according to Wilkey, has a tendency to make an academic exercise out of hierarchy and oppression that ultimately perpetuates the power dynamics between the student, instructor, and academy. Such academic exercises are anathema to critical pedagogy’s aims in that they elide the necessity of grounding student writing and thinking in the practical discourses of democratic activism, where academics must negotiate and compose in cooperation with non-academic community members and organizations, in a manner that moves from mere critique into action (5-7).

Wilkey’s critique of critical pedagogy suggests that cross-contextual application cannot be taught within a single discursive context. This suggestion aligns with the idea of incorporating a cross-disciplinary focus into critical pedagogy. Wilkey also argues that a critical composition pedagogy that does not extend beyond academic critique only serves to further the democratic image of the English Department rather than actual democracy:

“Insofar as composition courses have traditionally encouraged critical engagement with public culture, they have done so primarily in ways that would encourage students to engage in academic analyses and rhetorical forms keeping the hierarchy between the academy and the public firmly in place.” (9)

Consequently, it is important for critical pedagogues to actively link student engagement with course concepts to posing problems related to cross-contextual application. In this capacity, students could potentially learn to form productive relationships with others both within and without the university.

Wilkey attributes these limitations of critical pedagogy in part to the fact that a focus on academic discourse ultimately favors the instructor’s knowledge-base--and thus
the instructor’s authority—in the classroom, while also negating students’ ability to co-
create the learning environment by applying their knowledge-bases. Wilkey identifies 
these tendencies in Shor’s scholarship, arguing that while Shor explicitly strives to 
ground critical thinking in terms of creating positive social change, he does so out of a 
misconception that “transforming students’ individual insights into social injustices” is a 
sufficient means to achieve this grounding (13). Wilkey also argues that critical 
pedagogy’s conception of the teacher as a liberator who offers the red pill to their non-
critical thinking students as problematic: “Student perspectives are denied as ideological 
constructs, a false consciousness to be removed by the teacher” (13). This contradicts 
hooks’s and Lindquist’s position that instructors and students must negotiate meaning 
and expertise in effective classroom relationships. Furthermore, the liberator conception 
of the instructor also negates the potential value of peer relationships in cultivating 
student engagement and agency, not just teacher-student relationships.

Wilkey expands further on the significant dilemma posed for classroom 
relationships in critical pedagogy:

[If] negotiating authoritative knowledge through literacy exchanges between 
teacher and student provides the best opportunity for establishing a democratic 
environment...[then] the inherent asymmetrical power relations between teachers 
and students have made it extremely difficult for proponents of critical pedagogy 
to advance convincing arguments that student transformation is really possible 
through the negotiation of literacy practices between teacher and student. (14)

This argument suggests the value of teaching students critical thinking in cross-
contextual applications outside of the instructor’s knowledge-base. Placing an emphasis 
on students’ disciplinary trajectories, established and guided by students’ choices in terms 
of exploring said trajectories and connecting them to their personal interests, could help
to prevent the instructor’s ideology from undermining students’ ability to engage through making meaningful choices in the classroom.

Simultaneously, however, efforts to shift the context of assignments and curriculum in favor of students’ knowledge-bases must also incorporate opportunities for students to critique and negotiate these efforts. It is important for critical composition instructors to be cognizant of the fact that most students accustomed to traditional pedagogies are not likely to take the initiative (or feel welcome) to challenge the decisions an instructor makes, however well-intentioned those decisions are. Therefore, while it is ultimately students’ responsibility to take advantage of opportunities to provide feedback on assignments and curriculum, instructors should not only provide these opportunities, but make sure that students are explicitly aware of them. There are multiple potential strategies for doing so. For example, instructors can include a negotiation clause in assignment sheets that outlines steps students can take to negotiate new assignment trajectories or prompts. Instructors can also incorporate written reflections into larger assignments as students progress through them, in order to acquire insight on how students regard and struggle with the work they are doing. In short, critical composition instructors should provide both a contextual scaffold for academic discourse and an agentic scaffold for students to challenge, critique, and subsequently inform instructors’ choices.

Gibson offers a potential strategy for designing scaffolding for students unaccustomed to critical pedagogy. In a practical attempt to facilitate student growth by negotiating course policies while honoring students’ interests and a priori experiential knowledge-bases regarding sociological issues, she allows her students to choose her
course’s primary objectives, as well as the materials and due dates through which
students would fulfill said objectives (all within predetermined options). Unlike Shor’s
course negotiations, however, Gibson breaks these choices down into smaller, structured
components, providing a guiding framework for students’ structural choices. Gibson’s
approach seems to exhibit a positive manifestation of the teacher’s enhanced role in the
classroom as an authority figure, in that it acknowledges that many students are not ready
to completely abandon the banking model of education to which they are accustomed.6
The predetermined range of options she provides her students can also be seen as an
expression of her emotional stance on sociological issues (depending on how these
predeterminations are communicated to students) that invites collaboration through
critical dialogue. Her approach is also a practical manifestation of how teachers and
students can collaborate effectively with one another.

For a class consisting mostly of sociology students, Gibson’s structured course
design is a potentially effective pedagogical approach for fostering student growth
through collaborative classroom relationships and scaffolding students’ selection of
course texts. However, an effective critical composition pedagogy should take into
account that first-year composition courses are typically made up of students from a
variety of disciplinary trajectories. Critical composition instructors should also
appreciate that students’ opinions on course policies and exercises can shift over time,
even when students play a significant role in forming these policies and exercises.7

6 Shor discusses having to revert to a more traditional pedagogy when students refuse to engage in When Students Have Power.
7 Greenbaum, Andrea. Insurrections: Approaches to Resistance in Composition
is significant in that it is much more difficult for first-year composition instructors to ensure that initial course set up and negotiation of course materials are grounded at least in part on disciplinary relevance. Consequently, instructors must have some means of assessing and addressing shifts in students’ relationships with texts and the course design as the class progresses. Indeed, critical composition instructors should perceive these shifts as a sign of student investment in the classroom and curriculum, and regard responding to such shifts as fulfilling their part in co-creating a critical learning environment with their students.  

Conclusion

The paradigm of first-year composition as a “cure” for students’ struggles with analyzing and engaging in a variety of specific writing contexts is problematic because the “cure” paradigm is largely a reflection of what extra-disciplinary (re: non-rhetoric and composition) faculty and scholars expect from students, as well as more traditional forms of pedagogy that either ignore or presume student engagement without actively seeking to cultivate it through critical dialogue. This conflicts with critical composition pedagogy’s understanding of how students learn to write and how discursive conventions are constructed by participants. Nevertheless, multiple disciplinary discourses play a crucial role in shaping the rhetorical situations where students will be expected to apply compositional concepts, how students can engage with posed problems and form


8 Ibid.
comprehensive and responsive solutions to them, and how students’ efforts to meet their professional goals and apply their personal interests will be measured.

Consequently, critical composition pedagogues should look for opportunities to reconcile both paradigms and address limitations in critical pedagogy that undermine both its strengths and attempts to form this reconciliation. Attempts to reconcile these paradigms may prove beneficial to, if not “cure,” students’ writing. Furthermore, this reconciliation should be grounded in cultivating students’ agency and abilities through a solicitation of their personal interests and experiential knowledge-bases in relation to their professional goals, with instructors providing opportunities for students to make these connections, as well as providing encouragement/support in their explorations.

Critical pedagogy scholarship and praxes provide a great deal of insight as to how instructors can work with students to cultivate a learning environment conducive to student learning and engagement. In particular, critical dialogue, one of critical pedagogy’s most essential components, can be a highly effective means of raising instructors’ awareness of their teaching and how students respond to it. Critical dialogue also provides opportunities for students to generate course materials and critique power structures, including the course itself. Ultimately, critical dialogue helps to illustrate the connections between student engagement, empowerment, and making meaningful choices within their learning environment. Further still, critical pedagogy’s emphasis on applying course concepts cross-contextually helps to ensure a de-centered classroom and that students are empowered by what they have learned.

Critical pedagogy research, however, also reveals the continuing relevance of several key concerns. First, how can instructors create a course framework for students
accustomed to traditional pedagogies that acts as a scaffold for more critical, student-centered learning? How could this framework potentially provide structure for the students without simultaneously privileging the instructor’s knowledge-base and interests? Can an instructor’s expertise-based authority be a potential asset to, and scaffolding device for, student agency in the classroom? How do peer relationships affect student engagement and shape the critical learning environment, and how can instructors help students develop strong peer relationships? Additionally, can discursive conventions, an often vilified focus in critical pedagogy, be used to maintain an emphasis on student agency in scaffolding from students’ experiential knowledge-bases to engaging with unfamiliar discourses? These are questions I will examine in the next few chapters as I expound on my theorizing regarding critical pedagogy’s limitations, and potential means of addressing them in first-year composition.

In Chapter 2, I will focus in particular on two of critical pedagogy’s limitations that undermine dialogic, democratic teacher-student relationships: 1) students’ lack of familiarity with critical classrooms and how to engage/participate in a manner that fosters a critical learning environment; 2) the basis of the instructor’s authority in the classroom, how it manifests in curricula, and how this can undermine student-centered learning.

The second point will segue into Chapter 3. In particular, Chapter 3 will expand Chapter 2’s focus on how students’ lack of familiarity with critical pedagogy can affect their ability to learn and engage. I will link this with critical pedagogy’s tendency to focus more on teacher-student relationships than peer relationships in terms of student empowerment, and how correcting this may positively affect the critical learning environment.
Similar to Chapter 3’s examination of peer relationships, Chapter 4 focuses on how textual and discursive relationships governed by students’ choices and professional goals can help cultivate a de-centered critical learning environment. Chapter 4 also examines the role(s) critical composition instructors must fulfill in a critical interdisciplinary learning environment, using both the relational models discussed in Chapter 2 and the rhetorical concept of enthymemes as a tool for discourse analysis in the disciplinary contexts that students choose.

Chapter 5 reviews the limitations of critical pedagogy that I have identified, and also what a general response to these limitations should look like in practice. I then discuss a pedagogical model I designed around these limitations and responses. I review and reflect on my experiences practicing this pedagogy, and how the outcomes can inform subsequent theorizing and practice.
Chapter 2: Scaffolding through Relational Frameworks

Introduction

This chapter focuses on several of the limitations of critical pedagogy discussed in Chapter 1. Specifically, this chapter examines critical pedagogy’s failure to sufficiently address whether or not students are prepared for their responsibilities in a critical classroom, and what critical composition pedagogues can do to prepare them. Additionally, this chapter examines the roles, influences, and effects of the instructor’s authority in the classroom. This examination deals with the basis of the instructor’s authority both in terms of institutional position and the instructor’s knowledge-base/expertise, in order to explore how instructors can potentially utilize their authority to promote student growth, engagement, and agency in the classroom.

Essentially, I argue in this chapter that the instructor’s expertise-based authority in the classroom can be channeled productively as a resource for scaffolding critical pedagogical concepts and responsibilities for students. In doing so, instructors can simultaneously address most students’ expectations that instructors will fulfill the roles and responsibilities they typically have in more traditional pedagogies if necessary, while still providing opportunities for students to exercise agency in the course and provide input on course design and materials, should students choose to do so. I discussed Gibson’s scaffolding in Chapter 1 as an example of this; specifically, her practice of having students determine course policies and assignment sequences from a variety of predetermined options, as well as her practice of breaking down larger classroom decisions into smaller, more manageable components for her students. Although Gibson taught an upper-division sociology course rather than first-year composition, first-year
college students are even less likely to have been exposed to critical pedagogy; therefore, such scaffolding is likely to be as valuable if not more so in first-year composition courses.

In order to explore the issues of scaffolding and productively framing instructor authority, I will discuss the scholarship and strategies of practitioners from other pedagogical traditions. I will do so in order to demonstrate how it is possible for critical composition instructors to uphold the strengths and values of critical pedagogy—such as critical dialogue and reflection, problem-posing, student-centered learning, and cross-contextual application—while also offering potential strategies for focusing more directly on using the instructor’s expertise to teach students how to engage with critical pedagogy and course concepts. Utilizing instructor expertise to scaffold critical pedagogical skills and concepts could also help to strengthen teacher-student relationships, in particular by prompting instructors and students to articulate and fulfill their accompanying responsibilities and expectations for one another in co-creating a student-centered classroom. This review will form the basis of my theorizing on the benefits of a more relational, as opposed to political or civic, framework for critical composition pedagogy.

This chapter concludes by segueing from discussing how instructors’ expertise-based authority can provide cultivate strong teacher-student relationships into how critical composition instructors could use their expertise in the classroom to scaffold students’ cultivation of strong peer relationships; another limitation of critical pedagogy discussed in Chapter 1. Critical pedagogy’s limited focus on peer relationships and their influence on student agency, in turn, will be explored more extensively in terms of young adult neurocognitive development in Chapter 3.
Scaffolding Critical Engagement: Progressive and Growth Pedagogies

In critiquing critical pedagogy, it is important to note the problems of more traditional pedagogies that it attempts to address. Freire’s conception of traditional pedagogies, the banking model, best reflects these problems: the instructor’s unilateral control of the curriculum, its relegation of students to passive roles as consumers of established knowledge, its emphasis on lecturing over dialogue, etc. Despite the best intentions of critical pedagogues, however, critical pedagogy’s attempts to cover social and political issues—even critiques of education as a power structure—can easily replicate the power dynamics of banking pedagogies. This is particularly true if the instructor is more knowledgeable on political course content than the students. Furthermore, in responding to the banking model’s devaluation of student perspectives, critical pedagogy omits the possibility that the instructor’s perspective can be beneficial to students in some capacities. Critical pedagogy also ignores the issue that many students expect instructors to exercise their authority in traditional ways, such as pre-establishing course policies and assignment sequences, and often perceive it as laziness or apathy when the instructor does not, particularly when there is little established rapport between both parties. It becomes important, then, to analyze the relationship between the value ascribed to classroom participants’ knowledge-bases and the process of how, and by whom, course content is generated.

Dewey’s discussion of “traditional” versus “progressive” pedagogies illustrates the difficulties of understanding and addressing this relationship. He characterizes traditional education as an imposition of the past and its knowledge onto new generations of students, with no consideration of student expectations, interests, or experiential
knowledge: “[Traditional education] imposes adult standards, subject-matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity...The gap is so great...the methods of learning and of behaving...must be imposed” (4). Dewey uses the term “cultural heritage,” to denote how traditional education derives its authority from custom rather than its philosophical integrity or how it aligns with student interests and goals (18).

Dewey notes that, at best, skilled teachers who use this traditional model can merely strive to render its inherent imposition palatable, so that students can benefit from it without having their sensibilities offended. The problem with this, he argues, is that traditional education is premised largely on the assumption that the value of traditional cultural knowledge is static and inherent, rather than dynamic and subject to questioning in relation to students’ needs, interests, and experiential knowledge-bases. Progressive education, by contrast, is grounded in this relational conception of education’s value.

Dewey’s progressive model focuses on presenting education to students as a means for them to analyze and understand societal changes in terms of their own experiences, ultimately as a means for generating further positive and meaningful societal change. Not only does this progressive model encourage student “growth” (a term we see often in critical and composition pedagogies), it is also a reflection of the very democratic process our educational system is designed to empower our students to participate in and perpetuate: “democratic social arrangements promote a better quality of human experience” (25). To achieve this goal, Dewey argues that progressive educators must employ “humane” methods and construct classroom relationships focused on promoting positive student experiences (24-6). In other words, Dewey’s progressive
pedagogy has an emphasis on student-centered learning and problem-posing similar to critical pedagogy in its response to the banking model.

Despite the promise of progressive education, however, Dewey cautions that successfully practicing it is far more complex than traditional education. As a result, he argues that progressive education should not be understood as being in strict dichotomous opposition to traditional education, as critical pedagogy often appears to be in relation to the banking model. Rather, Dewey notes that there is significant interplay between traditional and progressive paradigms, represented by instructors and students, respectively. He argues that ideally, these paradigms should be negotiated to the benefit of both students and instructors. In other words, the knowledge and values of the past should not be utterly rejected but rather recontextualized in terms of the experiences, insights, and needs of students (i.e., future generations). Similarly, critical composition pedagogues should recognize the potential value of their knowledge-bases in relation to students’ interests, knowledge-bases, and goals, and provide students opportunities to draw on their expertise in critical dialogue. Through this, critical pedagogy concepts and responsibilities can be scaffolded through the cultivation of strong classroom relationships based on the synthesis of student agency and instructor expertise. Students are made aware of the instructor’s expertise, and instructors are made aware of students’ interests and goals; from this, the possibility to negotiate and synthesize the two can emerge.

Dewey also notes that incorporating students’ experiences positively and productively becomes significantly more challenging when working with older students. Adolescents and young adults have acquired more experiences than younger children,
making it difficult for instructors to discern which experiences are meaningful and can be used to generate further learning opportunities. Dewey envisions the structure of progressive education as follows:

“It is a cardinal precept of the newer [progressive] school of education that the beginning of instruction shall be made with the experience learners already have; that this experience...provide the starting point for all further learning...It is also essential that the new objects [of study] and events be related intellectually to those of earlier experiences, and this means that there be some advance made in conscious articulation of facts and ideas. It thus becomes the office of the educator to select those things within the range of existing experience that have the promise and potentiality of presenting new problems which by stimulating new ways of observation and judgment will expand the area of further experience...Connectedness in growth must be his constant watchword.” [89-90]

For first-year composition, Dewey’s outline of progressive education asserts that the structure and purpose of the course should be rooted in and expand upon “the range” of relevant student experiences. However, determining what that range is must be a mutual endeavor between the students and the instructor.

Again, Dewey’s ideas indicate the potential value of critical composition instructors and students negotiating knowledge-bases, and correspondingly classroom relationships, through critical dialogue. Instructors cannot anticipate what relevant experiences students may have had without input from the students themselves: for example, how students view themselves in terms of their personal and cultural histories; in terms of their interests, strengths, and weaknesses as learners; in terms of what/how key events in their past have influenced their current goals; etc. Likewise, students’ lack of familiarity with larger and more specialized community knowledge-bases can inhibit their abilities to form meaningful and valuable cross-contextual applications using their own experiential knowledge-bases. With this information, instructors can then
potentially help students (particularly those whose experiences with formal education have been primarily traditional) determine how their experiential knowledge can inform and facilitate their achievement of these future goals, and to which discourses cross-contextual applications should be made.

It becomes the teacher’s responsibility, then, to solicit students’ input and acquire an understanding of not only their experiences and interests, but their goals and ambitions. Instructors and students can then collaboratively design learning opportunities for students to navigate and actively link the two. Furthermore, this practice maintains critical pedagogy’s emphasis on problem-posing and student-centered learning while rendering the instructor’s expertise-based authority in service to those ends.

Similar to Dewey’s progressive model of education, Dixon outlines in *Growth Through English* the development of a then-new model for teaching composition: the growth model. Essentially, the growth model demonstrates the potential value of instructors and students reconciling their knowledge-bases through critical dialogue and course content in order to create a student-centered learning environment. Since its introduction, Dixon’s “growth” model has informed the developmental trajectory of composition pedagogy. In this model, Dixon focuses on the relationships between students’ personal worlds and writing as a social act. His pedagogy’s focus was largely in response to what he perceived as two other, more traditional pedagogical models common in composition. He labels the first of these the skill model, in which teaching English is reduced to mastering the mechanical and grammatical elements of the language. Dixon refers to the second as the “cultural heritage” model, in which literature becomes a vehicle for teaching students the values of Anglo history and heritage (2-3).
Notably, the phrase “cultural heritage” also appears in Dewey’s description of traditional pedagogy. As with critical pedagogy and Dewey’s progressive pedagogy, Dixon’s growth model attempts to address flaws in more traditional pedagogical models through student-centered learning, students’ critical reflection, and critical dialogue between teachers and students.

Essentially, I argue that Dixon’s growth model identifies the real benefit of writing for students as allowing them to concretize their thoughts in writing, then refine both their thoughts and writing through the revision process. This revision process entails student refinement of their thoughts and writing through critical reflection; and in the context of peer revision exercises, through how students’ thoughts are shaped and refined through critical dialogue (5). Student growth and critical reflection in composition, then, can potentially be stimulated through socialization and participation in larger, interpersonal contexts such as critical dialogues. Students’ efforts to concretize their ideas in writing can be evaluated by multiple perspectives, which they can then incorporate into their own introspective processes. Further still, peer revision exercises often prompt student writers to explain vague or faulty writing to their readers through talking, which in turn can influence subsequent written revisions. In other words, Dixon’s growth model, as does critical pedagogy, demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between critical reflection and dialogue.

Dixon’s growth model also touches on alignment between mode of instruction and course materials, the benefits of experiential learning, and teacher-student collaboration by discussing classroom relationships. As Freire, Shor, hooks, and other critical pedagogues recommend, he argues that it is the responsibility of composition
teachers to pay attention to the “day-to-day” experiences of students, both to create assignments that are beneficial and to bond with them as a mentor figure (7, 13).

Ultimately, Dixon’s arguments suggest that teachers should build on the pre-existing experiential knowledge-bases of their students in order to trigger reflective growth through writing (31). By doing so, teachers can help create opportunities for students to make meaningful connections between their knowledge-bases and less familiar concepts and discursive contexts. This not only affirms students’ status as learners through the knowledge they have acquired outside of the classroom, but also helps to foster collaboration between students and teachers in examining writing concepts and skills.

Dixon’s assertions regarding personal growth’s inherent connection to larger contexts echo critical pedagogy’s arguments on student-centered learning and the importance of engagement in their learning processes. Additionally, his insistence that personal growth fuels student engagement and learning connotes transference--i.e., our growth as learners and writers is marked by successful adaptation to new and cross-contextual circumstances. Unlike most critical pedagogues, however, he gives less specific guidance on 1) what those larger contexts are, 2) how students should connect them in reference to their own growth as writers and thinkers, and 3) how personal growth should be regarded once in these larger contexts. Of these three concerns, the second in particular implies that students and instructors must collaborate with one another so that students can draw on the latter’s expertise in making (and learning how to make) meaningful choices in the classroom, thus cultivating their engagement in a critical learning environment. Dixon’s lack of guidance on these concerns also implies that
students’ possessing the ability to cross-contextualize is more important in and of itself than to which contexts this ability is applied.

Ultimately, Dewey’s progressive model and Dixon’s growth model, and more specifically these models’ relationships with more traditional pedagogies, can inform critical composition instructors’ efforts to channel their expertise in cultivating strong teacher-student relationships. As with critical pedagogy, instructors can channel these efforts through critical dialogue and soliciting critical reflection in students. Even with a focus on student-centered learning, the instructor’s authority remains present in the classroom; therefore, it must be dealt with explicitly and framed productively. Furthermore, as the classroom participant who is likely the most familiar with practicing critical pedagogy, the instructor should utilize their expertise-based authority as a means of scaffolding critical pedagogy for students.

**Scaffolding Instructor Expertise and Student Agency through Course Structure**

The values of Dixon’s growth model, Dewey’s progressive model, and critical pedagogy pose in response to traditional models of education indicate a need for instructors to lend their expertise in helping students critically reflect on their knowledge-bases. They also indicate a need for instructors to help students apply them cross-contextually in ways that cultivate students’ levels of engagement and abilities to participate in critical learning environments. However, this raises the question of how students who are unfamiliar with critical pedagogy can learn to navigate and engage within critical learning environments. Correspondingly, students’ unfamiliarity with engaging in critical learning environments also poses the question of how instructors can
scaffold these skills for students. Both composition and education scholars offer potential strategies to this end.

Derek Owens’s sustainability pedagogy, for example, recognizes students’ familiarity with more traditional pedagogical models while also offering students opportunities to engage more critically in generating course materials and executing classroom assignments (6). Furthermore, as critical pedagogy does, Owens’s pedagogy grounds student engagement in terms of students’ ability to make meaningful choices in the classroom. All of this is reflected in the semi-established course structure he uses, which addresses students’ lack of familiarity with critical pedagogy while maintaining its focus on student-centered learning.

Although Owens’s pedagogy is centered on the pre-selected topic of environmental sustainability (which arguably favors his knowledge-base over his students’) and he does not open the class with a negotiation of course policies (as Shor and other critical pedagogues do), Owens does provide students opportunities to personalize the trajectory of course assignments. This can be seen in his organization of the course around four major essays. While he requires all of his students to write the same first and last essays of the course, he provides students with options for what they write as their second and third essays. More importantly, Owens also provides students the opportunity to design and negotiate an alternative assignment sequence if they wish to engage more critically than the predetermined assignment sequence allows (176). The flexibility of Owens’s structure, therefore, simultaneously caters to students who are less comfortable with engaging in a critical learning environment, while also providing
opportunities for students who understand and wish to accept the responsibilities of a more active level of critical engagement (177).

Owens’s assignment sequence also solicits students’ experiential knowledge-bases and frames them as valuable contributions to the class, as well as the basis for cross-contextual applications. The first assignment, for example, prompts students to reflect on their experiences growing up in their hometowns and the environmental conditions in which their experiences took place. The fourth assignment, by contrast, is geared toward students' predictions for the future, and is designed to get them to unpack and apply their own assumptions and what they learned in the course on how the world currently operates, and where it is headed based on their understanding (176). Further still, Owens solicits student feedback multiple times on the course’s progression and assignment design.

Consequently, Owens’s sustainability pedagogy features several of the strengths of critical pedagogy, including critical reflection, student-centered learning, and cross-contextual application of course concepts, while also addressing students’ lack of familiarity with these concepts through scaffolding. Similar to critical pedagogical methods, Owens solicits student feedback on critiquing power structures such as environmental issues and the course design itself. His assignment sequence solicits and validates students’ experiential knowledge-bases, and provides opportunities for them to engage in the learning process through making meaningful choices. Owens’s assignment sequence also emphasizes cross-contextual application of course concepts and problem-posing. However, it also grants students the authority to decide their own level of engagement. Students can either choose to adopt a more passive learning role in the
course through following the pre-established assignment sequence, or they can take a more active stance in the course by designing and advocating for their own curriculum. Finally, Owens’s pedagogy emphasizes critical reflection as students introspectively explore their own knowledge-bases and devise ways to apply it across multiple and increasingly less familiar contexts (173-4).

Owens’s contextually expansive assignment sequencing is similar to Nel Noddings’s “spheres of care” pedagogy, which also reflects strengths of critical pedagogy while addressing students’ potential need for scaffolding to develop skills such as cross-contextual application and critical reflection. Noddings primarily argues that relationships should be the foundation of public education, rather than solely standardized curricula or specific disciplinary boundaries and convictions. She casts teachers and students as "carers" and "cared-for," respectively, and though she allows for some interchangeability of roles, she sets the former as primarily the responsibility of teachers (3). She asserts that for a carer-cared-for relationship to work, teachers have to show students they care, and students have to respond to that to reinforce the teacher. Hence, the perspectives of both parties must be weighed against each other to measure the true impact and value of a course on students’ education and growth. Noddings’s pedagogy, in other words, suggests that a critical learning environment is ultimately founded on a relational understanding between classroom participants and participants’ recognition of the value of each other’s knowledge-bases. Instructors’ efforts to cultivate strong teacher-student relationships, then, are more essential to a student-centered learning environment than a direct exploration of specific issues that reflect the instructor’s expertise.
Similar to critical pedagogy, Noddings also emphasizes a dialogic approach, because of dialogue’s ability to foster understanding between differing points of view. Similar to Dixon, she also explicitly states "an important function of formal schooling" is to "provide a forum for the critical examination of all...informal activities" a student does outside of the classroom; another parallel with both critical and composition pedagogy research (17). Most importantly, the progressive and expansive nature of Noddings’s spheres of care links the importance of strong teacher-student relationships with problem-posing and critical dialogue, which often form the basis of critical pedagogy courses. In other words, many of the practices and mechanisms in critical pedagogy that create a student-centered learning environment, such as problem-posing and critical dialogue, are contingent on the strength of the relationships between participants in these practices.

Additionally, Noddings establishes multiple spheres of care beyond the classroom in her pedagogy, emphasizing cross-contextual application of course concepts rooted in students’ experiential knowledge-bases. She describes caring as a means of relation, not a set of established principles which one uses to relate to others. In other words, students’ learning processes occur in both introspective and interactive situations, student learning in both situations is influenced heavily by classroom relationships, and the dynamics of these processes and relationships are contextually based. Noddings argues further that caring as a means of relation originates in student introspection and then expands to intimate relationships with family, peers, and teachers (17). From there, Noddings argues that these spheres of care should extend to the larger world and its nonhuman inhabitants.
Noddings’s assertion that the foundation of all learning can be found in positive, mutually beneficial relationships suggests that classrooms should be spaces where experiential knowledge is analyzed and contextualized among classroom participants. She also cites the value of dialogue in fulfilling both purposes, arguing that through constructive dialogue students’ and instructors’ relational understandings and paradigms can be fruitfully reconciled. Instructors must demonstrate their regard for students, and students must respond to that regard in order for instructors to continue to demonstrate it effectively. For critical composition instructors, her spheres of care model also delineates how dialogue can be used to articulate and establish teacher and student responsibilities, and again frames the instructor’s expertise as an essential component of scaffolding the concept of student-centered learning to encourage and facilitate student engagement. For critical composition pedagogy, Noddings’s spheres of care model ultimately indicates that instructors should not ground student engagement within their knowledge-base, but rather should ground their knowledge-base in teaching students how to engage critically with course concepts.

Owens’s and Noddings’s scaffolded course structures reveal a number of important insights for critical composition instructors. Specifically, both emphasize the centrality of strong teacher-student relationships in cultivating a student-centered learning environment. They also demonstrate how teachers can use their expertise to cultivate students’ abilities to reflect critically and engage in critical dialogue, and scaffold cross-contextual application for students. Further still, Owens and Noddings illustrate how relational understandings that de-center the classroom from the instructor’s knowledge-base, and allow instructors and students to negotiate and engage critically with each
other’s knowledge-bases, are also the product of everyday circumstances in the classroom, not just holistic course structures. Critical composition instructors and students, therefore, must engage in daily practices that create mutually responsive critical learning environments, in addition to larger structural concerns.

Teacher-Student Relationships and Daily Practice: Reflexivity and Humility

Schön’s reflexive pedagogy offers critical composition instructors specific daily practices for cultivating mutually responsive relationships between instructors and students. His pedagogy is largely centered on the practice of reflection-in-action, which focuses on how instructors make immediate (and almost instinctive) adjustments to their practice based on the outcomes of interactions with students and receiving student feedback. Schön describes reflection-in-action as “conscientious trial and error… [and] an evolving collective performance” (28, 31) between students and instructors. He cautions that reflecting on this performance is difficult, but is absolutely necessary since such reflections inevitably inform instructors’ future actions in the classroom (31).

Schön’s concept of reflection-in-action naturally complements critical pedagogy’s emphasis on critical dialogue, and emphasizes the importance of instructors being mindful of how their authority (and how instructors exercise it) is perceived by students. Specifically, he argues that effective instructors not only adjust their practice regularly through critical dialogue with students, but work to be conscientious of how they do so in order to both improve their critical reflective skills and honor the perspectives and choices of their students. Conversely, Schön advocates that students can only develop critical thinking and reflection skills by working through posed problems with insights
from their instructors (82). Developing these skills through critical but supportive
dialogue with instructors, in turn, facilitates students’ abilities to cross-contextualize
course concepts in accordance with their interests and goals.

Furthermore, instructors can best illustrate gaps in both their knowledge-bases
and their students’ by asking them to reflect critically on posed problems. Subsequently,
their positive valuation of students’ input in reflection-in-action is an effective means of
cultivating students’ trust--both in themselves and the instructor--and willingness to
engage with challenging course concepts (150, 161). In other words, critical reflexive
dialogue not only renders instructor thinking transparent for students, but also provides
critical composition instructors opportunities to further reinforce the classroom
relationships on which a critical learning environment is contingent. Further still, Schön
argues that his pedagogy can apply to all disciplinary contexts, from design to cognitive
psychology to music performance (88). Similar to the connections between dialogue and
reflection in critical pedagogy, Schön asserts that “a reflective practicum is an experience
of high interpersonal intensity,” (171) illustrating the challenges instructors face in
critiquing student work while respecting their agency, as well as the challenges students
and instructors face in co-creating a de-centered critical learning environment.

Another potentially effective strategy for grounding instructors’ expertise in
facilitating student-centered learning and engagement can be found in Seitz’s pedagogy
of humility. Essentially, a pedagogy of humility calls on instructors to work explicitly to
subordinate their knowledge-bases and expertise in service of students’ goals and
developing critical engagement skills. Like Schön, Seitz argues that forming stronger
teacher-student relationships that promote student engagement depends on instructors’
mindfulness in exercising classroom authority. Forming these relationships also depends on critical composition instructors’ deliberately cultivating an ethos as a teacher that welcomes constructive criticism and input from students (when students wish to provide it).

Seitz also argues more specifically that instructors should openly acknowledge the uncertainties and mistakes they make in their teaching, as well as student critiques of the instructor’s mistakes. He derives this focus from critical reflections on his own teaching experiences, positing that in order for an instructor to get the most out of a classroom experience, she must be willing to allow student interests to redirect the trajectory of assignments and the course at large. Seitz also argues that critical composition pedagogy should be in sync with a student’s development of a “social self” because in order to develop in both contexts, students must constantly test boundaries by taking initiative in their learning processes (123). Ultimately, syncing these two developmental processes not only preserves a student-centered emphasis in the classroom, but also helps ensure that instructors maintain a responsive and facilitative stance in relation to the students’ interests and insights.

In his humility-based pedagogical framework, Seitz focuses a great deal on navigating classroom dynamics, identity politics, and resistance to critical pedagogies—all of which are important for constructing positive, productive, and democratic teacher-student relationships. However, Seitz admits in his reflections that his pedagogical framework emerged over the course of the semester rather than being consciously and systematically implemented from the outset. He even mentions that the reason he uses the phrase “pedagogy of humility” so sparsely is that it did not occur to him until the end
of the course. Had Seitz developed this approach prior to the start of the course, its successes and shortcomings might have been even more pronounced.

Seitz’s pedagogy reflects the necessity of the instructor’s introspective and critical reflection abilities in the process of forming democratic teacher-student relationships. His emphasis on teachers demonstrating their mistakes and articulating their reflections on their practice seems to be a more mindful version of the affective displays that Lindquist advocates. Although Seitz does not discuss whether he continued to develop and practice this pedagogy in subsequent classes, his ideas reflect the value of instructors being more mindful of the potential volatility of their authority and the ways in which it can manifest in the classroom. His ideas also reflect the value of instructors attempting on a daily basis to subordinate this authority when they interact with their students.

Essentially, Seitz’s pedagogy implies that instructors’ critical reflection should not only serve as a teaching tool for cultivating students’ own critical reflection abilities, but also as a crucial (albeit imperfect) means of checking the instructor’s traditional authority that the students cannot employ themselves. In other words, mitigating the instructor’s traditional authority in a critical classroom is a collaborative task shared by all classroom participants which cannot be achieved by the instructor or the students alone. Instructors are the only ones who can hold themselves accountable in terms of responding to student feedback, but they are also dependent on student feedback in order to do so and maintain the integrity of their practice.

Ultimately, while Seitz’s pedagogy of humility is valuable for critical composition instructors in terms of critical reflection and responding to students mindfully, its conceptual framework for developing positive classroom relationships is
limited by its exclusive focus on the instructor. It is undeniably important for critical composition pedagogues to model reflection by sharing their insights with their students. This is not only demonstrated in Seitz’s work, but also in the scaffolded and reflexive pedagogical frameworks that Owens, Noddings, and Schön discuss. Each of these pedagogues’ approaches imply that critical composition instructors must actively work to solicit student feedback and responsively frame their authority in terms of their expertises’ utility to students. This also entails, however, that instructors cannot create such a classroom environment on their own, and that students’ roles and contributions in critical learning environments also need to be examined. Furthermore, while student engagement and strong peer relationships cannot be mandated by instructors, and instructors cannot be held unilaterally responsible when they do not develop, instructors’ awareness of how classroom environments influence these can have a positive effect on the development of both.

Instructor Support and Divergent Perspectives in Critical Dialogue

As these other pedagogical models demonstrate, critical dialogue offers instructors potential opportunities to lend their expertise to students and develop a mutually responsive relational framework in a number of important ways. Beyond helping students engage with posed problems, reflect critically, and cross-contextually apply course concepts, critical composition instructors can also potentially use critical dialogue to help students develop the skills necessary to deal with peer conflicts and disagreements when they arise. To this end, Zembylas argues that teachers should use
empathy in the classroom to address perspectival differences among classroom participants, such as those identified by Wilkey.\footnote{See my discussion of Wilkey in Chapter 1.}

Zembylas’ conception of empathy—the ability and willingness to immerse oneself in multiple perspectives, without necessarily agreeing with them—expands on Seitz’s conception of the instructor’s role in the classroom.\footnote{Interestingly, Zembylas’ definition of empathy seems to coincide with Aristotle’s characterization of an educated mind.} Specifically, Zembylas envisions the instructor as a discussion facilitator, ensuring that student discussion of controversial issues does not adversely affect classroom relationships. This maintains students’ control of whether and how these issues are examined through dialogue, while grounding instructor support and expertise in terms of maintaining student dialogue rather than directing or superseding it, or being responsible for its outcomes.

In particular, Zembylas advocates a curriculum design for peace education that emphasizes teaching students empathy and reconciliation. Similar to critical pedagogues, he discusses how his pedagogical model reflects the reality that stories of trauma and crisis are often polarizing, and thus it is important for students to be exposed to every perspective of a story (including the “oppressor’s”) in order for students to form an emotional understanding of their own perspectives (as Lindquist advocates) on the events that comprise these stories. In this manner, instructors can demonstrate for students the value of engaging with disconcerting perspectives while maintaining students’ ability to choose how they engage with them. He refers to this skill as "critical emotional literacy" ("Politics" 218).
Zembylas expands on his discussion of empathy in terms of critical pedagogy and student resistance in addition to narrative and peace education. Specifically, Zembylas argues that instructors should see empathy not only as a means of teaching students to adopt and engage with other perspectives, but also as a strategy instructors can use to engage with resistant students (“Pedagogies” 116). In other words, the presence of strong, mutually responsive classroom relationships is what ensures that students and teachers regard disagreements in critical dialogue as opportunities for collaborative learning and problem-solving, rather than as indicators of fundamental differences that cannot be circumvented. Similar to Wilkey, Greenbaum, and Seitz, Zembylas implies that instructors must employ empathy to understand views they strongly disagree with, with the ultimate goal of teaching students to do so for themselves and among each other. However, critical composition pedagogues should not allow pre-selected topics, or their opinions on them, to encroach upon students’ assertions of their interest and knowledge-bases.

Based on Zembylas’s, Seitz’s, and Schön’s pedagogical strategies, I argue that instructors’ reflexive modeling of their thought process in engaging with other perspectives, coupled with an emphasis on students’ abilities to choose what societal issues they engage with, is a more valuable approach to Lindquist’s assertion that instructors should express their stances as a model for students. Instead of the instructor sharing how they have formed their own stance on a particular issue, they could share how they have attempted to honestly understand and respond to someone else’s point of view, and how that point of view might illuminate weaknesses in their own perspective. This Rogerian argumentative strategy highlights the limitations of the instructor’s
perspective and frames critical thinking as a difficult ongoing process rather than a set of pre-established, comfortable conclusions. In other words, critical composition instructors could potentially apply Zembylas’s concept of empathy as a model for students on how to critically engage with information outside of one’s knowledge-base, and the inherent messiness of critical thinking, reflection, and dialogue. Critical composition instructors can also use Zembylas’s concept of empathy to prioritize respect for the relationships on which a critical learning environment is contingent.

Additionally, Zembylas advocates that instructors create a reflective space separate from dialogue for students to reflect on their emotional reactions to readings and discussions. This structured separation of reflection and dialogue is important, I argue, because serious reflective consideration of ideas often takes more time than the immediacy of dialogue allows. I also argue that this space is important because it encourages students to focus on others’ ideas in terms of how they may benefit from them. In other words, students can achieve a more meaningful understanding of others’ ideas and stances by evaluating them in terms of their utility in addition to their potential flaws.

Ultimately, Zembylas’s pedagogy combines introspective and interactive learning spaces in ways that are symbiotically linked in promoting student learning, agency, and engagement. Critical composition instructors can potentially apply Zembylas’s ideas to help students develop critical dialogue strategies for conflict situations in order to develop strong, mutually responsive peer and teacher-student relationships in the classroom. His pedagogy also demonstrates the importance of critical composition instructors learning to focus on peer relationships and not solely teacher-student
Similarly, Alexander and Rhodes demonstrate how critical composition pedagogues can solicit students’ opinions on controversial topics like social justice issues in a manner that 1) honors the learning opportunities created when divergent perspectives emerge in critical dialogue, and 2) avoids subordinating student perspectives to the instructor’s. Specifically, they discuss critical composition pedagogy’s tendency to seek perspectival harmony in discussion of social issues, in order to form a holistic but one-dimensional multicultural narrative. This tendency is problematic, they argue, because in the act of focusing on similarities in order to construct multicultural narratives, instructors can undermine student-centered learning and the democratic integrity of these narratives by devaluing experiential differences and ignoring the possibility that some identity differences are unknowable to outsiders.

Building on this posed problem, Alexander and Rhodes provide a sample classroom exercise where students write about a group with whom they do not identify and then brainstorm about aspects of that identity. The function of this exercise, they argue, is to help students understand that even though it is important to appreciate social and cultural differences, this does not necessarily imply that said appreciation manifests in perfect harmonic convergences of understanding (435-7). Both hooks’s and Wilkey’s scholarship seem to confirm this in their positing that critical, mutually responsive classroom relationships are contingent not only on collaboration between instructor and student expertise, but in grounding each party’s expertise on an independent basis that cannot be co-opted by the other. Most importantly for critical composition pedagogy,
Alexander and Rhodes’ exercise focuses on approaching the unknown to help students and instructors prepare for classroom assignments that promote student-centered learning, critical reflection, and mutually supportive critical dialogue.

In addition to posing problems in the classroom that encourage students to anticipate and appreciate the value of multiple differential perspectives, critical composition instructors can also learn from Zembylas and Alexander and Rhodes to anticipate and appreciate student resistance to the instructor’s perspective\(^1\). As Wilkey reminds us, critical pedagogy should not only encourage approaching issues from multiple perspectives, but must also allow and overtly celebrate the value of positions that directly contradict the instructor’s perspective.

**Scaffolding Student Agency through Peer Relationships**

Critical composition instructors should not only utilize their expertise to promote the growth of strong peer relationships for the sake of critical dialogue, but also for the sake of enhancing student agency. Strong peer relationships have the potential to amplify students’ agency and willingness to engage in the course, as well as further check the instructor’s authority and prevent its being foregrounded in topics, materials, and discussions. Ngan-Ling Chow et al.’s DPE (dialogue, participation, experience) pedagogical model offers critical composition instructors further insight on how to cultivate strong peer relationships.

Ngan-Ling Chow et al.’s pedagogical research study builds upon critical pedagogy’s theoretical focus on dialogue in terms of praxis and the variety of demographics classrooms often represent. Specifically, Ngan-Ling Chow et al. claim in their pedagogy that dialogue, participation, and experience are all essential in a critical pedagogy classroom (259). Similar to Freire and Shor, they also examine students’ resistance to taking on more active roles in the learning process; i.e., students’ greater level of experience and comfort with banking/traditional pedagogical models. In their study on their DPE model, course discussions and assignments were typically executed in small groups, organized specifically to give equal consideration for men and women, and also American and international students (266). Student teaching also prompted students to take a more active role in the class, as well as trust the implicit value of their own experiences in relation to the formal/scholarly texts the class examined.

Despite these promising observations, Ngan-Ling Chow and her colleagues do note that their DPE model tends to be more successful with grad students and upper-division undergraduates. They attribute this to older college students with more experience in academia being more comfortable with negotiating classroom relationships democratically, as they are more likely to be confident in their abilities to engage and familiar with critical pedagogical approaches and academic discourse conventions. However, developing the experience and reflection necessary for college students to engage in DPE-based classes and disciplinary discourses should arguably begin at the first-year level and is one of the tasks first-year composition is assigned by the academy--i.e., to introduce students to academic culture.
Ngan-Ling Chow et al. also advocate that professors regard their authority as a tool for classroom “nurturance” rather than something to work around, and as a means of constructively handling relational inequities in the classroom (271). In other words, critical composition instructors should not simply attempt to renounce their traditional authority but examine how it manifests in the classroom (in large part as a result of students’ preconceptions of instructors) and use it conscientiously for specific purposes and to maintain a student-centered learning environment. This implies a slight shift from the Freirean conception of the teacher’s role in critical pedagogy, in that the instructor’s traditional authority is no longer regarded as something detrimental that should be abolished but rather a potential, albeit volatile, asset. Ngan-Ling Chow et al.’s goal for critical pedagogues, however, is the same as Freire’s: framing instructors’ primary responsibility in assignment and curriculum design as channeling student feedback into writing assignments whose outcomes are productive and meaningful to both students and teachers.

Ngan-Ling Chow and her colleagues’ DPE model is conducive to fostering mutually responsive, democratic classroom relationships in several ways. Primarily, the DPE model discusses a general critical pedagogy classroom practice that does not relate to a specific set of social or environmental issues--issues where the instructor’s knowledge-base might overshadow students’ experiences and potentially alienate less receptive students. Additionally, Ngan-Ling Chow and her colleagues’ study also supplements hooks's and Dixon's emphasis on using students’ experiential backgrounds to catalyze student growth as writers.
As with the other pedagogical models discussed in this chapter, Ngan-Ling Chow et al.’s emphasis on the connections between dialogue, participation, and experience inform a potentially useful characterization of student growth through classroom relationships: introspective-interactive exploration. In other words, through classroom relationships negotiated with and facilitated by instructor supporter, students can potentially learn how to write and think critically by interacting with others, and then reflecting introspectively on said interactions. Introspection and interaction, then, share an auto-catalytic connection that prompts students to frame feedback on each other’s work in terms of considering what each party has to offer, and what each party would find valuable. These considerations, in turn, form the basis of positive, mutually stimulating peer relationships and student growth.

Conclusion

The scholarship and pedagogies discussed in this chapter demonstrate how critical pedagogy can provide scaffolding for students unfamiliar with its approaches through a variety of strategies. First, critical composition instructors must acknowledge their authority in the classroom in terms of both tradition and expertise, and ground the latter in terms of helping students cross-contextually apply course concepts in service of their interests. Dewey’s and Dixon’s pedagogical models demonstrate the ability for critical composition instructors to reconcile the core values of critical pedagogy with such scaffolding.

Second, critical composition instructors should structure their courses around solicitations of student’s experiential knowledge and offer students scaffolded practice
for making meaningful choices through providing options. As Owens demonstrates, this practice should also offer more freedom of choice for students more comfortable with critical pedagogical methods. Noddings’s pedagogy offers critical composition pedagogy further insight as to how critical engagement skills are fundamentally contingent on strong teacher-student relationships. Additionally, instructors should engage in critical dialogue with students for the purposes of getting teachers to reflect on their practice and getting students to articulate and reflect on their decisions, as advocated by Seitz and Schön.

Finally, Zembylas’s, Alexander and Rhodes’s, and Ngan-Ling Chow et al.’s studies raise some important considerations regarding the potential for critical composition instructors to facilitate students’ valuation of divergent perspectives and cultivation of strong peer relationships, in service to co-creating a strong critical learning environment. Chapter 3 expands further on these considerations through a discussion of recent findings in young adult neurocognitive development, and how an understanding of these findings can help critical composition instructors design critical learning environments conducive to students’ development of strong peer relationships. Chapter 3 focuses specifically on young adult neurocognitive development’s significance in forming peer relationships, prompting students to reflect critically on their experiential knowledge-bases, and cultivating a scaffold for the class that promotes student agency while establishing mutually responsive relationships in the classroom.
Chapter 3: Student Neurocognitive Development and the Composition Classroom

Introduction

Building on Chapter 2’s emphasis on a scaffolded, relational framework for critical learning environments between students and instructors, this chapter focuses on recent cognitive psychology research on young adult neurocognitive development. For critical composition pedagogues, this research has the potential to deepen Chapter 2’s exploration of how critical composition instructors can provide scaffolding for students unaccustomed to critical pedagogy (one of the limitations of critical pedagogy addressed in Chapter 1). By gaining further insight into the neurocognitive developmental processes traditional first-year composition students are experiencing, instructors can refine their solicitations of student feedback around what are more likely to be students’ relevant experiences, as Dewey advocates in his progressive pedagogy. Furthermore, critical composition instructors could potentially use aspects of this research to gain a better understanding of young adult students’ critical reflection and critical dialogue abilities, and how they might process their experiences engaging in both. While this research cannot provide instructors a definitive road-map of individual students’ minds, processing skills, or their valuations of their experiences, it can assist instructors in cultivating a critical learning environment more conducive to young adult learners and their critically engagement with their experiential knowledge-bases.

Similarly, recent research on young adult neurocognitive development also offers potential insights on another limitation briefly discussed at the conclusion of Chapter 2: critical pedagogy’s tendency to ignore the impact of strong peer relationships and their potential for enhancing student agency and de-centering the classroom. Again,
instructors cannot anticipate the emergent dynamics of peer relationships any more than they can anticipate the specific dynamics of individual students’ cognitive profiles and processes. However, this research can offer critical composition instructors insight on how to cultivate a critical learning environment more conducive to the formation of strong peer relationships, such as strategies for scaffolding/modeling mutually responsive critical dialogue for students, and designing collaborative writing exercises. This research also discusses developmentally-related obstacles students and instructors might face in cultivating students’ agency, and how peer relationships can affect student agency and engagement in the classroom.

This chapter will review potential strategies for incorporating research on young adult neurocognitive development into designing a critical composition pedagogy geared towards students’ interests and experiential knowledge-bases. This research also provides critical composition instructors insight on the dynamics of, and crossover between, how traditional first-year students tend to process and respond to introspective learning situations, which involve critical reflection and self-assessment, and interactive learning situations, which involve critical dialogue and both peer and teacher-student relationships. It also offers potential insight on how students might process and respond to challenges and situations in the classroom that they find stressful, such as writing and discussion. Further still, this research also identifies and further characterizes the mutual benefits of experiential learning and strong teacher-student relationships for both parties.

After discussing these insights provided by cognitive psychology in the context of the critical composition classroom, this chapter concludes with an overview of how cognitive psychology could be used to supplement critical pedagogy’s limitations. This
conclusion then segues into how critical composition instructors could extend this research’s insights on peer relationships into students’ interactions with texts and the disciplinary discourses with which they wish to engage, another limitation of critical pedagogy which is also the focus of Chapter 4.

**Transmitting and Exchanging Experiential Learning**

In order to de-center their authority in the classroom, critical composition instructors should design their course structures and assignments around soliciting student feedback on their interests, identities, and experiences, in the hope that students will actively respond to these solicitations. However, instructors cannot mandate that students provide this feedback without re-centering the classroom around their traditional authority. Such a mandate would also inhibit students’ development as critical thinkers capable of making meaningful choices in the classroom, particularly in terms of applying course concepts cross-contextually into other discourse communities. Soliciting such feedback from students thus poses a significant challenge for instructors, especially with students unaccustomed to the mechanisms and responsibilities entailed of them in a critical learning environment. It follows, then, that critical composition instructors should have an understanding of how to cultivate a critical learning environment that reflects the dynamics of how students and instructors exchange information with one another. In addition to scholarship in critical pedagogy and other pedagogical traditions, cognitive psychology’s research on young adult neurocognitive development can provide critical composition instructors with further insight into addressing this challenge.
Larson and Hansen’s study of a Chicago youth activism group offers possible insights on how the reconciliation of knowledge-bases takes place in a learning environment. In studying this youth group, Larson and Hansen observed how these adolescents “learned to employ three strategic modes of reasoning: seeking strategic information, framing communications to the audience, and sequential contingency thinking.” They also noted how crucial adults were in shaping the experiences these adolescents had throughout this developmental process (327). Specifically, Larson and Hansen argue for the mutual cognitive benefits of interpersonal relationships between older and younger adults; i.e., younger adults within the age range of traditional first-year college students and instructors. They also assert that “a distinct form of pragmatic reasoning or ‘strategic thinking’ are required to exercise agency within...human systems, including institutional systems and informal networks” (328). In other words, older instructors can use their experiential knowledge to teach younger students how to navigate as critical thinkers through particular community/institutional contexts. In a critical composition classroom, these findings suggest the importance of critical dialogue in teaching and modeling these skills to students as a process, rather than a path to specific conclusions about specific issues.

Additionally, Larson and Hanson’s observations posit a need for critical composition instructors to practice reflection-in-action with their students in working through posed problems as they emerge, as Schön and Zembylas advocate\(^\text{12}\). Their observations also underscore critical composition instructors’ expertise as a potential asset in students’ cultivation of agency and willingness to engage in critical learning.

\(^{12}\) See my discussion of Schön and Zembylas in Chapter 2.
environments. In essence, instructors are never a neutral presence in the classroom, and modeling for students how to engage with posed problems has a strong potential to maintain a student-centered learning environment. Such modeling also has a strong potential for establishing mutually responsive classroom relationships that catalyze student growth and channel instructor expertise to that end. For critical composition instructors, Larson and Hansen’s findings indicate that they should reflect more conscientiously on their intentions when designing course exercises, how their choices might have a positive impact on students’ abilities to engage through making meaningful choices in the classroom, and whether or not critical composition instructors’ pedagogical designs reflect and respond to first-year college students’ developmental processes.

Kessler and Staudinger’s research on the mutual cognitive benefits in intergenerational interactions also offers potential insight on cultivating strong teacher-student relationships. Similar to Larson and Hansen, their research suggests that critical composition instructors are not a neutral or benign factor in students’ growth as learners, and therefore are either a positive or negative influence on this process. In other words, instructors being aware of and responding to students’ neurocognitive tendencies as young adults is not only good for students but also for instructors, particularly when the age gap between them is large. This also posits that critical composition instructors should play an active role in introducing and acclimating students to a critical learning environment, should students choose to engage in it.

In their study, Kessler and Staudinger observed non-familial interactions between adolescents and older adults who were two generations apart (i.e., the generational distance between grandparents and grandchildren). Kessler and Staudinger found,
however, that these intergenerational interactions only stimulated cognitive development when life experience was transferred in the exchange—a significant finding in relation to the arguments progressive and critical composition pedagogues typically make about teacher-student relationships (699). For critical composition pedagogy, these findings suggest that students are more likely to be actively engaged with course concepts initially in the context of their experiential knowledge-bases. This also suggests that students’ experiential knowledge-bases are a more effective learning context for forming strong teacher-student relationships and the basis for students’ eventual cross-contextual application of course concepts into other discourse communities. This mirrors Dixon’s, Dewey’s, and Freire’s claims that students are more likely to engage with course concepts and the instructors’ knowledge-base when they are able to contextualize both in terms of their experiences, and when instructors actively value and solicit students’ experiential knowledge-bases in order to prompt them to make these contextualizing connections.

Kessler and Staudinger also expound on the specific benefits for both parties in these interactions. They note that for adolescents, “interaction was expected to compensate for age-related deficits (e.g., cognitive performance, cognitive-affective complexity)” (690). For older adults, their results reflect an increase in “positive affect, self-esteem, and life satisfaction...This was the case, in particular when older people’s authority and advisory status has been made pivotal” (691). In other words, such interactions allow younger adults to draw on the experience of older adults when making decisions, and help older adults understand which of their experiences are more valuable and helpful to younger adults through the act of articulating them. For students, these
findings demonstrate how they can potentially benefit from instructors’ sharing their experiential knowledge and modeling unfamiliar practices in critical pedagogy, such as critical reflection and dialogue. For critical composition instructors, these findings illustrate how student feedback and insights are essential in helping instructors determine what aspects of their expertise are most valuable, and in triggering further critical reflection on how to adjust their teaching practices to accentuate this value. Doing so also could also help ensure that critical composition instructors channel their expertise-based authority into cultivating a student-centered critical learning environment, and scaffold critical learning concepts in a manner that helps students learn to make meaningful choices and engage with unfamiliar concepts and exercises.

Ultimately, an appreciation of how student feedback benefits their teaching can potentially motivate critical composition instructors to identify and act on these benefits in their analyses of said feedback. Kessler and Staudinger’s findings are not only useful specifically for older instructors, but also correlate with other cognitive psychologists’ findings on the mutually beneficial influences that interactive contexts have on individual participants in general. Their findings also correlate with critical pedagogy’s emphasis on the importance of student feedback in determining the efficacy of an instructor’s teaching practice. Additionally, an increased understanding of how students may benefit from an instructor’s experiential knowledge-base can help critical composition pedagogues incorporate and articulate their experiences in a positive and productive manner in regards to cultivating student engagement. A clearer understanding of how

13 This aspect of Kessler and Staudinger’s research parallels and could potentially calibrate Lindquist’s advocacy of critical pedagogues expressing their biases/stances in the classroom.
experiences can be shared positively and for the benefit of students can also help critical composition instructors avoid grounding this sharing in terms of their authority or mere self-indulgence.

Even though Larson and Hansen, as well as Kessler and Staudinger, conducted their studies in non-academic contexts, their observations on young adults’ cognitive strategic processes and how they can be influenced by older adults are very similar to the pedagogical goals that critical composition instructors often espouse. These goals include teaching students how to engage in critical reflection through writing and discussion, critical dialogue, and how to engage with their experiential knowledge-bases to form posed problems and a basis for their cross-contextual applications of course concepts. Larson and Hansen’s and Kessler and Staudinger’s studies also echo Schön’s discussion of reflection-in-action, specifically in terms of how exchanging experiential insights through critical dialogue can potentially trigger critical reflection for both students and instructors, and strengthen students’ willingness to engage through strengthening teacher-student relationships.

Furthermore, Larson and Hansen’s emphasis on adult awareness of adolescent development points to the kind of support and guidance effective college instructors should provide for their students in scaffolding critical pedagogical concepts. They, as well as Kessler and Staudinger, advocate that the most mutually beneficial acts of learning occur when instructors and students can share experiential knowledge with each other. This not only ensures that course concepts are concretely situated in practical contexts, but also helps to establish the rapport necessary for forming mutually trusting and beneficial classroom relationships. Ultimately, these studies can help critical
composition instructors to develop guidelines for engaging in critical dialogue with students, and articulate/model for students how their experiential knowledge-bases are valuable in a critical learning environment. Doing so can not only help foster strong teacher-student relationships, but also encourage students to engage their experiential knowledge-bases in cross-contextually applying course concepts.

**Student Engagement: Cognitive Developments and Obstacles**

As important as it is for critical composition instructors to be aware of the potential positive influence they have on students’ willingness to engage, however, they are not solely responsible for whether or not students do in fact decide to engage. Students’ experiential knowledge-bases and interests are often complex, as are their reasons for choosing not to engage in a critical learning environment. Fortunately, in addition to offering potential insight on forming mutually responsive and beneficial teacher-student relationships, cognitive psychology provides insight on how young adults are likely to perceive and handle challenging, unfamiliar situations. Thus, in the context of a critical learning environment, cognitive psychology also offers critical composition instructors potential strategies for mitigating negative influences on students’ willingness to engage with challenging and unfamiliar course concepts.

For example, a study conducted by Lothmann et al. suggests that if instructors induce and encourage the development a more positive interpretation style, young adults are less likely to fall into depression or anxiety, thus ensuring a more optimum performance on given tasks. This is based on their study’s observation that “accumulating data from adults show that positive and negative interpretation styles can
be induced through cognitive bias modification (CBM) paradigms with accompanying changes in mood,” and their study’s filling a critical research gap by attempting the same with adolescents and young adults (24). For critical composition pedagogy, Lothmann et al.’s findings suggest instructors could play an influential role in students’ self-assessment on their attempts to engage in critical pedagogy by encouraging individual students and student groups to view their decisions, abilities, and contributions to discussion and writing positively. Instructors could provide this encouragement through written and verbal feedback centered on students’ strengths as writers and the value of their ideas, as well as framing suggestions for improvement as possible strategies for ensuring these ideas are conveyed successfully.

Cognitive psychology research also indicates that traditional first-year college students are at an age where they are developing the ability to apply their experiential knowledge to larger and unfamiliar contexts, as well as the ability to reflect more critically on how their identities and experiences have been shaped by these contexts. For critical composition instructors, this presents an opportunity to assist students in cultivating these skills, prompting student critical reflection on their experiential knowledge-bases and interests, and cross-contextual applications of course concepts based on these reflections. De Silveira and Habermas, for instance, conducted a study on “how narrative expression of responsibility changes in life narratives from late childhood to early adulthood” (1). In this study, they tested the ability of participants ages 8-20 to form life narratives, examining the relationship between identity development, social-cognitive development, and agency. Specifically, De Silveira and Habermas note how the ability to tell stories and organize events in time parallels cognitive developments:
“Along with the arrival of formal operations, adolescents develop a more
decentered, contextualized understanding in terms of temporal and social
context…Also the understanding of the influence of societal and economic
circumstance on the development and actions of individuals expands.” (3)

De Silveira and Habermas's study found that with age the participants demonstrated a
growing awareness of their increasing ability to affect change in their environment, as
well as a growing awareness of the contextual forces that in turn shape and influence
their own decisions; i.e., their ability to cross-contextualize their experiences into the
dynamics of larger communities and institutions. These findings indicate that
adolescents’ and young adults’ cognitive development is correlative of and characterized
by their ability to:

1. Reflect on their formative experiences;
2. Analyze and infer connections between the meaning of these experiences and the
   socio-environmental contexts in which they occur;
3. Use these inferences to compose a sort of experiential narrative that they can use
to make more conscientious and meaningful life choices.

Thus, the trajectory of traditional first-year composition students’ neurocognitive
development provides critical composition instructors an opportunity to solicit critical
reflection and feedback on experiences students find particularly relevant to their
interests and goals, which can then inform instructors’ adjustments to their practice and
the design of subsequent units and assignments. Students’ sharing their experiential
knowledge also provides opportunities for critical dialogue between peers that does not
favor any one perspective or specific knowledge-base, both supplementing and
complicating students’ understanding of where they are in life and how they relate to one
another. Ultimately, both the results of De Silveira and Habermas’s study and their use of the term “narrative” suggests potential overlap between their research and critical composition pedagogy, on the grounds that critical composition students learn how to analyze, arrange, and synthesize information to form a narrative for their research, arguments, and ideas. Indeed, this is very much in line with Dixon’s characterization of writing as both an expression of personal growth and a social act.

Together these studies on young adult neurocognitive development illustrate the potential value of a relational framework in critical composition pedagogy, specifically in terms of teaching students to synthesize critical reflection with critical dialogue in order to engage with course concepts through their experiential knowledge-bases, and then apply them in larger unfamiliar contexts. More specifically, they illustrate the potential value of instructors anticipating and addressing aspects of students’ neurocognitive development as young adults that the students may be experiencing but are not aware of, such as their experiential knowledge-bases’ potential to be applied cross-contextually in reference to students’ interests and goals. Ultimately, critical composition instructors could not only use this research to anticipate and further examine ways in which their first-year students may not be prepared (or feel prepared) for the responsibilities of a critical classroom, but also examine recurring influential factors in students’ critical reflection. They can also use these studies to more effectively facilitate students’ abilities to exercise their agency and engage with course concepts through critical dialogue.

Williams and McGillicuddy-De Lisi’s study on adolescent coping strategies for stress can also help critical composition instructors further examine potential developmental obstacles to first-year college students’ engagement and exercising agency
in a critical learning environment. In their study, they observed specifically how students in “early, middle, and late adolescence” coped with stress, focusing on “two different types of stressors: daily hassles and major life events” (537). In reference to young adults, Williams and McGillicuddy-De Lisi found that “older adolescents used a greater variety of coping strategies and used methods that directly reduce the impact of the stressor and involved a cognitive component (e.g., planful problem solving; reappraisal) more often than younger adolescents” (537). To these researchers, this suggests that “[adolescents] attempt to cope with stressors in a variety of ways that become more diverse and adaptive with development through the adolescent years,” (548). This connects to Schön’s emphasis on reflexivity, in that Williams and McGillicuddy-De Lisi’s study suggests first-year students’ capacities for critical reflection and active engagement in critical learning environments are developing. It also suggests that critical composition instructors can facilitate this developmental process by modeling coping strategies for stress and positive interpretation styles, per Larson and Hansen’s and Lothmann et al.’s findings.

Similar to Williams and McGillicuddy-De Lisi, Frost et al. also examine the influence of positive and negative student self-assessments on task performance. To determine the extent of this influence, they analyze the differences in task performance between adolescent students with high perfectionistic tendencies—“the tendency to react negatively to mistakes, to interpret mistakes as equivalent to failure, and to believe that one will lose the respect of others following failure” (195)—and those with low perfectionistic tendencies. Though Frost et al. found that there is little difference between these groups in performing tasks with a low frequency of mistakes, they also
found huge differences in performing tasks with a high frequency of mistakes. In terms of a critical learning environment, Frost et al.’s findings indicate that the more challenging a classroom task or assignment is, the more uncomfortable young adult students with high perfectionistic tendencies will be, to the point where it affects their willingness to engage (195-205).

When considered with Williams and McGillicuddy-De Lisi’s research, Frost et al.’s findings signify for critical composition pedagogy that the more unfamiliar students are with critical pedagogical methods and exercises, and the fewer coping resources they have in dealing with stressful situations, the more likely they are to perceive their lack of familiarity with critical pedagogy as incompetence or failure. Consequently, these perceptions can generate anxiety or reluctance in students to further cultivate the skills necessary to engage in a critical learning environment. Students’ critical engagement, in turn, is essential to their cultivations of agency.

Ultimately, Frost et al.’s research implies that the likelihood (and implicit meaning behind) making mistakes is a major factor for young adult students in determining the risks and rewards of engaging in a critical learning environment. This reflects, in turn, the need for critical composition instructors to provide scaffolding from traditional to critical pedagogical models, solicit students’ critical reflections on their experiential knowledge-bases in a manner that accentuates the value of these knowledge-bases, collect feedback from students on the course, and demonstrate the value of this feedback by actively responding to it. By doing so, critical composition instructors can anticipate and hopefully mitigate first-year college students’ anxiety in unfamiliar critical
learning environments and thus increase the likelihood of their choosing (and developing the ability) to engage and exercise agency within them.

Essentially, critical composition instructors can enhance young adult students’ inclinations to take risks by minimizing their perception of the risk relative to the reward. This focus on student well-being and confidence also functions as a preventative measure against instructors ignoring student perspectives in the development of course materials and assignments. Rather, instructors must rely on soliciting student perspectives to assess and appropriately adjust the classroom environment to further encourage student engagement.

Supplementary to Frost et al.’s findings, a study conducted by Neff and McGehee appears to corroborate the importance of interaction and relationships in helping young adults form more positive perceptions/understandings of their mistakes in response to stressful situations. Additionally, similar to Lothmann et al., Neff and McGehee also approach the significance of intrapersonal self-assessment in young adult cognitive development, and the role self-assessment plays in interpersonal contexts. They ground intrapersonal understanding as the generative basis for interpersonal relationships. Specifically, Neff and McGehee study “self-compassion among adolescents,” or adolescents’ ability to maintain a positive self-assessment while making mistakes. They compare adolescent capacity for self-compassion with a sample group of young adults—a demographic whose self-compassion has been researched much more thoroughly (225). Neff and McGehee’s results suggest that the “ability to frame one’s experience in light of the common human experience should provide a sense of interpersonal connectedness that can help teens cope with fears of social rejection,” (226) as well as that an increased
sense of self-compassion leads to greater feelings of social comfort and connectedness. Neff and McGehee’s conception of self-compassion relates to Williams and McGillicuddy-De Lisi’s research on adolescent and young adult coping strategies for stress, since they cite self-compassion as one of these strategies.

Neff and McGehee’s findings are also similar to De Silveira and Habermas's, in that they suggest adolescents’ understanding of socio-environmental contexts are enhanced by the formation of personal narratives. Additionally, as Frost et al. and Lothmann et al. posit, Neff and McGehee’s results also point to the importance of self-perception in student performance, as well as social and contextual factors that shape self-perception. In turn, these findings also parallel both critical pedagogy’s and composition’s research and focus on how individuals are governed by community relationships (whether geographical, cultural, professional, or discursive), as Dewey, Dixon, hooks, and others argue.

Ultimately, cognitive psychology research on young adult neurocognitive development has a great deal of insight to offer critical composition pedagogues on student engagement. These insights pertain specifically to identifying potential obstacles to engagement that may emerge in young adult students’ critical reflection processes (particularly in regards to self-assessment), and how they might interpret their initial attempts to engage with unfamiliar course concepts and learning environments. For critical composition instructors, in turn, this research offers insight on how they can preemptively address factors that discourage student engagement. Instructors can do so in several ways: using critical reflexive dialogue with students to articulate and model positive interpretation and reinforcement of students’ attempts to engage with course
concepts and exercises; soliciting students’ experiential knowledge-bases and feedback in a manner that explicitly values both; last, demonstrating a valuation of student feedback and understanding of student mistakes by making responsive adjustments to the course and modeling for students how they acknowledge and address their own mistakes.

**Peer Relationships and Student Engagement**

Instructors play an essential role in creating a mutually responsive and scaffolded critical learning environment, and helping students navigate it. However, as previously discussed, critical composition instructors do not bear sole responsibility for cultivating a critical learning environment. Indeed, such an environment is not possible without students’ engagement in critical thinking, reflection, and feedback on course policies. As complex and dynamic as critical learning environments are, however, it also follows that instructors are not the sole valuable asset that students can draw on in cultivating agency and engagement.

Peer relationships are likely another significant factor in helping students learn to overcome developmental obstacles in critical learning environments, and thus enhance individual students’ ability to engage and exercise agency. Mirroring Neff and McGehee’s focus on young adult interpersonal relationships as products of intrapersonal understanding, Pfeifer et al. examine the influence of interpersonal relationships on a young adult’s intrapersonal self-assessment. Specifically, Pfeifer et al. find that “during direct self-reflection, adolescents demonstrated greater activity than adults in networks relevant to self-perception… and social-cognition… suggesting adolescent self-construals may rely more heavily on others’ perspectives about the self” (1016). From there, they
argue that this cognitive development is the mechanism through which self- and contextual-awareness are balanced in young adult minds.

For critical composition instructors, Pfeifer et al.’s findings on adolescents’ introspective processes indicate that traditional first-year students’ self-assessments and critical reflection rely more heavily on how peers perceive them than older adults’ introspective processes. These findings reinforce the potential significance of peer relationships’ influence on individual students’ willingness to engage and exercise agency in critical learning environments. They also point to strong peer relationships’ potential in helping students develop the confidence needed to navigate stressful and unfamiliar situations in these environments, thus helping to scaffold student engagement and enhance both critical dialogue and student agency in the classroom.

Indeed, critical composition instructors already implement classroom exercises and activities that cultivate and capitalize on strong peer relationships. For instance, there is the familiar pedagogical strategy in composition where instructors preface whole-class discussions with discussion in small groups, in order to give students an opportunity to examine, articulate, and refine their thoughts before speaking in front of everyone. This practice illustrates significant parallels between cognitive psychologists’ and critical pedagogues’ understanding of how young adult agency can be catalyzed. In this context, small group discussions have the potential to 1) allow for students’ risk-taking tendencies to be enhanced by the presence of peers, 2) lower their perception of the negative consequences for articulating their ideas, through mitigating the number of direct participants and temporarily removing the direct presence of the instructor’s authority, 3) provide contextual/interactive stimuli for the introspective experiential narrative students
have previously formed on a subject, and 4) help frame students’ individual experiences with the learning process as a collective experience shared by all humans.

A research study conducted by Chein et al. reveals further important insights on how interpersonal contexts, such as critical dialogue, can influence young adults’ assessments of and decisions to take risks. Similar to De Silveira & Habermas, they examine connections between intrapersonal and interpersonal contexts for adolescents and young adults, asserting that “the presence of peers may promote adolescent risk taking by sensitizing brain regions associated with the anticipation of potential rewards” (F1). What this means is that adolescents’ generally increased willingness to take risks for a perceived reward (in comparison to other age groups) is cognitively enhanced within group settings. Specifically, Chein et al.’s study, which compared brain activity in “adolescents, young adults, and adults” between unsupervised and supervised tasks, yielded the following results: “adolescents selectively demonstrated greater activation in reward-related brain regions, including the ventral striatum and orbitofrontal cortex, and activity in these regions predicted subsequent risk taking” (F1). They also found that “brain areas associated with cognitive control were less strongly recruited by adolescents than adults, but activity in the cognitive control system did not vary with social context” (F1). Essentially, these findings point to increased adolescent and young adult sensitivity to reward relative to risk when in the presence of peers.

While Chein et al.’s study characterizes risky behavior as a lack of regard for safety and legality—they cite reckless driving and experimentation with illicit substances as examples—they also observe that adolescents’ predilection for risky behavior is primarily affected by “social context” and “peer observation” rather than the risky
decision itself (F10-11). I argue, therefore, that their study indicates that what constitutes risky behavior is a matter of relational context. Essentially, students’ perception of peer relationships plays a significant role in forming the contextual basis of what is and is not a risk in the classroom, as well as what the positive and negative consequences will be for taking risks. While peer relationships are not the only relational context that shapes classroom environments\textsuperscript{14}, Chein et al.’s findings denote the mutually influential cognitive relationships among young adults; i.e., if agency entails taking risks in a critical classroom, then young adult students can potentially amplify one another’s agency.

Although young adult risk-taking typically carries more negative connotations in other contexts, I argue that critical composition instructors could incorporate students’ valuing of peer validation as a means of empowerment to assert themselves more boldly in the context of the classroom. For example, strong peer relationships could potentially lower students’ assessment of the negative consequences of challenging the instructor’s ideas in discussion, initially struggling with practices and exercises in critical pedagogy, or critiquing the course through feedback. Strong peer relationships could also raise students’ assessments of the potential rewards for offering insights or critiques others may find valuable, thus encouraging students’ sense that through engagement they can meaningfully contribute to discussions and even the structure of the course itself.

Indeed, as Chein et al. suggest, I argue that peer relationships could potentially have a stronger influence on individual student behavior than critical reflection and self-assessment. My argument is also supplemented by Freire’s, Shor’s and other critical

\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, the authority of the instructor traditionally takes precedence in how classroom environments are formed.
pedagogues’ emphasis on critical dialogue to form and address posed problems in a democratic and mutually responsive manner. This is because critical dialogue provides a means for students to concretize, articulate, and relate their critical reflections on a subject to their peers in an interactive setting. Further still, the importance that interpersonal classroom relationships (both peer and teacher-student) have in influencing student decisions and behavior signifies that the classroom is inherently incapable of being a neutral space when it comes to students’ introspective and critical reflection processes. Consequently, I argue that a focus on forming positive classroom relationships through experiential learning, critical reflection, and critical dialogue is a potentially valuable means of preparing students to engage more actively in a critical learning environment. I argue further that critical dialogue supplemented by strong peer relationships could solicit more active student engagement through the formation of clear connections between experiential learning, academic discourse, and students’ interests and goals. As both critical pedagogy and cognitive psychology posit, students’ learning and developmental processes are either enhanced or curtailed by relational contexts.

Peer relationships, then, are a crucial factor in students’ willingness to take risks in terms of asserting agency. Similar to Chein et al., Cauffman et al. examine adolescents and young adults’ greater tendency to engage in risky behavior. In contrast to Chein et al., however, they initially posited a different causal factor for this tendency by testing whether adolescents’ risk-reward behavior is the result of underdeveloped cognitive processes. However, Cauffman et al. note that “adolescents are no worse than adults at perceiving risk or estimating their vulnerability to it…and increasing the salience of the risks associated with making a poor or potentially dangerous decision has comparable
effects on adolescents and adults” (193). From there, they conclude that emotional and social factors are more responsible for risky adolescent behavior than cognitive ones, and that “affective decision making” is affected more than “decision making in general” (194). In other words, adolescent and young adult decision-making processes in relation to risk are both more heavily influenced by social and environmental factors than pure logic.

Similar to Chein et al.’s and Cauffman et al.’s findings, Bandura explores the concept and cultivation of young adults’ collective agency through dialogue and peer relationships’ potential to enhance student engagement in the classroom. Additionally, his exploration of self-efficacy and “human agency” reaffirms De Silveira and Habermas’s connection between context and young adult decision-making, and also parallels critical pedagogy’s focus on student agency (1). In his study, Bandura defines agency as people’s capacities to make meaningful decisions and act on them for their own benefit. He then explicitly traces people’s agency as being substantially derivative of their reflective capabilities. Specifically, Bandura argues that critical reflection is the process through which people identify their motives and goals. People can then use these reflections to both determine and evaluate the actions they will undertake to pursue their goals (10). In this manner, people’s capacities for critical reflection have a direct impact on their ability to assess their strengths and weaknesses in terms of their needs.

Furthermore, just as De Silveira and Habermas’s results indicate, Bandura extends his characterization of agency beyond individual decisions and circumstances to two other modes: proxemic and collective. Proxemic agency occurs when a person relies on someone else to achieve a specific outcome, and collective agency occurs when groups of
individuals coordinate with one another to achieve an outcome. These two modes are essential facets of agency because individuals tend to recognize the limitations of their own strengths, as well how their strengths can potentially combine with the expertise and resources of others (13-14). Essentially, a person’s sense of agency derives from both intrapersonal and interpersonal contexts such as critical reflection and critical dialogue, respectively, and the mutually influential connections between them. This suggests that the importance of how individual students regard themselves affects the way they perform in group settings, such as peer group discussions, and vice versa.

Bandura’s study on multiple forms of agency offers a number of important insights for critical composition pedagogues. Examining the contextual differences in how a student engages with and performs in both independent and group assignments, for example, could help instructors identify parallels and connections between students’ writing and self-assessment in both contexts. These connections could then help critical composition instructors provide students with more responsive feedback to their contributions, as well as create and adjust subsequent assignments in alignment with student strengths and weaknesses in both individual and group exercises.

By soliciting student feedback on specific peers in group work, instructors can also form strategies for creating assignments conducive to students’ navigating and forming strong peer relationships. Comparing student writing in individual and group assignments could also inform instructors on how to integrate the two in order to capitalize on students’ strengths and address their weaknesses in both contexts. In particular, prewriting and revision are both parts of the writing process that benefit from peer feedback. Prewriting with peers helps students evaluate the potential merit of ideas
before pursuing them in an assignment, and revision with peers helps writers know whether or not they are fulfilling their audience’s needs. What this entails, then, is that strong peer relationships in the classroom and the unique perspectives/insights students can offer one another can supplement instructors’ modeling of how to critically engage with one’s own writing and the writing of one’s peers.

Additionally, as these studies demonstrate, the task of writing can potentially influence a composition student’s self-assessment and critical reflection, and that this is true when students engage in both familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks. If a person’s agency is closely linked to their anticipation of an action’s consequences, then it follows that the more comfortable students are with a particular writing assignment, the more confident they will feel in making rhetorical choices as writers. I argue, in turn, that students’ confidence in their abilities to make rhetorical choices are most likely to increase with practice, especially when supplemented with peer support when students practice these skills. Correspondingly, instructors should provide opportunities for students to offer each other this kind of peer support, especially in terms of facilitating student engagement with less familiar texts and discourses\(^\text{15}\). Ultimately, creating opportunities for students to reflect on their writing and discuss it with one another simultaneously creates opportunities for the instructor to learn more about the students’ perspectives, and potentially respond to them more effectively in written feedback and subsequent assignments.

\(^{15}\) I discuss enthymemes as a potential tool for facilitating this transition in Chapter 4.
Conclusion

Cognitive psychology and its research on young adult neurocognitive development offers critical composition instructors potentially valuable insights and strategies for addressing limitations that undermine critical pedagogy and the cultivation of a mutually responsive critical learning environment. First, this research reveals the benefits of experiential learning-based critical dialogue between students and instructors, which helps students come to appreciate the insights of instructors’ knowledge-bases in reference to their own. It also helps instructors learn to channel their expertise in service to student interests and goals and scaffold their engagement with critical learning environments. Research on young adult neurocognitive development also adds further insight on students’ abilities to reflect critically on their experiences and apply them cross-contextually to larger discourse communities and institutions.

Additionally, this research illustrates the potential impact instructors can have on how students approach unfamiliar and challenging tasks, and evaluate their own attempts to do so in critical reflection and self-assessment. Though instructors are ultimately not responsible for whether students choose to engage in the course, they can encourage students to do so through demonstrating their valuation of and responsiveness to student insights, writing, and feedback. Further still, cognitive psychology reveals the significance of peer relationships in influencing individual students’ self-assessments, and thus their potential to mitigate obstacles to students’ willingness to engage and make meaningful choices in the classroom. This research also demonstrates how peer relationships can enhance individual students’ agentic abilities, and therefore the
importance of instructors creating opportunities for students to form strong peer relationships and learn from them.

For these reasons, I argue that critical composition instructors can supplement their pedagogy with research on young adult neurocognitive development for the purposes of:

1. Soliciting students’ experiential knowledge to promote student engagement and cross-contextual applications of course concepts;
2. Providing feedback on student writing that focuses on helping them fulfill their goals, pursue their interests in unfamiliar contexts, and convince them of the value of doing so;
3. Using classroom discussions and exercises to promote both critical self-reflection and the growth of strong peer relationships.

These factors are essential in forming a scaffold for students more accustomed with traditional learning environments into the demands and responsibilities of critical classrooms; i.e., generating course content and developing/pursuing strategies for applying their experiential knowledge-bases and interests into unfamiliar discursive contexts. Chapter 4 continues this focus, examining specifically how students can continue to cultivate their engagement and agency through choosing the trajectory of their cross-contextual applications of course concepts. This examination will focus specifically on how instructors and students can use classroom relationships (peer and teacher-student), critical dialogue, and critical reflection to scaffold students’ attempts to engage with disciplinary discourses of their choice. Furthermore, it will also focus on how these choices can maintain a student-centered critical learning environment while
simultaneously continuing to frame the instructors’ knowledge-bases in terms of support rather than domination.
Chapter 4: Textual and Disciplinary Discourse Relationships

Introduction

Similar to Chapter 3, this chapter focuses on potentially catalytic influences on student agency and engagement in a critical learning environment. Whereas Chapter 3 focuses on peer relationships as one of these influences, however, this chapter focuses on the potential influence of students’ relationships with texts and discourses, which critical pedagogy tends to ignore; a limitation I initially discussed in Chapter 1. In relation to this, I also examine another limitation of critical pedagogy: its tendency to ignore the potential to empower students through an emphasis on their chosen disciplinary discourses.

Specifically, this chapter discusses how a focus on students’ future educational goals in relation to their personal interests and experiences could potentially facilitate students’ learning to engage in critical composition classrooms and cross-contextually apply course concepts in contexts students find meaningful/relevant. Simultaneously, critical composition instructors could continue to lend their expertise to students’ pursuit of these choices while maintaining a student-centered learning environment. A focus on students’ chosen disciplinary discourses would arguably preserve the integrity of students’ abilities to exercise agency within compositional contexts of their choosing, rather than contexts reflective of the instructor’s interests and knowledge-base, as discussed in Chapter 2. Further still, I posit that similar to the introspective-interactive dynamics of relational learning among peers discussed in Chapter 3, critical composition instructors can potentially help students relationally frame textual and discursive analysis, again without undermining or predetermining students’ abilities to make these choices.
To explore these arguments, this chapter begins with a review of scholarship in rhetoric and composition that focuses on discourse analysis. I argue that a focus on disciplinary discourse analysis offers a potentially fruitful means of cultivating students’ cross-contextual engagement abilities. This is because students are able to make meaningful choices regarding course materials and cross-contextually apply concepts from critical dialogue and reflection to textual and discursive analysis in a relational framework. In other words, students are given the choice to engage with a disciplinary discourse they find interesting and explore its conventions in terms of their experiential knowledge, while maintaining their ability to generate posed problems and course materials. This is similar to Owens’s and Noddings’s pedagogical frameworks in Chapter 2, in that students initially engage with course concepts in terms of their experiential knowledge-bases and explore these connections by tracing them into larger unfamiliar contexts. Such a focus also provides critical composition instructors with a potentially useful strategy for cultivating students’ cross-contextual application skills that incorporates an analysis and critique of discursive power structures without using an overly political or instructor-centric focus on course topics and materials.

**Rhet-Comp Studies and Textual Relationships**

While rhetorical theory has not explicitly dealt with textual analysis as a means of expanding a relational framework in the classroom, connections between interpersonal and textual relationships are readily apparent. For example, classroom texts are often employed by critical composition pedagogues as catalysts for soliciting student reflection on their own interests and experiential knowledge-bases, which they can then explore
through writing and discussion. From there, revision exercises can be particularly apt opportunities to reaffirm relationships between texts, students, and teachers. I argue that this is accurate because revision exercises are prime opportunities for critical dialogue, critical reflection, and reflection-in-action. This is because instructors and students can articulate and evaluate multiple interpretations and responses to a text, as well as the choices that students make as researchers and writers. Revision exercises also provide students opportunities to express their needs as learners to the instructor, and for instructors to respond to those needs and adjust their pedagogy/curriculum where necessary. This is especially true with the workshop process, where students are asked to discuss their work with peers and the instructor, and then reflect on that discussion in order to make revisions.

Thus, the linked processes of critical reading, writing, and dialogue stimulate and exhibit the mutually responsive processes of discussion and reflection that both critical pedagogues and cognitive psychologists assert is vital to the agentic growth of young adults. Furthermore, these processes are ultimately reinforced by both strong peer and teacher-student relationships in the classroom. The connection between these processes and students’ agentic growth is corroborated by Bartholomae and Petrosky. Essentially, Bartholomae and Petrosky discuss building a basic composition course around the premise that students should see texts as potential vehicles for their own growth and development, rather than something whose meaning is absolute and must be correctly assessed.

16 Bartholomae and Petrosky’s focus on student choices in revision also dovetails with Greenbaum’s assertion in Chapter 1 that observing student resistance to assignments provides valuable opportunities for instructors to adjust their pedagogy.
Similar to Dewey’s progressive and Dixon’s growth models, Bartholomae and Petrosky seem to suggest that students’ textual analysis and writings in response to them are both introspective and social acts, and ultimately sites of synthesis for students’ experiential knowledge and the knowledge-bases of larger contexts. In other words, textual analysis and responsive writing are opportunities for students to learn from and negotiate with other perspectives and refine their own accordingly\(^\text{17}\). Bartholomae and Petrosky also argue that this kind of understanding--the thrill of seeing something in a new way, and discussing one’s (re)visions with peers and the instructor--is ultimately what fuels the revision process; i.e., learning through a synthesis of introspection and interaction. Indeed, like Dixon and De Silveira and Habermas, Bartholomae and Petrosky see introspection as a catalyst for student growth through engagement with larger contexts, and argue that this makes critical reflection an important aspect of composition pedagogy. Critical composition instructors should thus encourage students to actively search for connections between texts’ content and their experiential knowledge-bases, as well as how said content can be useful to students in achieving their goals.

As students engage with course materials through identifying and unpacking these connections, it becomes important for critical composition instructors to teach textual analysis as a means of problem-posing and scaffolding student engagement within critical pedagogy, particularly in terms of students’ cultivation of strong peer relationships and their development of cross-contextual application skills. Jensen’s rhetorical scholarship, for example, argues that textual analysis can be used to help students learn strategies for

\(^{17}\) See my discussion of Dewey and Dixon in Chapter 2.
reconciling and adapting their experiential knowledge to larger unfamiliar discursive contexts, such as disciplinary discourses with which they may wish to engage. Jensen characterizes reality as being constructed using a Jungian “interpersonal view,” and asserts that student textual analysis and writing should be viewed as a kind of ideological battleground between the established knowledge of the academy and the experiential knowledge-base of the student (21). Again, this reflects Dewey’s and Dixon’s pedagogical models and their basis in negotiating students’ insights with larger social contexts in a manner that affirms the value of the former. It also reflects Freire’s, Shor’s, and other critical pedagogues’ emphasis on critiquing power structures through critical reflection and critical dialogue in response to course materials.

Essentially, Jensen explicitly equates students’ interactions with texts with interpersonal interaction, and encourages instructors to teach critical reflection, reading, and writing in separate components so as to facilitate students’ development of each specific skill and understanding of how they relate to one another. In particular, this could provide a means to scaffold critical reading and reflection skills for students as they begin to engage with disciplinary discourses that are unfamiliar but potentially relevant to their experiences and interests. Furthermore, in addition to catalyzing students’ development of these skills, this strategy also frames students’ emergent textual relationships as a means of cultivating student agency and de-centering the curriculum through student choice. As critical pedagogy emphasizes, students’ ability to make meaningful choices in the classroom is a central basis of students’ abilities and willingness to engage in a course. Such meaningful choices include the generation and selection of course materials. However, as discussed in previous chapters, many students
are unaccustomed to making these kinds of choices in classroom settings and therefore often require scaffolding in order to become comfortable with and appreciate the value of such choices. A focus on students’ textual analysis in their chosen disciplinary discourses could potentially fulfill this requirement.

The potential link between textual and classroom relationships reinforces the conception that the writing process is based on relational understandings. In other words, the individuated parts of the writing process are inherently grounded in their relation to one another, and the relationships between students and teachers. This is because an understanding of how texts and ideas relate to one another is a foundational part of students’ composing processes, which then form the basis of discussions with peers and the instructor. The structure of a student’s response to a text, in turn, reflects both the strength of their understanding of the text and the essence of their relationship with it.

D’Angelo examines this phenomenon in his scholarship, focusing especially on how students’ relational understandings of a text are reflected in how they compose and structure their responses to it. He asserts that the essence of rhetoric is the symbiotic relationship between thinking and writing, and that composition is a holistic, organic process determined by a writer’s “innate [cognitive] organizing principles” (26). D’Angelo extends this line reasoning by contending that an individual’s writing style is best characterized by their arrangement of information. Additionally, as Dewey implies in his progressive model, he characterizes students as the primary providers of knowledge acquired outside the logical structure of the university. However, in order to ensure the continued transmission of that body of knowledge, D’Angelo argues that the best new conceptions of rhetoric should derive from the legacy of classical rhetoric, because
“[composition] reflects dynamic organizational processes, symbolic manifestations of underlying mental processes, and not merely conventional, static patterns” (57). While D’Angelo seems to implicitly value traditional knowledge more than students’ experiential knowledge-bases, his ideas could be adapted to a more critical pedagogical framework. Specifically, students can test and assess the value of classical rhetorical techniques as possible strategies for textual analysis. With instructor and peer support through critical dialogue, they could use these to further develop their abilities to appropriate and cross-contextualize the ideas of course materials and course concepts as thinkers and writers independent of the instructor and the academy.

In the context of critical composition pedagogy, then, D’Angelo’s argument that student writing benefits from learning to integrate classical rhetorical concepts suggests the potential of using textual relationships to both reaffirm and expand upon students’ perspectives, as well as using textual relationships as a means of applying students’ interests into the disciplinary discourses they choose. Furthermore, D’Angelo’s idea that the writing process is based on relational understandings, but should still draw from the wisdom of the classical rhetorical tradition, also echoes Dewey’s, Dixon’s, and Schön’s pedagogies. Each of these scholars’ examination of the possibilities within reconciling knowledge-bases in the classroom emphasizes the importance of cultivating student engagement and agency through the application of students’ interests, ideas, and experiences to larger discursive contexts. These examinations also emphasize the importance adapting the conventions of these larger contexts to students’ interests and for students’ purposes. In other words, rather than subordinating student ideas and writing to the rhetorical traditions D’Angelo espouses, these rhetorical techniques can be adapted to
teach students strategies for forming strong textual relationships that are conducive to their interests and goals.

**Media and Scaffolding Textual Relationships**

D’Angelo’s insights on how students can potentially synthesize their experiential knowledge-bases with course texts raises another important consideration. Specifically, it is not only important to consider how these syntheses are reflected in students’ relationships with specific texts, but also their relationships with various media. For example, the medium of the academic journal is much more likely to be a reflection and extension of the instructors’ knowledge-base than students’, whereas digital platforms such as apps and social media are more likely to favor the latter.

For this reason, rhetoric and composition scholars such as Ernest Morrell argue that composition instructors should capitalize on students’ familiarity with digital media in teaching and scaffolding course concepts. This position also reflects critical pedagogy’s valuation of student-centered learning. To this end, Morrell provides an outline for how critical literacy (both reading and writing) can be taught in this manner. Essentially, he advocates that critical composition pedagogues teach critical media literacy as a means of empowering students, particularly people of color and other marginalized groups (7). From this, Morrell argues that instructors should take advantage of students’ familiarity with digital media for two specific purposes: 1) To facilitate students’ ability to generate course content; 2) to encourage students’ learning of rhetorical concepts in contexts they engage with outside of the classroom on a regular basis (114).
In addition to Morrell’s ideas, I argue that incorporating the rhetorical contexts of digital media not only situates students’ experiences as the basis for their cross-contextual applications and critical engagement, but also offers students further opportunities to cultivate strong peer relationships. Programs such as Google Docs and Google Hangout, for example, enhance students’ ability to share information with one another and continue critical dialogues and reflection-in-action outside of the classroom. Digital media can also create spaces for student interaction independent of the instructor’s authority, in terms of how it manifests in the instructor’s presence and the physical space of the classroom.

Ultimately, Morrell’s insights provide further evidence that critical composition instructors should be aware of how the dynamics of classroom and community relationships can manifest in the selection and analysis of course texts and materials. Furthermore, a potentially effective way for instructors to develop this awareness is to encourage and facilitate student generation of course materials in relation to their experiential knowledge-bases; i.e., soliciting student input and feedback through the selection of course materials.

In the context of critical pedagogy, digital media offers a better representation of students’ experiential knowledge-bases—specifically how students analyze and compose texts outside of the classroom. Digital media can also help students examine and learn to appreciate their expertise as critical thinkers, as participants in critical dialogue, as thinkers, writers, and collaborators independent of the instructor, and in cross-contextually applying course concepts. Therefore, texts and media students are more familiar can provide a scaffold of critical pedagogy’s responsibilities for students through
generating course content and selecting course materials with which to engage. Further still, students’ increased familiarity with digital media can provide critical composition instructors with a practical means of reframing teacher-student relationships away from traditional roles to those of co-problem solvers in approaching texts; again, by creating spaces more conducive to students’ individual agency and collective agency through peer interactions where the instructor is not present. Digital media can also enhance students’ ability course materials outside of solely the instructor’s knowledge-base.

Hart and Hicks further explore this potential utility of digital media in terms of helping students cultivate textual relationships; and, through the generation of course materials, providing instructors with influential feedback on their practice and students’ interests and observations. They assert in particular that while teachers might be less familiar with digital media initially, the process of learning how to use and apply them in composition pedagogy will not only better equip them to engage with their students and affirm the value of their reflections, but also to engage with other teachers (28, 75). Hart and Hicks’s assertion reflects the findings of cognitive psychologists Kessler and Staudinger18, in that using digital media collaboratively has symbiotic cognitive benefits for teachers and students. Effectively, this approach grounds students’ understanding of different contextual forms in relational terms; i.e., how media influence the construction and presentation of content.

Further still, Hart and Hicks point out that teachers are often left to determine if and how digital media will be used in the classroom. In a critical learning environment, negotiating and restructuring writing assignments through critical dialogue provides a

18 See Chapter 3 for my discussion of their research.
potentially valuable opportunity to better engage students’ experiential knowledge-bases. This opportunity reflects both Kessler and Staudinger’s and Larson and Hansen’s studies, in that students’ familiarity with digital media can help instructors adjust their practice in a manner that better integrates their knowledge of course concepts with students’ familiarity with the media, so that instructors know which concepts will be most valuable to students’ interests, goals, and composing processes in these experientially-based rhetorical contexts. Hart and Hicks implicitly support this, in that they encourage educators to explore the possibilities of digital media in the classroom beyond their own recommendations. Indeed, they explain that their text is only a template of inquiry for launching such investigations. Ultimately, Hart and Hicks’s work reinforce the idea that texts (and the relationships the instructors and students share with them) should also be seen as sites of negotiation for peer and teacher-student relationships.

Hart and Hicks’s scholarship also specifically links textual relationships with classroom relationships. They do so by citing the importance of classroom relationships in designing composition pedagogy and writing assignments. Additionally, they reaffirm how writing assignments in composition pedagogy should focus on textual relationships, which can then be used to assess classroom relationships. Furthermore, Hart and Hicks’s particular emphasis on digital media and composing offers unique opportunities to situate course concepts within students’ experiences and reflections, cultivate strong peer relationships through interactive composing in these contexts, and potentially catalyze students’ abilities to engage, exercise agency, and cross-contextually apply course concepts. In this manner, situating students’ generation of course materials, textual analysis, and composing in contexts reflective of their backgrounds echoes Dixon’s
growth model in a relevant contemporary classroom context, in that students are most likely to engage with traditional knowledge-bases through the lens of their experiences, as well as adapting course concepts for the purpose of personal growth through and from their experiences.

**Student-Text Relationships Across Disciplines and Discourses**

Critical pedagogy’s emphasis on student-centered learning necessitates that instructors solicit students’ input and insights. Without these solicitations, and students’ willingness to provide them, instructors can only fall back on traditional banking models of pedagogy. However, critical pedagogy also emphasizes cross-contextually applying course concepts. While such applications should not negate students’ agency in a critical learning environment, they typically entail students examining contexts outside of their knowledge-bases; i.e., contexts where students are less likely to feel comfortable exercising agency. It becomes important, then, for critical composition instructors to anticipate in which contexts students’ efforts at cross-contextually applying course concepts might take place in relation to their interests and goals. Instructors should also strive to anticipate how their expertise can facilitate (rather than dominate) students’ exploration of their choices and efforts. Since critical pedagogy’s traditional emphasis on sociopolitical issues has a tendency to privilege the instructor’s expertise and interests, I argue that a focus on students’ intended fields of study and their disciplinary discourses have more potential to maintain student-centered learning through the process of cross-contextual application, as well as reflect the valuation of students’ experiences as the basis for such applications.
As discussed in Chapter 1, composition studies as a discipline has a long history of exploring its situatedness in the academy and its potential for interdisciplinary collaboration. Berlin characterizes this history and potential in *Rhetoric and Reality*, most notably in his assertion that composition studies’ focus on thinking and writing forms the basis for an essential aspect of college training (2). Berlin expands on this claim later in the book, focusing specifically on the nature of collaboration between composition studies and other fields within and outside of the English department, such as literature and cognitive psychology, respectively. In reference to other fields, he characterizes one of the core functions of rhetoric and composition as interdisciplinary: “It is the organizing discipline of our educational system” (57). Essentially, Berlin argues that rhetorical and compositional skills are inherently interdisciplinary and should be taught specifically in terms of their applicability to the discursive contexts of other disciplines.

Consequently, Berlin’s conception of composition as a nexus of multiple disciplinary discourses and critical thinking indicates the potential value of a multidisciplinary discursive focus in critical pedagogy. This is largely because critical pedagogy is designed explicitly to navigate the dialogic link between self-knowledge and knowledge of others through discussion and reflection, a link which Berlin argues is inherent in all disciplines (58). In other words, by providing a practical means of analyzing interpersonal and discursive relationships, a critical composition pedagogy with a focus on disciplinary discourses can help students learn to assess and cultivate their understanding of whichever disciplinary discourses they choose to engage in, and
thus cultivate their agency and exploration of their interests and experiential knowledge-bases in the process.

Similar to Berlin and D’Angelo, Bruner argues that composition instructors should design reading and writing exercises based on the relationship between structure and discourse conventions, on the grounds that texts’ structures are based on rhetorical relationships. In *The Process of Education*, Bruner focuses on a specific shift in teaching methodology that began in the 60s and was prompted by scholars’ renewed interest in how composition is taught at the elementary and secondary school levels. According to Bruner, this shift demonstrates how educators’ relationships with students uniquely position them to design writing exercises that encourage students’ intellectual growth (1). Writing exercises trigger such growth, Bruner argues, by asking students to examine their interpersonal and circumstantial relationships. This effectively links students’ potential to engage with texts and discourses with their interests, backgrounds, problem-posing, and learning in both introspective and interactive contexts, such as critical reflection and critical dialogue.

In order to instigate this transformation, Bruner argues that teachers should use several basic strategies to design reading and writing exercises. These strategies include introducing the basic ideological framework and discursive conventions behind disciplines to students at a young age, so they can learn to assesses them and build on that understanding: “to learn structure, in short, is to learn how things are related” (6-7). Similar to critical pedagogues, Bruner argues in relation to this that student interest in the material is the best teaching aid, and that composition instructors can best cultivate student engagement by encouraging them to critically reflect on their thoughts,
assumptions, and judgments when analyzing and responding to texts. By doing so, critical composition instructors can encourage students to frame difficulties they have engaging with disciplinary texts/discourses as potential gaps in their knowledge-bases, which can inform students’ future attempts at textual engagement and critical reflection-in-action\(^\text{19}\). This also reflects Lothmann et al.’s emphasis on the influential role older adults (e.g. instructors) can play in encouraging younger adults (e.g. students) to interpret their efforts and mistakes positively, which further grounds instructor expertise in supporting students’ exploration of their choices and interests through cross-contextual application.\(^\text{20}\)

Similar to Dixon's growth model, I argue that Bruner’s ideas connect with critical pedagogy’s scholarship on classroom relationships in a number of ways. First, Bruner lays the groundwork for the idea that teachers need to be educated on how to relate to their students by soliciting their observations and reflections. Beyond the scope of critical pedagogy, his linking disciplinary learning with experiential writing exercises also indicates that critical pedagogical concepts can be helpful when scaffolded and applied earlier in a course, in order to smooth students’ transitions from more traditional learning environments to critical ones.\(^\text{21}\) A focus on using student interest and intuition to generate and execute classroom exercises is also well-adapted to (and well-established in) critical pedagogy's emphasis on student-centered learning.

\(^{19}\) See my discussion of Schön in Chapter 2.

\(^{20}\) See my discussion of Lothmann et al.’s study in Chapter 3

\(^{21}\) This assertion also connects to Noddings’ pedagogy of care, which I discuss in Chapter 2.
Bruner’s focus also corroborates Hart and Hick’s emphasis on the potential of digital media and critical pedagogy’s emphasis on student-centered learning, in that he argues teachers should use of non-print forms of media that are more reflective of students’ daily lives and experiences with composing (72). In doing so, he asserts that teachers could not only more effectively solicit and center students’ experiential expertise, but also better introduce compositional concepts within said expertise, thereby enhancing student comprehension and transference of these concepts to other contexts. Essentially, student interest is an essential component of an effective classroom exercise, and composition instructors should solicit student interest to prompt students to reflect critically on how (and whether) they can connect their interests with classroom texts. From the basis of their interests and experiential knowledge-bases, students can more effectively learn to assess how and why they are able to engage with a text, as well as devise strategies for synthesizing their ideas with discursive conventions through the cross-contextual application of course concepts.

**Enthymemes and Teaching Cross-Contextual Application**

Despite the potential of a multidisciplinary discourse focus to address limitations in critical pedagogy, however, incorporating such a focus into critical composition pedagogy poses a significant challenge. As critical composition instructors shift from a general focus on students’ experiences to students’ specific efforts at cross-contextual application in alignment with their disciplinary trajectories, two important factors must be reconciled. Specifically, critical composition must reconcile introducing and discussing course concepts to the class as whole with how these concepts operate differently in the
specific disciplinary contexts students choose; contexts that are likely unfamiliar to both
the student and the instructor.

Previous scholarship in rhetoric and composition offers a potential strategy for
helping critical composition instructors achieve this reconciliation through scaffolding
and equipping students to analyze the conventions of their chosen discourses: the
enthymeme. As D’Angelo’s epistemological claims on the utility of classical rhetorical
concepts suggest, I argue that it is potentially valuable to trace the origin and
development of the enthymeme and its connection to relational dynamics over the field’s
evolution from classical rhetoric. Doing so reveals how the concept of the enthymeme
has evolved from its origins to its modern day forms, as well as its current potential
applications to relationally framing textual analysis in critical pedagogy. Walker, for
instance, traces the term enthymeme back to its roots in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. He begins
his tracing by acknowledging what he still finds useful in Aristotle’s definition: “[it has a]
tendency to emphasize the dialogic relation between writer and audience by requiring the
writer to include the audience’s thinking in the invention process” (46). Aristotle’s
discussion of enthymemes in *Rhetoric* supports the accuracy of Walker’s analysis.

In his appropriately named seminal text on rhetoric, Aristotle defines rhetoric as
“the faculty of observing in any case the available means of persuasion” and asserts that
enthymemes are a viable strategy for doing so. Aristotle bases this assertion on the
premise that speakers should use audience values, experiential knowledge-bases, and
expectations to more effectively craft arguments for their ideas. An example of this
would be how critical composition instructors attempt to convince students of the value
of engaging with course concepts by appealing to the value students place on their interests and perspectives.

Furthermore, Aristotle conceives enthymemes as primarily appeal to audiences’ values through logic, and narrowly frames them as a three-part syllogism (i.e., argument based on deductive reasoning), where the second part (i.e., the minor premise) is omitted by the rhetor, based on the rhetor’s assumption that it reflects the audience’s values. A common example of this framing, with the implicit minor premise bracketed, is “All men are mortal [Socrates is a man]; therefore, Socrates is mortal.” Through rendering the minor premise implicit, the speaker draws on the audience’s knowledge-base in order to actively fill the implicit gap in her argument, aligning her logic with theirs.

Ultimately, Aristotle’s discussion of enthymemes being based on speaker-audience relationships, and speakers’ attempts to integrate their arguments into the context of their audiences’ values, mirrors the relational dynamics of both interpersonal and textual interactions in a critical learning environment. This discussion also mirrors these interactions’ potential as vehicles for student engagement and agency across contexts. In other words, successfully crafting enthymemes requires critical reflection and critical dialogue with others in order to understand how to convey concrete evidence convincingly, suggesting their potential use in critical pedagogy.

Cicero provides a practical demonstration of my argument--albeit in a different rhetorical situation--in an exercise he designed for teaching judicial rhetoric. His exercise has students listen to examples of clients presenting their cases, then play the part of the "adversary" to help the client expand on their reasoning. Then, when the client has left, the students "play out" the issue from the client's, adversary's, and jury's
points of view (150), developing their understanding of the rhetorical situation through dialogic enthymematic analysis. Similarly, I argue that critical composition instructors can facilitate students’ development of critical thinking skills through enthymematic argumentation and analysis. This can be done through students engaging in critical dialogue and reflection-in-action sessions with peers and the instructor and using the framework of this exercise to incorporate audience awareness into articulating ideas and analyzing those of others.

In this sense, the potential value of enthymemes in critical composition pedagogy is that they provide a possible approach towards developing students’ abilities to analyze how experts in their chosen disciplines form and articulate arguments in response to their audience’s values and expectations. Audience values and expectations in specialized disciplinary discourses, in turn, are influenced by these discourses’ conventions. In other words, critical composition instructors can adapt this exercise to help students engage with their chosen discourses’ conventions and analyze the perspectives of expert participants in these discourses. For example, students who interested in engaging with STEM disciplinary discourses can compare how experts’ ideas are framed for a peer audience in a peer-reviewed journal with how they are framed for a general audience in a popular publication. By focusing in particular on analyzing the structure and content focus of both pieces, students can infer the writers’ perspective of their audiences’ values, knowledge-bases, and expectations, and how they attempt to engage these perspectives.

Thus, while first-year composition students (and critical composition pedagogues) cannot reasonably be expected to use enthymemes to become proficient in an unfamiliar discourse in a semester or two, they could potentially use enthymemes in a scaffolded
framework textual analysis in terms of the interpersonal dynamics between writers and their audiences. Ultimately, when applied to the modern critical composition classroom, Cicero's pedagogical strategy for teaching rhetoric, which expands on students’ experiential knowledge-bases through a dialogic exercise--and ultimately is similar to the mutually influential relationship between critical reflection and critical dialogue--signifies the value of enthymemes as a means of cultivating students’ abilities to critically analyze rhetorical situations. In the context of the critical composition classroom, then, enthymemes could help critical composition instructors cultivate students’ learning how to frame specific discursive contexts in terms of interpersonal, speaker-audience relationships.

**Modern Conceptions of the Enthymeme**

In modern times, rhetoricians have expanded our understanding of how enthymemes are derived and applied from Aristotle’s and Cicero’s logos-driven dialogic conceptions, instead characterizing enthymemes as appeals to audiences’ emotional understandings as well. Their conceptual expansions of the enthymeme also represent a departure from Aristotle’s narrow syllogistic structure and are instead based more on the commonality between his definition and modern rhetoricians' definitions that Douglas Walton identifies: “[Aristotle and modern rhetoricians both] link enthymemes and appeal to popular opinion as a kind of argumentation” (99). Similarly, Walker proposes that we flip “Aristotle’s notion that all the other skills of rhetoric are supplementary…to enthymememg” and instead realize that “enthymemic skill depends on all other skills” (61). He does this because he claims Aristotle does not give a clear definition of what a
syllogism is, thus potentially leading to enthymemes being relegated to a lesser role in rhetoric by confining them to matters of logic.

Furthermore, Walker essentially observes that “enthymeming” is a natural part of the communicative process—i.e., effective speakers, even in casual conversation, inevitably incorporate their awareness of their audience into how they compose their ideas, and the transmission and accumulation of knowledge requires both introspective and interactive processing of information. Since discourses are made up human relationships, enthymemes are therefore virtually inescapable. What does change, according to Walker, is the way enthymemes are applied across discursive contexts (62).

Thus, while enthymemes have not been discussed in relation to a critical composition pedagogy, there is a recurring motif of cross-contextual discursive application in rhetoric and composition’s discourse on enthymemes.

I argue that Walker’s discussion of enthymemes ultimately helps to solidify the value of scaffolding students’ engagement with disciplinary discourses through an analysis of speaker-audience relationships within them. This is because enthymemes are a tool that is useful in academic/disciplinary discourses, but not one that dismisses the value of students’ experiential insights in these contexts. The use and value of enthymemes in both experiential knowledge-bases and disciplinary discourses also reflects the parallels between interpersonal relationships and textual relationships in that both are characterized by underlying critical dialogues and the critical reflections of their participants. Furthermore, Walker’s claim that it is only the application of enthymemes that changes across discourses also suggests that critical composition instructors could
use enthymemes as a resource for helping students cultivate their abilities to cross-contextually apply course concepts in discourses of their choosing.

In addition to their potential utility in a critical learning environment, Cicero’s exercise and his dialogic characterization of enthymemes support Walker’s and other modern rhetoricians’, such as Gross and Dascal’s and Miller and Bee’s, expansion of Aristotle’s logos-centered conception. This contemporary reframing of enthymemes’ importance in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is significant in that identifying the use of enthymemes in all forms of appeals to the audience, not just logos, highlights their versatility as well as utility.

This paradigmatic shift regarding enthymemes is further examined by Gross and Dascal. They remind us that while in previous scholarship rhetoricians have identified ethos, pathos, and logos as the unifying concepts in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle actually indicates that the enthymeme fulfills this role (275). Gross and Dascal base this claim on their premise that all three rhetorical appeals rely on inferences between speaker and audience. Therefore, I argue that the omnipresence of enthymemes in all rhetorical appeals further indicates that enthymemes are a fundamental tool for students’ learning to engage with disciplinary discourses and the speaker-audience relational dynamics within them. This is because enthymemes could provide students with a template for understanding the rhetorical choices authors make within a text or discourse in terms of how they are aimed at an audience also made of participants in said discourse. Further still, rhetorical appeals’ presence in multiple disciplinary discourses supports my argument that enthymemes are a potentially valuable multidisciplinary tool for students’ cultivation of
textual relationships through an understanding of how writers and discourse participants craft their arguments in terms of audience perspectives, interests, and values.

My argument is further reinforced by the fact that Gross and Dascal are not alone in calling for this conceptual reframing of enthymemes. Miller and Bee similarly call for a shift from Aristotle’s perception of the enthymeme as primarily logos-driven, instead seeing enthymemes as a rhetorical tool rooted in pathos or affect. In particular, Miller and Bee claim that there is a gap in enthymeme research regarding Aristotle’s use of them as the centerpiece in rhetorical persuasion. They attempt to fill that gap by positing that “the affective component in the enthymeme is the essence of Aristotle’s concept of the enthymeme as practical reasoning [emphasis original],” in other words, enthymemes are about making an impression upon one’s audience in general, rather than specifically through logic (201). They support this claim by citing the term’s etymology (enthymeme means “in the mind/soul”). Indeed, their argument is well-supported in that they frequently cite Aristotle’s Rhetoric as textual evidence, allowing readers to assess directly the accuracy of their interpretation.

Within the context of critical composition pedagogy, then enthymemes could serve as the basis for teaching students to analyze how authors and discursive participants make rhetorical choices to affect their audiences. As students cultivate this understanding of enthymemes in their chosen discourses, critical composition instructors can then begin to teach students how to experiment with enthymemes as a means of critical engagement and forming a relational understanding of their discourse as aspiring participants. Miller and Bee corroborate this in their argument that an affective understanding of enthymemes is central to rhetorical persuasion because the speaker must
have a credible ethos and the emotional support of their audience in order to persuade them with logic to commit to a particular action. Miller and Bee base their argument in an exploration of the three qualities that they claim contribute to a speaker’s ethos—good sense, good moral character, and goodwill,—tracing how each of these qualities are determined by how successfully the speaker uses them to appeal to the emotions of their audience (211).

Knight and Sweeney’s scholarship on enthymemes also demonstrates their interdisciplinary potential in helping students cultivate textual relationships and critical discourse analysis skills. Their scholarship also builds on Walker’s premise that enthymemes can be used to analyze critical dialogue and experiential learning. Knight and Sweeney do so by appropriating enthymemes to analyze interpersonal relationships and render them in both a disciplinary discourse and interpersonal dialogue for the purpose of helping medical professionals (speakers) align their agendas with those of their patients (audience) for reflective interpersonal communication. Knight and Sweeney ground their claim in a disciplinary focus on the field of medicine, urging researchers to use enthymemes for analyzing researcher-participant conversations.

While Knight and Sweeney’s discussion of enthymemes is not as theoretically dense as most rhetoricians’, their application of them reflects my argument that enthymemes have the potential to bridge interpersonal contexts with disciplinary discursive ones: “We believe that this analytical tool [enthymemes] can be applied to the understanding of many areas within medical education research, including the investigation of clinical reasoning, professional attitudes (e.g. attitudes to patient groups or diseases) and doctor–patient interaction” (232). Their encouragement of researchers
to use enthymemes to analyze doctor-patient interactions shows that enthymemes can be applied to analyze both doctors’ articulations of their discursive knowledge and patients’ articulations of their experiences. This cross-contextual application of enthymemes demonstrates the potential of students’ engaging in enthymematic exercises in a critical composition course to not only scaffold learning to analyze unfamiliar discourses of their choice, but also do so through critical dialogues rooted in students’ experiential knowledge-bases.

Furthermore, I argue that framing rhetors’ successful use of enthymemes as based on having a relational understanding of their audience correlates with many of the critical pedagogues’ scholarship I discussed in Chapter 1. For example, Miller and Bee’s scholarship parallels Lindquist’s recommendation that instructors affectively display their stances on social issues and relationships with class texts, in order to make them more relatable/approachable to students. Additionally, this parallel also aligns closely with Freire’s conception of the teacher-student relationship, in that responding to students’ and audiences’ experiences and values should form the basis of teachers’ and rhetors’ approaches, respectively.

As I have discussed previously, there is a strong connection between introspective-interactive learning in interpersonal and textual relationships. An exercise designed by Walton illustrates this by framing critical reflection as a means to humanize textual analysis. He argues that rhetoricians should use “some kind of notation and argument reconstruction” to measure speakers’ rhetorically strategic use of enthymemes in terms of the audience’s ability to use their contextually relevant insights to fill in and agree with the speaker’s implicit assumptions (110). Although Walton does not provide a
specific example of the notation he calls for, I argue that critical composition instructors could potentially use this enthymematic exercise to concretize the parallels between introspective-interactive learning in critical reflection/critical dialogue and textual/discursive analysis. My argument is based on the premise that doing so would both promote the growth of student engagement and agency by grounding these skills in texts they choose and their experiential knowledge-bases, as well as scaffold their efforts to analyze and engage with the disciplinary discourses they find personally relevant.

It is also important to note, however, that while many contemporary rhetoricians agree on the central importance of enthymemes in constructing different rhetorical appeals, as well as how the concept of enthymemes has become more adaptable in modern times, the debate on how exactly enthymemes should be understood remains nuanced. Walton argues, as do Gross and Dascal and Miller and Bee, that the modern use of the term “enthymeme” differs from that of Aristotle’s in some ways, and that these differences in modern usage need to be studied further. However, Walton’s approach to reconceiving enthymemes differs from them. Rejecting the “formal, mechanistic” notion that enthymemes are mere syllogisms with missing premises, Walton asserts that enthymemes also depend on “informal criteria” such as common knowledge and plausibility (94). Although he acknowledges that Aristotle’s own definition of the term revolves around plausibility, he cites other scholars to prove that Aristotle viewed enthymemes as syllogisms that “argued by signs or premise” rather than simply being a collection of three syllogisms with one missing (98).

To clarify this misunderstanding, Walton raises an interesting point. Specifically, he distinguishes between needed and used assumptions in filling these “missing”
premises. Needed assumptions are “missing propositions such that 1) the argument is not structurally correct as it stands, but 2) when the propositions in question are inserted, the argument becomes structurally correct” (95). By contrast, the used assumptions are “propositions that, even though not explicitly stated in the text of the discourse, are meant to be part of the argument by the speaker (and are likely to be taken so by the hearer, once they are identified by the hearer)” (95). Significantly, Walton argues these two definitions are connected because both Aristotle and modern enthymeme theorists “link enthymemes and appeal to popular opinion as a kind of argumentation” (99). In other words, a rhetor’s successful use of enthymemes is equivalent to the introspective-interactive learning process I describe in Chapter 3, in that there is a mutually stimulating relationship between a rhetor’s awareness of their audience and the feedback they receive from that audience.

**Practicing Enthymemes in Pedagogy**

Ultimately, Walton’s expansion of the structural nature of enthymemes provides critical composition instructors an opportunity to adapt enthymematic textual analysis to a student-centered critical learning environment, particularly one that promotes students’ exploration of and engagement with a variety of unfamiliar disciplinary discourses. Gage provides an example of how this might look in practice. He advocates that composition students could practice enthymematic analysis in order to help them develop an "organic" sense of structure as determined between speaker and audience, rather than instructors merely providing students with structural templates to which they should conform (38). In other words, by focusing on an audience's shared implicit assumptions in specific
textual contexts, students could potentially learn how speaker-audience relationships translate into a text’s structure--i.e., teaching composition in terms of relationships, both interpersonal and textual. Gage’s recommendation, then, echoes both classical and contemporary rhetorical scholarship on enthymemes, and also the value of exploring enthymemes in critical dialogue with peers and the instructor.

In order to provide a scaffolded, generative approach for his students, Gage breaks down enthymematic structures into four separate concerns: "1) questions at issue; 2) probable answers to those questions, or stances taken; 3) potential strategies for leading to those answers; 4) assumptions which make the strategies work" (40). I argue that the first two concerns in particular reflect critical pedagogy’s emphasis on problem-posing, because they ask students to interpret and articulate the intentions of the writer instead of the instructor. They also link student problem-posing with students’ learning discourse analysis. The third concern, I argue, scaffolds students’ linking of textual structure with methodology, because it frames both in relational terms that mirror human interaction; i.e., writers and speakers arrange their ideas in a manner responsive to audience values, backgrounds, and expectations.

In a critical composition classroom where students choose texts and discourses they are not experienced in analyzing, Gage’s exercise can not only break down enthymematic analysis for students, but also facilitate students’ ability to reflect critically in the process. This framework also provides critical composition instructors, who often are not well-versed in these discourses either, a means of facilitating students’ initial exploration of them in understandable terms: what problems/subjects are the participants in my disciplinary discourse interested in; how do the authors examine those subjects;
what connections are there between what authors are interested in, what they find, and how they communicate what they find? More importantly, this framework helps instructors channel their expertise in service of students’ problem-posing, generation of course materials, and cross-contextual applications of course concepts. Additionally, these questions are not meant to be a stand-in for possessing an established disciplinary knowledge-base, but rather an initial means of establishing one.

Ultimately, I argue that Gage’s conception of the enthymeme as a means of reconciling speakers and their audiences to organically construct a text suggests the potential value of enthymemes as a means of measurement between the alignment of the introspective and interactive components of textual and discursive relationships. In other words, I argue that students’ framing discourse analysis in terms of attempting to enthymematically map what they observe in a text’s speaker-audience relationships equates textual analysis with interpersonal dialogue. This parallel is reflected in the schematic Gage provides via four concerns, which implicitly equate enthymematic structure with discursive methodology, thus facilitating students’ deliberation over writers’ choices and anticipating their audiences’ values and expectations accordingly. Additionally, in terms of student writing, the process of determining what enthymematic premises are the most important can help students reflect on what "knee-jerk" position they may take on a subject, and offer them a strategy for developing their own arguments (41). Further still, Gage’s steps provide critical composition instructors with a framework that breaks down the components of enthymematic while still centering students’ interests and observations to drive the exercise’s purpose and outcome.
Emmel’s dialogic exercise using enthymemes also aligns with critical pedagogy, particularly its emphasis on critical dialogue and reflection. Specifically, she calls for a composition course design focused on teaching enthymemes in terms of relational dynamics. Similar to Walton and Gage, Emmel argues that enthymemes are more than “truncated syllogisms” and argues that they are at “the center of cognition and discourse” (132). Most tellingly, she characterizes enthymemes as “a conceptualization of a rich set of relationships with the potential to be expressed in a multitude of ways” (132). At its practical heart, Emmel argues that the purpose of an enthymeme-based pedagogy “is to create the classroom as a crucible... of inquiry-thinking, questioning, defining, conversing, understanding, connecting, and concluding” in order to “clarify how communication, both written and otherwise, achieves the shape of shared conclusions and shared knowledge” (133). This characterization of enthymemes further reinforces my argument that there are important commonalities between the learning dynamics of classrooms and textual/discursive relationships, and students can draw on these commonalities as a scaffolding mechanism from the former to the latter.

Additionally, as critical pedagogy calls for, Emmel advocates that classroom materials be student-generated and exercises student-driven. She provides an example discussion exercise where a student acts as a speaker and poses a general claim to the class/audience regarding a topic they choose. The class then refutes the claim, forcing the speaker to refine the claim accordingly, and take note of the enthymemes that emerge in the process. I argue that such an exercise provides students with a live audience on which to test their ideas, effectively using enthymemes to link classroom and rhetorical/textual relationships, as well as introspection and interaction. More
specifically, I argue that Emmel’s enthymeme exercise can easily be supplemented with critical pedagogy’s focus on students’ experiential knowledge-bases\textsuperscript{22}, in terms of stimulating critical reflection through dialogue.

Additionally, if applied as a means of cultivating multidisciplinary application, as Knight and Sweeney demonstrate, Emmel’s enthymematic exercise can help students analyze basic rhetorical and compositional concepts such as speaker-audience relationships and argumentation in multiple disciplinary backgrounds. Thus Emmel’s exercise can simultaneously encourage students to appreciate each other’s contributions to class discussion as they articulate their approaches to posed problems and promote the cultivation of peer relationships. Essentially, students’ use of enthymematic dialogic analysis to understand how their own contributions align with and are supplemented by their peers’ can also enhance their experiential frame of reference, as well as their collective agency through peer relationships in a critical learning environment.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to being applicable to multiple forms of media, including those which favor students’ experiential backgrounds, enthymemes’ ability to render structure in terms of the speaker-audience relationship also offers students a tool for genre analysis. Though she does not mention enthymemes specifically, Soliday’s \textit{Everyday Genres: Writing Assignments across the Disciplines} focuses on the relationship between the discursive goals of different disciplines and interdisciplinary-based writing initiatives, focusing in particular on one Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program. Essentially, Soliday argues that composition instructors should encourage their students

\textsuperscript{22} See my examination of Shor, hooks, and Lindquist in Chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{23} See my examination in Chapter 2 of De Silveira and Habermas and Bandura, respectively.
to view genres in terms of “social practice,” rather than static conventions devoid of context; i.e., students can better understand genres by viewing them as being constructed by relationships (2). She argues that this is helpful for students because it concretizes and binds their concept of audience to genre conventions, so that they have a clearer sense of purpose (6). In other words, I argue that Soliday’s conception of genres is conducive to enthymematic analysis because both frame textual relationships in terms of the introspective-interactive dynamics that characterize interpersonal relationships.

Soliday’s approach to this task also points to the potential efficacy of scaffolding from classroom relationships and experiential knowledge to textual relationships and discursive knowledge. Through working with multiple disciplines, she notes that it is useful to segment writing assignments (particularly larger ones) as a means of scaffolding across concepts, so that students are better able to isolate and master the functions of each component before attempting to master the whole. Furthermore, Soliday finds that it is also helpful for students to “enact” (3) genres in class, so they can see the choices other writers have made, rather than merely explaining them in an assignment sheet to the instructor. Another pedagogical strategy Soliday espouses is grounding student exploration of textual relationships in small group discussion, on the basis that students “learn more content in small classes where they frequently discuss, write, revise and receive frequent feedback from readers” (30). Again, Soliday’s scholarship establishes the connection between classroom and textual relationships in terms of interpersonal negotiation. As evidence for her findings, she includes notes and interviews with professors from various disciplines, as well as various combinations of student
interviews, classroom surveys, samples of student work, regular observations, and course portfolios (32-3).

Soliday’s analysis of genre theory and her view of genres as social constructs posits that writers are best able to approach and situate themselves within a writing assignment by being aware of their relationships to others. This not only provides students with a sense of function, but also a sense of purpose that corresponds with an emphasis on critical dialogue and critical reflection. In conjunction with enthymematic analysis and dialogic exercises, Soliday’s genre exercises could potentially be adapted by critical composition instructors to help students generate course materials, experiment with rhetorical elements, and apply experiential learning to academic contexts and assignments. Soliday’s description of her methods of data collection and assignment design can also inform instructors’ attempts to more effectively cultivate student engagement with disciplinary discourses. Specifically, I argue that Soliday’s work illustrates the potential value of critical composition instructors collaborating directly with pedagogues in other disciplines, in order to better inform their attempts to help their students examine unfamiliar discourses.

Conclusion

If critical pedagogy incorporates a focus on disciplinary discourse analysis and relationally framing textual analysis in order to maintain the integrity of a student-centered learning environment, this poses significant challenges. For critical composition instructors, this entails the difficulty of actively mitigating the instructor’s traditional authority by teaching composition concepts outside the realm of the instructor’s personal
interests and disciplinary knowledge-base, especially through students’ non-standardized exploration of a variety of disciplinary discourses, which the students choose based on their interests and goals, as well as students’ cultivation of strong peer relationships. To this end, it is imperative that critical composition instructors find a means of teaching composition concepts in a manner that facilitates students’ disciplinary exploration and cultivation of peer relationships without taking the initiative away from students in the process.

Furthermore, as discussed in previous chapters, students who are not accustomed to critical pedagogy often require time and guided practice to adjust their learning paradigms from more traditional forms of education, and may actively resist making such adjustments because of the responsibilities engagement and exercising agency entail. A further shift from this style of learning to unfamiliar texts and discourses only complicates these adjustments.

In spite of these challenges, I argue that rhetorical scholarship on discourse analysis and enthymemes offers a potentially valuable for facilitating students’ engagement with this cross-contextual shift. This is because a recurring theme in my research in critical pedagogy and other disciplinary scholarship is that critical reflection and engagement are essential to learning, and that cultivating students’ ability to transfer these skills across multiple learning contexts is far more important than cultivating them in a particular learning context or regarding particular issues.

Critical reflection and critical dialogue with both peers and the instructor can help students develop insight as to what discourses are most potentially relevant and empowering for them, as well techniques for navigating unfamiliar texts and discourses
by framing them in terms of interpersonal relationships. I also argue that a focus on
developing textual and discursive analysis skills in students’ intended fields will maintain
the integrity of their ability to exercise agency in a critical classroom, with the instructor
offering opportunities and support to help them do so, with enthymemes as a possible
strategy to this end. This potential use of enthymemes, as well as other possible
approaches to the limitations I have discussed in the previous four chapters, will be
examined in critical reflections on my own practice in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Praxis and Reflections

Introduction

Throughout the previous chapters of this project, I have examined how critical pedagogy intersects with and is practiced in composition studies, specifically in terms of how students engage with course concepts such as the writing process and its components. This examination is framed around a critique of several key/recurring strengths and corresponding limitations I have identified in critical pedagogy. It is also framed around how these limitations, if unaddressed, have the potential to compromise these strengths. In its exploration of critical pedagogy’s key strengths and limitations, this project attempts to refine and enrich critical pedagogues’ practice, as well as students’ and teachers’ co-establishment of critical learning environments. This attempt is rooted in a multidisciplinary theoretical inquiry and response to critical pedagogy’s limitations, in service of its strengths.

First and foremost, critical composition pedagogy is based on creating learning environments that are student-centered. Student-centered learning environments are inherently characterized by a valuation of students’ interests and experiential knowledge-bases, and they demonstrate this valuation through instructors’ soliciting and responding to students’ interests and experiences. This is because critical pedagogy posits that when students are able to act on opportunities to critique and shape a course’s design and topics, they are more likely to become engaged in their own learning processes, and thus become more empowered as thinkers and writers through making these decisions. Critical pedagogy also posits that this process is auto-catalytic; i.e., the more empowered students are in terms of making decisions in and contributing to a course, the more
engaged they become in doing so, and thus further engaged and empowered. For instructors, student engagement and exercises of agency in the classroom provide valuable insight into their teaching practices and the value of their knowledge-bases for students, through which they can continue to refine and develop both.

Consequently, students themselves play an essential role in cultivating student-centered learning environments, and must choose to fulfill this role in order for these environments to be cultivated. However, most students’ experiences with formal education are based in more traditional pedagogies, where students are simply tasked with passively absorbing content rather than actively critiquing and contributing it. While students are less likely to be engaged in their learning processes when confined to these passive roles, being accustomed to them often leaves students inexperienced with more actively engaging with their learning processes. This lack of experience, in turn, also likely leaves students less confident in their abilities to actively engage. In other words, students’ willingness to engage, and their appreciation of the value of engaging, are in large part contingent on students’ confidence in their ability to do so, and their experiences with the outcomes of their efforts in this process in terms of instructor responses.

However, despite the potential of students’ lack of experience to undermine their confidence in and abilities and willingness to engage, critical composition pedagogy does not sufficiently address the need for instructors to provide students with scaffolding in the classroom. By doing so, instructors can facilitate students’ exposure to the advantages and responsibilities a critical learning environment entails of them. Also, as students’ levels of comfort with and confidence in their abilities to engage begin to grow,
instructors can subsequently adjust the course to provide them further opportunities to expand their engagement through further opportunities to exercise agency in the classroom.

In order to cultivate student engagement and agency, critical pedagogy also emphasizes the political nature of education, and focuses critical thinking on the analysis and critique of power structures. This emphasis is reflected in the practice of problem-posing, where students ultimately create, frame, and articulate the questions and issues to which they will respond in the course. Critical dialogue, where students engage in attempts to address these posed problems in open-ended discussions with each other and the instructor, also reflects this practice. Both problem-posing and critical dialogue are rooted in the valuation of students’ interests and knowledge-bases, and they cannot take place in a critical learning environment unless students are able to objectively analyze and critique power structures. Such power structures range from the largest civic and economic institutions in our society to the localized authority and power structure of the classroom itself, as represented by the instructor. Consequently, in order to maintain a student-centered learning environment, the dynamics of power structures must be explicated and actively checked by students, including the instructor’s traditional authority.

What critical pedagogy often overlooks, however, is that the instructor’s authority in the classroom is not just based on their institutional role, but also their expertise. In other words, critical pedagogues are more likely to be familiar with and have strong opinions on political issues. A focus on political issues, therefore, has the potential to re-center the classroom around the instructor’s opinions and authority. This is especially
true in regards to students who are either less informed or more apathetic on these issues than the instructor, as well as students who disagree with the instructor’s opinions. In such cases, students are arguably likely to either defer to or be alienated by the instructor’s stances, which again compromises their ability to engage with the course through exercising agency and responding to instructors’ solicitations for open-ended feedback. Consequently, critical composition instructors must work to reflect on and address how their expertise-based authority manifests in the classroom. This should be done not only in terms of how an instructor’s expertise can compromise student agency, but also in terms of how an instructor’s expertise can be channeled to cultivate critical learning environments for students while maintaining their ability to engage through making meaningful choices in the classroom.

Furthermore, critical pedagogy’s focus on classroom relationships in a critical learning environment, and these relationship’s potential to positively influence and enhance student engagement, should not be confined narrowly to teacher-student relationships. Critical pedagogy, however, tends to ignore the potential impact of peer relationships on students’ senses of agency, empowerment, the value of their experiential knowledge-bases, and the value of active engagement in their learning processes. The impact of these particular relationships can be observed in how students exchange ideas with one another through critical dialogue, how they engage in critical reflection on their contributions and those of others in such dialogues, how students collaborate in identifying and articulating posed problems, and how students collaborate in generating course materials. In addition to their engagement in these processes, students have the potential to offer their peers unique insights and support as a counterbalance to the
instructor’s perspective and authority in the classroom. While the cultivation and
dynamics of strong peer relationships are the sole responsibility of the students
themselves, instructors can facilitate students’ cultivation of these relationships through
providing opportunities to do so, in addition to opportunities to contribute insights and
feedback on the course.

Further still, in order to ensure student engagement with and empowerment
through course concepts, critical pedagogy emphasizes cultivating and encouraging
students’ ability to apply these concepts in larger (and often unfamiliar) community
contexts. Students’ ability to cross-contextualize these concepts for their own purposes is
the ultimate manifestation of student-centered learning, which should be independent of
the instructor’s authority and the authority of larger power structures. For this reason, in
part, critical pedagogy has traditionally eschewed incorporating a focus on specific
disciplinary discourses and their conventions. Critical pedagogues such as Shor have
argued that focusing on discursive contexts like these inherently equates education with
mere job-training and encourages students’ adherence to these conventions, rather than
critiquing them.

It is precisely through these specialized disciplinary discourses, however, that
college students have an opportunity to learn how to comprehensively engage with and
critique power structures in society. Furthermore, engaging with and mastery of these
discourses often forms part of students’ motivation to pursue a college education and
fulfill their goals. Students can still maintain their ability to make meaningful choices in
the classroom through posing course problems and generating course content, therefore,
while practicing cross-contextually applying course concepts in these contexts.
Instructors, meanwhile, can channel their expertise and insights towards helping students cultivate these skills based on the choices students have made without re-centering the course around their perspective and knowledge-base.

Ultimately, this research project attempts to comprehensively address these limitations in critical pedagogy’s efforts to cultivate a student-centered learning environment, while simultaneously honoring and preserving critical pedagogy’s strengths and core values. This attempt, and the pedagogical design I piloted based on it, are rooted in the insights, scholarship, and research of a theoretical inquiry into other pedagogical traditions, cognitive psychology, and rhetoric and composition.

In the following sections of this chapter, I will discuss the aspects, ideas, and findings of this multidisciplinary theoretical inquiry. I will describe in detail the specific design of my pedagogy in terms of overall structure, classroom activities, and the major assignment sequence. Along with this description, I will also reflect on my observations on the course as it unfolded, as well as my unsuccessful attempt to collect data from students on my piloted pedagogy and its indications regarding students’ engagement in course. I will then reflect on my observations on course outcomes in relation to my theorizing, focusing on emergent and unanticipated outcomes in particular, and how my theorizing/pedagogical design might adjusted going forward. I will then conclude by discussing the insights and contributions this project makes towards advancing research and practice in critical pedagogy.
Praxis Design and Outcomes

As the previous chapters discuss, I derived several fundamental operating assumptions from my theorizing on and research into other pedagogical traditions, cognitive psychology, and rhetoric and composition. These fundamental operating assumptions, in turn, informed my pedagogical design and practice-based decisions. Specifically, these assumptions include the following:

1. Critical composition instructors can provide guidance through pre-established, semi-traditional course structures (at least initially), without compromising students’ abilities to make meaningful choices in the classroom;

2. My students were most likely not familiar with engaging in critical learning environments;

3. Critical composition pedagogy and its attempts to engage students should start from the basis of students’ experiential knowledge-bases;

4. Instructors’ expertise-based authority can be reflexively managed to where it is an asset, rather than a liability, in a student-centered learning environment;

5. Students’ declared majors can be taken by critical composition instructors as meaningful choices made regarding their education, and therefore a focus on their chosen disciplines’ discourses is a response to students’ choices;

6. Peer relationships are an asset to students’ engagement and cultivation of agency;
7. Instructors can and should take the honesty and merit of student feedback seriously, and at face value;

8. Enthymemes are an inherently valuable strategy for students’ analyses of their discourses, regardless of which discourses they choose. Enthymemes also scaffold the instructors’ expertise in a manner that maintains a student-centered learning environment.

In order to further test my theoretical assumptions and arguments, I designed and practiced a modified first-year critical composition pedagogy that attempts to address the limitations I identify in critical pedagogy, as well as implement the potential solutions I posit for these limitations. I taught this course, a section of English 102: College Composition II, at UNR in the Spring of 2015. This section consisted of 26 students, one of whom dropped in the first unit of the course. The 25 who remained throughout the semester represented a variety of fields, including business, engineering, sociology, physics, nutrition, criminal justice, agricultural science, journalism, history, molecular biology, computer science, communications, veterinary science, pre-law, psychology, and undeclared. All but one of the students, who was in his late 20s, were the age of traditional first-year college students, 18-19.

As I piloted this pedagogy, I attempted to collect data from both my perspective and the students’. On my part, I kept a daily teaching journal recording observations on each class and individual conferences. Additionally, in an attempt to collect student observations on the course anonymously (so as not to compromise student feedback via my authority over them), a colleague of mine administered consent forms, three rounds of
anonymous surveys during the course and scheduled interviews when the course was complete. Survey and interview questions focused on:

1. Students’ impressions of each course unit (and how previous units prepared them for it);
2. Descriptions of their relationships with their peers and myself as the instructor, and how these relationships did or did not contribute to their learning;
3. Which assignments they did and did not find useful;
4. How discussions did or did not relate to their writing/work in the class;
5. Improvements they would make based on their experiences.
6. Other factors not covered in the survey

Unfortunately, however, only a few students answered even one of these surveys, and only one student gave an interview after the course. This absence of responses is likely indicative of how students viewed themselves in relation to my authority as the instructor, and reflective of their investment in this pedagogy. The questions in the survey themselves, furthermore, reflect a teacher-centric perspective in their focus as opposed to critical pedagogy values and practices, especially student problem-posing. I will discuss my reflections on my methodology and students’ lack of responses in further detail in the next section.

Due to the lack of feedback from a significant majority of the students in the course, my discussion of my praxis attempt will focus primarily on the relationship between my posed limitations in critical pedagogy and my proposed solutions for them, and my limited observations on the outcomes of my practice and the course.
First, having anticipated that most of my students would likely not have experience with participating in critical learning environments, I based my course design around guiding them through this experience. Drawing from Noddings’ spheres of care\textsuperscript{24}, which starts in the context of students’ introspective experiential knowledge-bases and gradually expands to the larger world through a relational framework, I designed a three-unit structure for the course that starts with students’ experiences and expands to intra-disciplinary discourse analysis, and then to interdisciplinary research inquiries into larger societal issues. By starting from students’ experiential knowledge-bases, my intention was not only to help students become comfortable with the course and with me as a teacher, but also to create opportunities to solicit feedback from students on their interests, backgrounds, and goals through writing assignments.

Similar to Owens’s\textsuperscript{25} and Gibson’s\textsuperscript{25} semi-structured course designs, which focused on sustainability and sociology, respectively, I used a preselected course topic as a starting point for acclimating to the course. In order to ensure that students could focus on their interests and experiential knowledge-bases in relation to this initial course topic and critique the readings, I focused on young adult neurocognitive development. I also used some of my research as course readings in this unit. From there, however, the focus shifted from this topic towards providing students opportunities to pursue their own interests, generate materials, and use assignments to follow and engage with their own disciplinary discourses.

\textsuperscript{24} See my discussion of Noddings in Chapter 2

\textsuperscript{25} See my discussion of Owens in Chapter 2 and Gibson in Chapter 1.
I refer to the three-unit structure of my pedagogical design as “empathic pedagogy.” As Zembylas\(^{26}\) demonstrates, empathy can be characterized as people’s ability and willingness to immerse themselves in (and engage with) other perspectives, and that this is best conveyed through modeling thought processes to others and acknowledging/respecting others’ contributions to these processes. I also called my pedagogical design empathic in reference to the relational frameworks that form the basis of much my response to critical pedagogy’s limitations. These relational frameworks include, for an example, an emphasis on teacher-student relationships, as modeled by Noddings’s relations of care, Dewey’s emphasis on students and teachers negotiating their perspectives as the basis of curriculum, and Schön’s reflexive pedagogy and its emphasis on the dynamics between dialogue and reflection.

My empathic pedagogical design also emphasizes a focus on peer relationships in generating posed problems, course materials, and enhancing students’ willingness and abilities to engage in the course and exercise agency. Further still, my pedagogical design attempts to facilitate students’ forming relationships with texts and discourses relevant to their goals and intended fields of study. I focused assignments and my observations around these frameworks in each unit of the course.

Empathic Pedagogy: First Unit

The first unit of this empathic pedagogy focused primarily on students’ explorations of their experiential knowledge-bases through critical reflection and dialogue. Through this emphasis on dialogue and reflection, I sought to provide students

\(^{26}\) See my discussion of Zembylas in Chapter 2.
opportunities to develop strong peer relationships, as well as encourage them to find ways to potentially connect their interests and experiential knowledge-bases with their goals. I reasoned that exploring these potential connections while facilitating students’ exercising of agency through making meaningful choices would then form the basis of the second and third units.

As I mentioned, I assumed my students, most of whom were traditional first-years, would need scaffolding for the responsibilities of a critical classroom, since prior to college most of their educational experiences would likely have been with more traditional pedagogies. With this in mind, I chose young adult neurocognitive development as the initial subject of my first unit. I made this choice on the assumption that it had several advantages that reflect the limitations of critical pedagogy and solutions I discussed in Chapters 2-3. For example, a focus on young adult neurocognitive development centers course materials and discussion on a subject relevant to everyone’s experiential knowledge-bases, not just the instructor’s, while still allowing for students to apply their own unique interests and experiences to this subject. Additionally, by introducing texts on this subject, including scholarly articles, I intended to facilitate and support students’ learning to analyze and critique writers’ and scholars’ views on these issues through directly applying their experiences. In this way, I reasoned that my students could potentially negotiate their experiential insights with my own and the texts’, as Dixon and Dewey\(^{27}\) advocate in their pedagogies.

I also presumed that the subject of young adult neurocognitive development would provide an opportunity for students to critique and critically reflect on concepts

\(^{27}\) See my discussion of Dixon’s and Dewey’s pedagogies in Chapter 2.
discussed in the readings in relation to themselves and their peers’ insights; i.e., the kind of reflection-in-action that Schön advocates. In other words, I reasoned that since the subject of the readings was their own age group, or an age they had experienced, this would create an opening for students to challenge the authors’ claims about their experiences and neurocognitive development, as well as examine potential connections between both. Further still, this focus was not a political issue that I was well-informed on and strongly opinionated about, which I assumed would lessen the chances of students feeling alienated by my familiarity with the research and any stances I had based on my experiential knowledge-base.

Having reflected on my observations over these first few weeks, I noticed that students generally tended to be confident and comfortable with reflecting on and discussing their perspectives in this first unit of the course. Students were also generally able to point to quotes in the texts that confirmed their knowledge-bases. This was particularly true in one opening free-write discussion with Arthur and Chein et al., where I observed that students’ references to their experiences and risk assessment became so raucous that participation actually had to be capped in the interest of moving on to the activity.

I also observed, however, that students were more comfortable asking questions to each other about readings than asking me, or with questioning the texts. With De Silveira and Habermas, for example, students tended to agree unequivocally with their observations on young adult behavior, and did not cite any disagreements unless I asked specifically if there were any aspects they thought were weaker or did not align with their own experiences. Given my authority in the classroom, I cannot claim with certainty
whether this signifies students’ passivity with the reading, their impression that I agreed with the reading because I assigned it, their impression that I expected them to give an affirmative answer if I asked there were aspects they did not agree with, or some combination of the three.

I designed the homework and daily assignments in the first unit/first few weeks of the course around guiding students’ engagement with course texts, critically reflecting on these texts in relation to their experiential perspectives, engaging in critical dialogue with peers in small-group settings, and applying course concepts cross-contextually. On the first day, for example, we opened with a free-write where students wrote their preferred names, majors, something they found interesting, and their idea of what empathy was. I also participated in this free-write in order to model its importance and engage directly with them. As students shared answers, I made an effort to respond to them by showing interest in something they said or asking a follow-up question.

After we shared our answers, I reviewed how they had defined empathy in relation to how it might be applied to their goals and the way the course was going to be structured, and how their feedback would fit into this structure. For the final part of the first day, I passed around a book (Robert Arthur’s *You Will Die: The Burden of Modern Taboos*) and asked the class to vote for a chapter they thought sounded interesting for the night’s reading. I had taught from this book before and, based on anonymous course evaluations, have found that students typically find taboos interesting subject matter. They chose a chapter on sexuality, and from there we used this chapter to generate subsequent daily exercises.
The major assignment in this unit was a paper I designed called the Introspective-Interactive Essay. The prompt for this essay is based on a series of questions designed to elicit students’ critical reflections and self-assessments:

1. What interests you?
2. What are your professional goals?
3. How do you identify yourself as an individual?
4. How would you characterize your relationship with writing?
5. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer, relative to the course outcomes in the syllabus?
6. How do you tend to “fit” as part of a team?
7. What strengths/qualities are you looking for in group members?
8. What do you want to get out of this class?

Students could arrange and structure their answers to these questions however they liked, so long as they included a written explanation of the structure they chose (most students chose to answer the questions in the order given by the prompt). They could also use informal language in this essay, so long as their meaning was clear. In addition to students’ engaging in critical reflection, I wanted to gain further feedback on how they connected the answers to these questions and anticipate how they might react to the foci of the next two units, which were situated in discourses in alignment with their educational goals but less likely to be familiar to them. I include the assignment sheet for this paper in the Appendix.

For this unit, we began each class day with a free-write where students shared an observation they had from the reading that they found particularly interesting, and speculated on the reading’s perspective for another point of view (in response to the Arthur reading, for example, students were asked to consider another gender’s point of view). My intention through this practice was to get students comfortable with sharing their insights on texts in front of each other, give them opportunities to share experiences
relevant to the materials that they found meaningful, and provide a “warm up” for their writing about and engaging with more in-depth activities.

Of the free-writes we conducted in all three units, this was the only unit with instances in which I noted I had to cap the number of volunteers for students who wished to share their answers in the interest of class time. This could be due to the fact that it was early in the semester and the material/structure was still fresh for students; it could also be because this unit focused most directly on students’ experiential backgrounds.

Similarly, I observed that when students gave answers to free-writes and questions that asked them to synthesize texts with their experiences, they were more likely to omit the former in their answer than the latter. Students were also less likely to pull direct lines from [the] text to support their answers without being prompted, and likely to write less than talk when forming answers in discussions. This suggests that students were more comfortable with and/or valued explorations of their knowledge-bases.

Daily activities throughout the first unit of the course focused on small-group discussions and activities based on their experiences and course readings, which would then segue into full class discussions. Initially, these questions focused on soliciting their experiential knowledge-bases and using them to analyze the writing. For example, students discussed the following with the first Arthur chapter:

1. Choose your own question to pose to the rest of the class.

2. Based on your experiences, which parts of the reading do you find the most relatable, and which the least? Why?
3. How does your group envision Arthur as a person, a thinker, and/or a writer? What purpose(s) does he have for writing (spoken and unspoken)?

4. How do you think Arthur visualizes his audience, and how does he attempt to make himself empathetic to them?

5. Why do you think Arthur begins his discussion of human sexuality with an anecdote (personal story)? How does this contribute to the presentation of his ideas? Explain.

We then expanded on the Arthur chapter in the next discussion. Prior to this next discussion, students read De Silveira and Habermas’s studies on young adults’ increasing ability to form contextually-based self-narratives for homework. In class, they discussed and analyzed possible connections between their cognitive evaluations of young adults and Arthur’s, the validity and shortcomings of these authors’ profiles of young adults, and how they would communicate these ideas to peers who had not read the article. My intention in the focus of these questions was to encourage students’ thinking of texts in terms of their experiential knowledge-bases, making value judgments on textual information instead of regurgitating it, and developing communicative strategies for discussing academic research in a more familiar, dialogic context.

In addition to focusing in-class work on student groups, I also made an effort to differentiate the people students were grouped with during daily assignments. In doing so, my intention was that students would have the chance to all get to know each other better and feel comfortable working and conversing with one another; i.e., help them establish rapport and stronger peer relationships. Based on my reading of Chein et al.’s study on how peers increase young adults’ willingness to take risks, and Bandura’s study on collective agency, my hope was that these small group exercises would increase
student engagement and help to establish the kind of peer relationships necessary to maintain a critical learning environment centered in students’ insights, rather than my own.\textsuperscript{28} The small group discussions and collaborative writing were also influenced in part by Ngan-Ling Chow et al.’s DPE model, which posits that students learn to engage more critically with course concepts through small group work with peers, where they can learn to gain trust in their insights through textual materials without directly pitting these insights against the instructors’.\textsuperscript{29} I not only hoped to encourage students’ development of strong peer relationships by doing so, but also use these activities to solicit feedback from students on their interests, experiences, goals, and thoughts on the course, which I could then use to make needed adjustments.

Overall, students seemed comfortable with discussing, reflecting on, and exploring their perspectival observations through course texts and activities, but seemed less inclined to question the readings they were given or express to me when they were confused on particular aspects of a reading or activity, instead referring to their peers. I will discuss this further in the next section, where I reflect on the ramifications of my piloted pedagogy in terms of my data collection methods and theorizing as a whole.

**Empathic Pedagogy: Second Unit**

From there, the second unit of my pedagogy focused on critical composition instructors increasing students’ sense of agency through developing their ability to engage with texts, as I discuss in Chapter 4. On the first day of this unit, my intention

\textsuperscript{28} See my discussion of Bandura’s and Chein et al.’s studies in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{29} See my discussion of Ngan-Ling Chow et al. in Chapter 3
was to assess what specific disciplines students were interested in exploring and help them adapt enthymematic exercises to these contexts. I based this focus in particular on Bartholomae and Petrosky’s premise that texts should be seen as vehicles for student growth, as well as Jensen’s argument that interpersonal and textual interactions operate along similar dynamics, in that both critical dialogue and textual analysis students must learn to reconcile their knowledge-bases in relation to others’. This unit’s disciplinary focus also draws from Berlin’s conception of composition studies as a site for interdisciplinary collaboration and exploration.

Compared to the first unit of my empathic pedagogical design, course readings and daily assignments revolved more directly around the second major writing assignment: an Intra-Disciplinary Discourse Community Analysis. I introduced this paper on the first day of the second unit, and went through the structural guidelines with the students. These are included below:

This paper is meant to be an opportunity for you to get an in-depth look at either your chosen field or one that potentially interests you. Your analysis will consist of five sections:

1. The important organizations in your field and required courses to earn a degree in it at UNR, and reflections on why; (Who and what do I have to know to become a professional in my field, and why do I think that is?)

2. The questions, subjects, and potential issues professionals in your field are interested in, and the methodology your field uses to approach them; (What am I interested in solving, and what do I do to solve it?)

3. The genres (kinds) of texts professionals in your field tend to write, and how their structure reflects their purpose; (How does the order and the way I say something amplify what I have to say?)

See my discussion of these scholars in Chapter 4.
4. The differences between how professionals in your field communicate through writing with each other, vs. a more general audience; (How would I persuasively discuss my ideas with people well-versed in my field, and with people who know little about it?)

5. A reflective analysis of yourself as an apprentice entering the field. (How do I relate to this field? What parts of the professional viewpoint do I identify with? What do I have to learn to acquire this expert perspective? What personal and societal contributions do I want to make in this profession?)

As with the first assignment, I structured this essay around specific, first-person questions in order to provide a basis for students’ critical reflections. My intention was also that these questions would help students tie these fields directly to their interests and insights while acquiring an introduction to the discursive conventions of their chosen fields. With the first and last questions in particular, I wanted to facilitate students’ critical reflections on what the ramifications of their chosen majors were (e.g., the courses they would have to take and the purposes behind them) and how exactly their chosen majors related to their specific goals. For the students in my class who were undeclared, I presented this assignment as an opportunity to further explore a field they might be interested in pursuing eventually. Throughout the unit, students were able to choose any field of study they wished to pursue (not just their major), and were also able to change their topic if they wanted, though I cautioned them that the longer they waited to do so the more difficult the assignment with be. Without exception, students who declared a major chose to base the assignment around that, and none switched topics. The full assignment sheet for this paper is included in the Appendix.

In addition to answering these questions, students had to incorporate a minimum of six sources into the paper. Of these six sources, three of them had to be scholarly
articles in their chosen fields, and one additional source had to be a popular news article that cited one of the scholarly sources. To help students break down their review of these sources and ensure that I was available to help them navigate these unfamiliar discourses, students chose articles for homework and brought them into class to read and analyze.

In-class assignments in the second unit of the course transitioned from a focus on small-group work to individual critical reading and prewriting activities (though for revision exercises I did group students who had similar or identical fields so they could help one another). This in, turn, necessitated coursework that was more oriented towards writing and co-problem solving between the students and I on daily tasks. I designed the second unit this way in order to synthesize student-centered learning and student agency with engaging with disciplinary discourses, as students began to actively generate more course materials.

The second unit was also designed around ensuring that I as the instructor used my expertise and authority productively in relation to helping students achieve their goals, rather than predetermining or undermining the choices they could make, as I discuss in Chapter 2. Specifically, by helping students use enthymematic analysis to approach the discourses they chose, I hoped to create the same kind of reflective co-problem solving interactions that Schön advocates, as well as Larson and Hansen’s study on the interactions between youth and adult mentors.  

Furthermore, I presumed that the transition from critical dialogue to critical reading would allow students the opportunity

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31 See my discussion of Schön in Chapter 2 and my discussion of Larson and Hansen in Chapter 3.
to examine the parallels between both, with guidance from me as problems arose in their discursive explorations.

Prior to this course, I had never taught enthymemes as a rhetorical exercise; nor had I incorporated a multidisciplinary emphasis into my composition class before. As students worked through these exercises to varying degrees of success, I began to observe potential problems that might arise as we ventured further into their discourses. These potential problems included that students might focus on Aristotle’s syllogistic conception of enthymemes too literally and have difficulty finding enthymematic relationships in scholarly writing, particularly when neither they nor I were familiar with the discourses they had chosen. These observations appeared to be confirmed at the end of this unit, when I was able to meet with each of my students for one-on-one conferences.

To prepare for these meetings, students had to come up with three questions to ask me, in addition to bringing in a draft of their Intra-Disciplinary Discourse Community Analysis. Of the 23 students I met with, eight of them expressed confusion regarding enthymemes, which we had been covering in class at that point for the last two and a half weeks. This was the most repeated question students asked me, suggesting that enthymemes were not as universally applicable to discourses as I had anticipated. I had based my assumption that they were in part on Knight and Sweeney’s discussion of their utility in the medical sciences, but had failed to consider that they were already established participants in that discourse.

To supplement students’ explorations of their chosen discourses in class and provide a common basis for students’ engagement with their discourses, I introduced the
concept of the enthymeme to class on the first day of this unit. I started with providing examples of enthymematic arguments in Aristotle’s syllogistic form consisting of a major premise, minor premise, and conclusion, with either the minor premise or conclusion being implicit. After reviewing Aristotle’s example of “All men are mortal; [Socrates is a man]; therefore, Socrates is mortal” example, students worked through practice examples such as these:

- Silent Minor Premise: Teenagers don’t understand the consequences of being sexually active; therefore, sex education should be abstinence-only.

- Silent Conclusion: Climate change is an ever-growing problem; government regulation has proven effective for environmental problems in the past; therefore, ____.

As we worked through these examples, I attempted to convey that enthymemes are essentially a way to analyze relationships between writers and audiences, in terms of what audiences expect from writers and how writers frame their points in response. As a pairing with students’ first choice of scholarly article to critically read and analyze in class, I assigned Gage’s article on enthymematically analyzing the structures of texts in terms of writer-audience relationships. Students then applied his four-step approach to analyzing their articles in class:

1. Questions at issue;
2. Probable answers to those questions, or steps taken;
3. Potential strategies for leading to those answers;
4. Assumptions which make the strategies work. (40)

Students’ applications of Gage to their articles, however, yielded mixed results. Students who were stronger writers and/or were engaging with disciplinary discourses in the

32 See my discussion of Gage’s approach in Chapter 4.
humanities and social sciences appeared to have less trouble with this exercise. By contrast, I observed that students with more technical disciplines had more trouble. For example, one student was an astrophysics major and selected an article in her field that was centered on complex algebraic and calculus equations. Needless to say, neither enthymemes nor my knowledge-base were particularly useful in helping her navigate those.

Furthermore, the second unit’s focus on students’ engaging with their chosen disciplinary discourses and spending class-time on textual analysis resulted in peer discussions being eliminated almost entirely, with the exception of brief sessions where students shared their analysis with a peer and the workshop for the second paper. In other words, the pedagogical design of the first unit was almost in direct contrast to the second, suggesting more of a schism than a smooth transition from the former to the latter. This also prevented students from supplementing lectures and homework assignments on enthymemes with peer discussions, which could have helped more students learn the concept. Peer relationships, however, were re-introduced as a prominent feature of classroom exercises in the third unit of the course.

**Empathic Pedagogy: Third Unit**

The third and final unit of my pedagogical design shifts from an individual intra-disciplinary focus to interdisciplinary collaboration. Students worked in small groups on a final research project, with each member representing their chosen discipline as they worked together to explore/address a societal/environmental issue of their choice. Thus, not only did students continue to engage with their chosen disciplines, as they did in the
second unit, they moved from analyzing the discourse of their fields to applying what they had learned about their fields. Based on Chein et al.’s and Bandura’s assertions that the presence of peers can embolden individual students, this unit was designed to help cultivate strong peer relationships to enhance students’ agency, as well as have them work together to make meaningful choices in the classroom through critical reflection and dialogue. This unit was also designed to ground coursework in students’ disciplinary discourses and texts of their choice, while having them pose problems that critique existing power structures and institutions within the context of their choices and disciplines. Students could choose their own group members for these projects, so long as each person represented a different discipline; group size was set at 3-4 students.

My observations on these student groups and their project presentations indicate a correlation between project cohesion and the relational dynamics between group members. It is difficult to confirm or expand on this, however, since much of their collaborations and work arrangements took place outside of the classroom, and students did not provide me with data on their experiences during this project. As with the other units of the course, I will focus more in-depth on my reflections on these observations in the next section. For the sake of clarity and context, I include the assignment sheets for each step of this project in the Appendix.

The topics and disciplinary foci for these groups were as follows:

1. Colonizing Mars (psychology, communications, and mechanical engineering);
2. World Hunger (veterinary science, sociology, nutrition, and psychology);
3. Animal Rights (law, criminal justice, biology, computer science);
4. Combating Global Epidemics (microbiology, history, nursing);
5. Terrorism (journalism, nursing, physics)
6. Water Crisis in Africa (journalism, civil engineering, business, psychology);
7. Animal Rights (education, agricultural science, criminal justice, psychology)
As part of the drafting process for their projects, groups gave informal presentations to the rest of the class. Each group introduced their research question and explained how each member and their discipline would contribute to the project and approach the question in relation to the others. Though these presentations were informal, and some of the disciplinary combinations appeared challenging, I was impressed with the project designs most of the groups had come up with. I observed in particular that Groups 2, 3, and 7 were well-constructed with organized, fluid delivery. Group 1 also gave a thorough explanation of their project structure, but went over time due to getting bogged down in details. Group 4 had snags in organization and delivery because the history portion was not integrated fully, but their project conveyed a logical design rationale overall. Group 6 had one member absent, but the other three conveyed their parts well. Group 5, however, showed significant problems in their presentation. The journalism major gave a strong intro through engaging the audience with questions, and the nursing major posed great questions as well, but talked over time. The physics major, by contrast, had a stunted delivery and fumbled through her portion. The journalism major jumped in with a snide transition and wrapped up the project, but snags were apparent in the project and there appeared to be tensions in the group.

For the last week of class, student groups gave multimedia presentations on their final projects, going in-depth on the research they had done. This last presentation was done in part to help students talk through the structure of their drafts with one another and engage in critical dialogue to make any necessary adjustments to the written portion of their project. It was also an opportunity for students to incorporate digital media (and thus their familiarity with it) in constructing their projects. I had intended to incorporate
digital media to facilitate students’ generation of course content, per Hart and Hicks’s argument that digital media presents an opportunity for students to practice composition concepts in a more student-centered composing contexts. Upon reflection, however, my practice did not reflect the intent of their arguments; I will discuss this in the next section.

Although students were free to choose the type of visual aid they incorporated, every group chose to do a PowerPoint of Prezi (the examples I had given in the instructions). Groups of three were given 12-15 minutes to present, and groups of four 15-18 minutes. When students gave their final presentations, my observations were similar to the efforts that groups had made when presenting their proposals. Groups 2, 3, and 7’s presentations reflected the strongest and most integrated projects. My observations of these groups’ work were characterized by steady and confident delivery within their portions and in transitioning to the next group member, as well as strong engagement with the rest of the class through posing questions and using humor and relatable examples. Group 1’s project also demonstrated thorough research, but went significantly over time (as they had with their proposal presentation) and did not convey a sense that group members had budgeted with one another through collaborative practice sessions.

Similarly, Group 4’s presentation also reflected a lack of balance between group members. The student who covered the history portion again seemed the least integrated into the project, and spoke for over 9 minutes, or 60% of the group’s maximum allotted speaking time, forcing the third group member to wrap up their portion quickly in order to meet time constraints. Group 6’s presentation did well in terms of audience engagement through questions and examples, but due to the first two members’ longer
portions the civil engineering major was given little speaking time. Additionally, their
team had been reduced to three students shortly before this presentation was given, due to
the psychology major’s withdrawal from the course because of personal circumstances.
Lastly, Group 4’s final presentation also demonstrated similar problems in comparison to
their proposal presentation; i.e., the journalism and nursing students showed strong and
confident delivery in conveying their portions, and the physics student’s portion showed
little integration in the rest of the project and seemingly unrehearsed delivery due to
tangents and lack of a coherent structure.

Since these were larger collaborative projects that required a significant amount
of research and drafting, I structured the assignment into three components. The first of
these was an annotated bibliography, which students completed individually. This was
done to ensure each member had completed their research and began prewriting in terms
of organizing their individual components of the project. These annotated bibliographies
were used to help students gather textual evidence that they might incorporate later into
their sections of the project, and also use enthymematic analysis to assess the strengths
and weaknesses of each source’s assumptions. My intention was that through such
enthymematic analysis, students might gain further practice examining the thought
processes of experts in their fields, as well as recurring assumptions/arguments that might
inform the structure of their sections of the group projects. With the exception of an
intra-group workshop, students completed this assignment outside of class. Students
chose these articles for homework assignments, and I stopped assigning readings
altogether for this unit of the course so that groups could focus on their projects.
The next component of the group projects consisted of a Project Proposal and Work Contract. In this section of the assignment, project topics and disciplinary foci were solidified among groups. The primary function and challenge of the Project Proposal was for these groups to draft research questions broad enough to encompass these fields, and then form a tentative disciplinary sequence for the project, explaining their rhetorical choices along the way. Groups also had to unpack the implicit enthymematic assumptions within their research questions, in order to help form more objective, inquiry-based projects.

In addition to the Project Proposal, students drafted Work Contracts. To facilitate their development of these contracts, I provided the following guidelines:

1. A tentative work schedule (when you will meet, where, how often, etc.) that factors in other commitments in each member’s schedule;
2. A clear and detailed division of labor that is relatively equal among members (e.g., no outsourcing all of the writing or citations to one group member);
3. At least two strategies for holding each other accountable and resolving potential conflicts, and when/how you’d like me to intervene should those be unsuccessful;
4. What you expect from me as the instructor of the course, in terms of being an asset to your project/team;
5. How you would like to be graded on this project (as a team, individually, or a combination of the two);
6. Whether or not you would like some kind of anonymous peer evaluation to be factored into your grade;
7. The signatures of each group member and myself, indicating that we all accept the terms of the contract and our respective responsibilities.

Additionally, though I did not require this, I encouraged students to use digital spaces such as Google Docs to facilitate collaborative drafting.

With students having completed their research, structured their projects, and drafted working arrangements for their groups, the final component of the project was
writing the paper itself. Class time at this point focused on drafting exercises for specific components of the paper, such as introductions and conclusions, and two workshops in order to provide students opportunities to meet with their groups during class and ensure that they were completing portions of their draft each week.

**Reflections: Pedagogy, Methodology, and Theorizing**

In order to properly frame and contextualize the outcomes of my practicing this piloted pedagogy, I must reiterate two important considerations. First, I received little direct feedback from my students on the structure of the course and their experience in it. This not only limits any analysis of outcomes to my perspective, but also implies the existence of significant design flaws in my methodology and how students viewed the relational dynamics of the learning environment and their situatedness in the pedagogy. Furthermore, I have only practiced this empathic pedagogy once for this one course section, and my pedagogical design incorporates a number of different exercises, concepts, and assumptions that I had not practiced in previous courses. Consequently, the outcomes of both my practice and methodology are also reflective of flaws and unconsidered variables in my theorizing on critical pedagogy’s limitations, and how concepts from other disciplines can be applied to respond to them. I will expand upon each of these in detail below.

**Practice Reflections**

Based on both my design choices and my observations on the outcomes of my empathic pedagogy’s three units, my attempts at scaffolding were problematic and not
student-centered in significant ways. Rather than serving to channel my expertise in relation to supporting and facilitating students’ engagement through making meaningful choices, some of my structural choices inadvertently wound up reinforcing my authority. This is especially true in relation to students’ abilities to problem-pose and generate course topics.

The first unit, for instance, was designed heavily around the assumption that my students did not have prior experiences engaging in critical learning environments. I now realize, however, that I did not attempt to test this assumption by inquiring into students’ prior educational experiences to determine whether they were familiar with critical pedagogy or any of its practices. In failing to do so, I centered my perspective on the students’ knowledge-bases in my pedagogical design, viewing them as a monolithic entity in terms of their presumed lack of experience with critical engagement. This is similar to what hooks and Alexander and Rhodes caution against; i.e., instructors’ tendencies to ignore perspectival and experiential differences among students and flattening these differences in their teaching approach.33 In other words, this was a missed opportunity to engage with my students as co-collaborators, and check my assumptions about their experiences. Had I done so on the first day, I might have been able to form a more responsive scaffolding to their familiarity with and interest in engaging in a critical learning environment.

Furthermore, my facilitating students’ engagement with texts on young adult experiences/issues through predetermined questions—even ones explicitly solicitous of student experiences—deprived students of an opportunity to problem-pose and form their

33 See my discussion of hooks in Chapter 1 and Alexander and Rhodes in Chapter 2.
own inquiries into the text. This is reminiscent of the perils of Shor’s “student-centered, teacher-directed” dichotomy, in that my scaffolding framed students’ peer group discussions and focus on the text while simultaneously attempting to solicit them.\textsuperscript{34}

Additionally, though my main focus as the instructor for this unit was to obtain feedback from my students on their interests and goals, and also to get them to reflect on these, this did not significantly alter the three-unit structure of my course design. Instead, students’ critical reflections were implicitly designed around getting them to operate within this structure more efficiently. In other words, solicitations of student feedback in critical learning environments should be focused not only cultivating students’ abilities to exercise agency and apply course concepts cross-contextually, but also prompt instructors to make significant adjustments to their overall practice and curriculum. However, my inherent valuation of my pedagogical design, as well as students’ inherent inability to anticipate the shift in focus between units one and two, prevented the possibilities of significant structural change to the course. Further still, unlike Owens’s sustainability curriculum, I did not provide students with the option to opt out of my assignment sequence through designing and negotiating an alternative structure, which would have provided students a forum to initiate for and advocate such changes.\textsuperscript{35}

Based on my observations (and my observations alone), students did seem to be more engaged in this unit than the others based on their relative willingness to share their experiences in class. Their critical reflections also did give me a better sense of their writing abilities, how they felt about writing, and how they felt about both individual and

\textsuperscript{34} See my discussion of Shor in Chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{35} See my discussion of Owens in Chapter 2.
group learning exercises. However, despite my intention to use this unit’s scaffolding to cultivate students’ engagement, problem-posing, critical thinking, and cross-contextual applications of course concepts, I did not test some of my basic assumptions about my practice, and as a result this unit reflected my authority in the classroom more so than it channeled my expertise or enhanced students’ abilities to make meaningful choices.

Similarly, my structural choices in the second unit of the course foregrounded enthymemes in exercises where students attempted to engage with their chosen disciplinary discourses. However, enthymemes did not prove to be a particularly valuable tool for critical discourse analysis across multiple disciplines, and I did not provide alternative tools which might have been more useful in other disciplines. Additionally, my assignment sheet for the Intra-Disciplinary Discourse Community Analysis paper was centered on predetermined questions for students to answer about the disciplines they chose. As with my structural choices in the first unit, my emphasis on enthymematic analysis and the design of the second major paper prevented potentially valuable opportunities for student-centered learning and problem posing.

Instead of providing a directive assessment of what students needed to know about their fields, for example, students could have determined not only which disciplines they wanted to engage with, but also what exactly they wanted (and needed) to learn about them, and negotiated these choices with me through dialogue, as Schön recommends in his reflexive pedagogy. Students’ initial generations of materials and posed problems would have been much more effective in ensuring that my expertise was channeled in service to their interests and goals, rather than the reverse. This would also have made this unit much more student-centered.
In addition to the structure of the second major assignment, my incorporation of enthymemes was flawed due to a number of different factors. To begin with, my students all chose discourses with which both they and I were not familiar. Per my theorizing, I had intended this as a means of mitigating my authority via de-centering students’ textual choices from my interests and expertise. However, enthymemes by definition are a technique based in the dynamics of speaker-audience relationships. It follows, therefore, that enthymematic analysis is contingent on an awareness of these relational dynamics. Students’ abilities to apply enthymemes effectively, in other words, may be contingent in part on their *a priori* knowledge-bases of the discourses with which they are engaging. Since my students generally did not possess this awareness, focusing on enthymemes appeared to be counterproductive.

By contrast, enthymemes are a concept situated within my research and the discourse of my field. As a result, I likely had a clearer sense than my students of how to apply enthymemes to textual analysis and as a framework for rhetorical relationships in my field of choice. Simultaneously, this likely obscured my sense of how applicable enthymemes were to other fields, and what such applications should look like. Furthermore, in tracing the origins and evolution of enthymemes as a concept, I neglected to concretize a single operational definition of it for my students. As a result, when we discussed the concept students had difficulty figuring out how to apply it to analyzing their chosen discourses. Aristotle’s three-part syllogism, for example, is ill-adapted for analyzing how the structure of a text reflects the relationship between the writer and her audience, as D’Angelo and Gage assert. The fact that I was more familiar with enthymemes than my students, combined with my traditional authority in the classroom,
likely made it difficult for students to critique the utility of enthymemes in analyzing their specific fields. Students also did not have an opportunity to consider and offer potential alternatives for engaging with their fields, because I mandated enthymemes as part of the curriculum rather than presenting it as an option for students’ consideration. Doing so would have allowed for students’ exploration of other strategies without having to directly contradict/critique my choices as the instructor.

Another significant design flaw in my empathic pedagogy’s second unit is that it almost entirely omitted opportunities for students to engage with peers. In my theorizing, specifically drawing on Bandura’s and Chein et al.’s studies, which focus on collective agency and how peers encourages young adults’ to take risks, respectively, I posited that strong peer relationships are an essential catalyst to student growth and engagement in a critical learning environment, and can be used to scaffold students’ problem-posing cross-contextual applications of course concepts. However, students were not able to draw on these relationships or engage in critical dialogue with their peers about the discourses with which they were engaging. I had assumed that because students were not focusing on the same discourses, these interactions would not have been as valuable a use of class time. Had students been able to problem-pose how to analyze and critically engage with the texts they chose, however, these interactions might have offered them potentially valuable insights/strategies for doing so that I could not.

In the third unit of the course, students’ projects appeared to demonstrate the possibility of combining disciplinary perspectives with societal and environmental issues. In this unit, students were able to choose both the disciplines they examined individually and the topic/issue their paper would focus on; the only constraint on their ability to
choose was that each student had to pick a different discipline to focus on. Students were not only able to frame their issue/topic as a posed problem, but also had to negotiate their disciplinary perspectives and research into a cohesive structure for their project, both through dialogue and writing.

Additionally, the influence of peer relationships on how students engage and exercise agency became apparent in this unit, as did several flaws in my theorizing and pedagogical design. Overall, the multidisciplinary group projects this unit was centered around yielded mixed results, with an observed correlation between the quality of each group’s project and the relationships between group members. Among the potential causal factors for these mixed results, I posit that mandating students work in groups for this project deprived them of an opportunity to make a meaningful choice in the classroom; a choice that not only could have helped some students further cultivate their agency/engagement in the course, but also one that could have better reflected some students’ preferences for introspective rather than interactive learning situations.

Moreover, most of my theorizing on the value of peer relationships in critical pedagogy focuses on their potential to positively enhance students’ agency and engagement, as Bandura’s and Chein et al.’s studies indicate. Based on these findings, I posited that critical composition instructors should focus on creating a critical learning environment that cultivated strong peer relationships. My efforts towards this focus in my own practice largely consisted of using discussions, class activities, and workshops as opportunities for students to get to know one another. These efforts were based on my assumption that an emphasis on critical dialogue and reflection would be sufficient in motivating students to work through emergent disagreements or conflicts between one
another productively, and that in extreme cases where this did not happen, students would reach out to me for assistance, as Zembylas discusses in his pedagogy of empathy. I also assumed that the students’ collaboration on work contracts for their projects would also facilitate students’ discussion of their mutual responsibilities and provide a sufficient mechanism for addressing any peer conflicts.

The third unit of my empathic pedagogy, despite its own flaws, seems to be the most aligned with critical pedagogy and my own theorizing. Peer relationships became a major emphasis again in this unit, for instance. Students also had the most freedom in terms of problem-posing, topic selection, and generation of course materials; this is when I stopped assigning readings entirely. Furthermore, the focus of this unit, though not directly political or civic, was centered on societal/environmental issues and how students could engage with them through their disciplines, rather than focusing purely on disciplinary discourse analysis. Further still, students chose the questions they wanted to pursue about their chosen topics, as well as how to organize their research into engaging with their questions. Student groups also had to engage in critical dialogue with one another in order to design and refine their projects, as well as their working arrangements.

Despite these features in the third unit, however, there were some significant flaws in my practice and this unit’s design as well. First and foremost, I mandated that students work in groups for this assignment, rather than letting them choose. This mandate prioritized my valuation of the potential of Bandura’s and Chein et al.’s findings over the basic tenet of critical pedagogy that students should be able to make meaningful choices in the classroom. I also assumed, based on Zembylas’s article on modeling for students how to resolve conflicts through critical dialogue, that if peer conflicts arose I
would be able to work through them with student groups. Zembylas bases his assertions, however, on critical dialogue in the classroom; student groups spent most of their time working together outside of class, in situations where I was not present to engage with them. Similarly, my assumptions that class-related conflicts would always be visible to me, that students would honor the explicit agreements they made with one another in their work contracts, and that students would reach out to me when needed, appeared to be incorrect.

Although in some groups the students seemed to maintain productive and positive working relationships, based on the cohesiveness and quality of their work, several other groups appeared to have internal conflicts that could not be resolved through dialogue. Further still, they did not provide me the feedback essential to my becoming aware of the problem and offering guidance in these situations. This ultimately compromised the quality of these groups’ projects, suggesting that just as strong peer relationships can enhance student engagement/agency, weak or negative peer relationships can inhibit student engagement/agency.

Another significant flaw in this unit is that I did not properly solicit students’ knowledge/expertise on digital media in their engagements with course concepts. My only attempts to incorporate digital media consisted of recommending that student groups work through Google Docs to circumvent the logistical difficulties of meeting in person, and also requiring a visual aid in their final presentations. Morrell and Hart and Hicks, by contrast, argue that instructors should use digital media as a means of facilitating students’ generation of course content, and solicit students’ feedback on how digital media could be applied further in the classroom, respectively. In addition to selecting
course materials and topics in this unit, I could have provided students an opportunity to compose digitally-based projects, as well as posit suggestions for incorporating more digital media in the classroom. This would not only have given them more agency in designing their final projects, but given me more insight on how to adjust my practice as an instructor.

Ultimately, though my empathic pedagogical design and pilot reflect the potential benefits of some facets of my research across disciplines, they are also largely reflective of my traditional authority in the classroom and some of the practices critical pedagogy critiques in the first place. This includes foregrounding my perceptions of students’ experiential knowledge-bases in relation to critical pedagogy, foregrounding my expertise in terms of enthymematic analysis and the research I conducted on young adult neurocognitive development, and foregrounding my interest in testing the pedagogical design itself. This last flaw in particular carried over into my methodological design in terms of collecting student data.

**Methodology Reflections**

Originally when I designed my data collection methods for this piloted pedagogy, I intended to collect data from students on their experiences in the course. Since I was in the instructor in the course, I naturally was not in a position to collect anonymous feedback from my students, nor acquire their consent to do so. In response to this, I asked a colleague to administer and obtain consent forms, three rounds of written student surveys (one for each unit), and in-person interviews at the course’s end. Although my
colleague generously agreeing to do so, this methodological design contained several significant flaws.

First and foremost, despite the fact that 17 of the students consented to participate in the study, only four students wound up responding to even one survey. Participation continued to decline after the first round of surveys from there, and ultimately only one student completed all three surveys and the interview. This lack of participation is significant in that it shows when students had the choice to engage in the research process of this course and offer feedback, entirely removed from my authority over them as the instructor, most of them chose not to engage. What this suggests is students’ lack of investment in the course and/or its outcomes. Given the circumstances, this is not an irrational conclusion. For one, they knew that I would not be able to respond to their feedback because I would not have access to it until the course was over. As a result, if they had critiques on the course or my practice, their sharing those insights would have made no difference regarding their experiences in the class. In addition to this, I was effectively asking them to provide me this feedback on their own time on top of what I was asking of them in the course. In other words, I was the only one who had anything to gain from these solicitations, which is anathema to student-centered learning and the goals of my pedagogical design in the first place.

My inability to access students’ feedback during the course also compromised my ability to practice critical pedagogy. As both critical pedagogy and my theorizing on it assert, instructors cannot successfully practice critical pedagogy without student critiques and feedback on the course, to which instructors must adjust their practice. Since I was the instructor in the classroom, and much of the course design was not foregrounded in
soliciting students’ perspectives, students did not have opportunities to provide feedback on the course in terms of critiquing my choices without having to consider my authority. Without such feedback, I could not practice critical pedagogy by definition. Even if students had responded to these surveys, they would not have been able to give data indicative of how they evaluated my attempts to adjust to said feedback.

Additionally, even if a majority of the students had responded comprehensively to each round of surveys and given interviews, and I had been able to adjust the course in response to their answers and to their benefit, the questions themselves were problematic. Specifically, they were problematic in that they emphasize the merits of my pedagogical design, rather than a pure solicitation of students’ experiences in the course and thoughts they might have on adjusting the curriculum independent of that design. Instead of asking students for their impression on the design of each unit and how to improve it, for example, I could have asked what students’ expectations for the course were, in terms of what they wanted to learn, whether they felt like a focus on their majors was appropriate, what they expected from me as an instructor, what kinds of assignments they found valuable in general (not just the ones I offered them), etc. More open-ended questions like these would have allowed students to critique my pedagogical design as a power structure, as critical pedagogy emphasized. The only question on the surveys that were this open-ended simply asked students if there were any observations they wanted to make beyond what I wanted to hear from them, and this question, ironically, was placed at the very bottom of the list.

Ultimately, the design of my methodology was grounded almost entirely in my interests and needs as a researcher-practitioner, and in an inherent belief in the design of
my empathic pedagogy. This is evident in all aspects of my methodological design, from the survey questions themselves, to the way in which the data was collected on students’ own time, to the way in which I could not access it and respond to their feedback. Furthermore, the basis of my methodology and pilot are not reflective of critical pedagogy and its strengths and values, such as student-centered learning, critical dialogue between students and instructors, and student problem-posing.

Theorizing Reflections

The emergent flaws in my pedagogical design, as well as my methodological design for collecting data on it, also offer insight as to the merits of my theorizing. In particular, these flaws offer insight as to how my theoretical responses from other disciplines to critical pedagogy’s limitations can be integrated with critical pedagogy’s strengths, without negating these strengths and/or replicating the traditional pedagogies that critical pedagogy critiques.

My theorizing on scaffolding, for example, focuses on its potential to enhance critical pedagogy by channeling the course structure and the instructor’s expertise into cultivating students’ abilities to engage in critical learning environments. My pedagogical design and pilot, however, illustrate how education’s conception of scaffolding—breaking up larger concepts/exercises into smaller, more manageable components—is teacher-centered. Unless efforts to scaffold critical pedagogy are rooted in responses to student feedback, and instructors’ scaffold mechanisms are co-constructed with students, they become manifestations of the instructor’s authority in the classroom. Without providing students an opportunity to share their expectations, learning
preferences, and educational experiences, instructor efforts at scaffolding cannot effectively respond to student needs. This is a fundamental premise of Freire’s in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* when he argues that instructors’ choices must not become the standard by which students are measured (75). Shor affirms this as well in his call for teacher and students negotiations of course structure in *Empowering Education* (94-5).

Scaffolding, therefore, must be incorporated into critical composition pedagogues’ initial solicitations of student feedback and negotiations of course policies and foci. Instructors could, for example, ask for student feedback on their learning interests, course expectations, and self-assessments on their writing skills and abilities. Instructors could then use this feedback to generate a tentative model and have the students anonymously vote on it and offer amendments. Doing so could provide instructors an opportunity to offer their expertise, but in the context of responding to student feedback. For students, this would be an early valuation of their feedback and an opportunity to reflect on and assess what aspects of the instructor’s expertise would be most helpful to them. Additionally, instructors can provide opportunities for students to propose new course structures and amendments if they change their mind later in the term, as Owens does with his sustainability pedagogy.

Similarly, cognitive psychology’s research on young adult neurocognitive development has a great deal of insight to offer critical composition instructors, so long as these findings do not interfere with students’ abilities to make meaningful choices in the classroom. Kessler and Staudinger’s and Larson and Hansen’s studies, for example, supplement critical pedagogy’s emphasis on valuing student-centered learning through engaging in critical dialogue. Their studies do so specifically by revealing the mutual
cognitive benefits of younger and older adults when they exchange experiential knowledge; i.e., older adults improve their ability to recall and re-contextualize their observations, and younger adults’ lack of experience is supplemented by the experiential knowledge-bases of their elders. Indeed, the relational dynamics these studies describe echo critical pedagogy’s premise that students enrich instructors’ teaching through feedback, and instructors enrich students’ learning experiences by providing students opportunities to make meaningful choices, encouraging them to reflect on these choices through dialogue, and honoring these choices by responding to them in their practice.

Furthermore, Bandura’s and Chein et al.’s studies offer critical composition instructors a great deal of insight in regards to the dynamics of peer relationship; however, the potential of peer relationships to have a negative impact on student agency must be factored in as well. Essentially, my initial theorizing on Chein et al.’s findings that the presence of peers can positively enhance young adults’ willingness to take risks in any given contexts, and Bandura’s findings that young adults can collectively enhance their agency, focused on their positive potential to increase students’ willingness to engage and critique the power structure of the course and the instructor’s authority. It is also essential, however, for critical composition pedagogues to realize that ultimately they do not play any direct role in creating these relationships among peers. Further still, if peer relationships are a meaningful, influential factor in shaping critical learning environments, and critical learning environments are contingent on students’ abilities to make meaningful choices in them, it follows that students’ ability to choose to form and engage in these relationships must be maintained. Instructors at best, then, can provide
students opportunities to make these choices regarding peer relationships, not mandate them.

In addition to providing opportunities for students to engage with peers in critical dialogue, however, Ngan-Ling Chow et al.’s DPE model also suggests that critical composition instructors can offer students opportunities to act as teachers among their peers and manage discussions more directly. Specifically, they note that such roles encourage students to become more actively engaged in the classroom; again, however, they ground this in students’ abilities to choose these roles (206). Offering students more nuanced roles in discussion and class activities, then, is another manner in which peer relationships can refine critical pedagogical practice.

Among all the disciplinary facets of my theorizing, my view of how textual analysis and engagement with disciplinary discourses should be incorporated into critical pedagogy was the most significantly altered by my pedagogical design and pilot. Prior to my piloted pedagogy, I argued that critical pedagogy should not inherently dismiss engagement with disciplinary discourses as antithetical to critiquing power structures. Now, having tested my theorizing in practice, I would qualify this by arguing that conversely, critical composition instructors cannot inherently presume that first-year composition students prefer or expect a disciplinary focus over a civic one. As with the other insights my multidisciplinary theoretical inquiry offers to critical pedagogy, the adoption of this focus must be based on students’ choice. Critical composition instructors can present this as one of several potential options for students, but they cannot inherently ground the course in this focus, as is true of any other topic/focus.
Additionally, instead of focusing on enthymematic analysis, students who choose to engage with disciplinary discourses should be given the opportunity to devise their own strategies for engagement, and solicit the instructor’s help when needed. While Berlin’s insight that composition is an inherently disciplinary field, this must also be reconciled with Bartholomae and Petrosky’s assertion that students should see texts as vehicles for their growth when engaging with them. In other words, students’ ability to choose the discourses they engage with is a more important factor in cultivating their engagement in the course than the potential benefits of engaging with any one discourse. Indeed, if a given discourse does offer a great deal of value to students, critical composition instructors should trust in students’ abilities to make that decision.

Similarly, developing strategies for textual analysis with students through critical dialogue, and offering students more opportunities to practice applying these strategies to their chosen fields could also be potentially useful to cultivating student engagement through textual analysis. Instructors could also introduce a variety of possible tools for analyzing discursive structure, again offering students a choice to apply concepts they find more useful without mandating it. Exercises could also focus more directly on how structure reflects genre and purpose rather than speaker-audience relationships, so that students are not constrained unproductively by attempting to juxtapose interpersonal relationships with textual analysis. Another possibility I could have explored in this unit of the pedagogy would be having students reach out to expert participants in their chosen discourses and solicit their expertise, and by doing so further de-center the classroom from my expertise while further grounding students’ trajectory in the course in terms of their choices.
Conclusion

The insights, strengths, and values of critical pedagogy have contributed significantly to composition studies. In particular, its emphases on critical dialogue, critical reflection, student-centered learning, analysis and critique of power structures and relationships, and cross-contextual application of course concepts are all applicable to how students learn best to write, and the interdisciplinary nature of composition studies as a field. As much as critical pedagogy and composition studies have to offer other fields, however, they also can potentially benefit from the insights of other pedagogical traditions and fields of study. Despite the flaws in my theorizing that emerged in my practice and reflections, I argue that critical composition pedagogy can still learn from the insights of other disciplines.

Traditionally, critical pedagogy tends to ignore addressing whether or not students are equipped to engage in the classroom at the level critical pedagogy requires. By actively focusing on teaching students how to engage in critical learning environments, instructors can potentially increase their responsiveness to students and design more comprehensive solicitations of student feedback on their interests, experiential knowledge-bases, goals, and expectations. Students, in turn, can potentially benefit from instructors’ expertise in developing the skills needed to engage in a critical learning environment. Scaffolding and instructor expertise, however, must grounded in response to student feedback and choices, and students must be given the opportunity to engage without course structure being pre-imposed.

Future scholarship and practice in critical pedagogy also stands to benefit from an increased focus on how strong peer relationships can shape and enhance critical learning
environments. Although instructors cannot directly shape peer relationships, they can work to provide students opportunities to make meaningful choices that include their cultivation of these relationships, opportunities for students to engage in critical dialogue and problem-posing, and opportunities to critically reflect on the insights they have gained from peers. Through cognitive psychology and its research on adult neurocognitive development, instructors can also gain a more nuanced (albeit general) understanding of students’ cognitive capabilities in relation to their responsibilities in a critical learning environment. Instructors can also gain a deeper sense of appreciation as to how they and their practice might benefit from students’ experiential insights and feedback.

Finally, critical pedagogy has traditionally discounted the potential value of engaging with specific disciplinary discourses, based on the premise that they encourage students to adhere to power structures rather than provide them with the means to critique them. This is certainly true when students are required to engage with these particular discourses, as is true when the instructors’ authority preempts students’ abilities to make such choices in the classroom. However, if students are able to choose to engage with specific disciplinary discourses and apply their knowledge-bases and course concepts in them cross-contextually, these discourses in the context of critical pedagogy have the potential to empower students. Specifically, students’ acquisition and appropriation of specific disciplinary knowledge can be used to critique power structures and engage in civic/political issues more comprehensively. Furthermore, students’ ability to choose among a range of specialized discourses and subjects, rather than focusing on one subject or discourse as a class, can enrich critical dialogue between peers and teachers and
students through an increasingly de-centered classroom that celebrates divergent interests, knowledge-bases, and goals.

Ultimately, critical pedagogy’s core values of critical dialogue, critical reflection, student-centered learning, and cross-contextual application are both compatible with and stand to benefit from increased engagement with research and insights from other fields of study. Through these multidisciplinary interactions, however, the challenge will be for instructors and students to negotiate them together, and integrate the benefits of these interactions into the strengths of critical pedagogy and address its weaknesses, all without compromising the latter. Doing so presents a great deal of opportunity for future research, theorizing, and practice.
Works Cited


Appendix

Paper 1: Introspective-Interactive Essay

Purpose
This essay is meant to help you reconcile your personal interests with your professional goals, and to help you reflect in a number of ways. Focus on the following questions:

● What interests you?
● What are your professional goals?
● How do you identify yourself as an individual?
● How would you characterize your relationship with writing?
● What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer, relative to the course outcomes in the syllabus?
● How do you tend to “fit” as part of a team?
● What strengths/qualities are you looking for in group members?
● What do you want to get out of this class?

You may choose to structure your answers to these questions however you like in this essay (hint: think about what connections between these points feel the most natural to you). You must, however, explain the structure you chose, and why.

NOTE: There will be no workshop in class for this essay (mostly because it’s a personal subject and informally structured). You are, however, more than welcome to email me a draft for feedback or set up an appointment with me to discuss the assignment. You can also schedule an appointment with the Writing Center (www.unr.edu/writing-center).

Format
● 1-inch margins, Times New Roman, size 12, double-spaced (including heading).
● 4-5 full pages (i.e., no blank space on page 4).
● See Format Template Handout issued on the first day of class, and also on WebCampus.

Questions to Consider When Writing:
● Does my paper have a creative title?
● Have I chosen a structure/organizational strategy that fits my content, and have I explained my choice?
● Does my paper cover all of the content elements covered in the prompt sheet, including a reference to the course outcomes?
● Does my paper meet the minimum page requirements?
● Is my paper formatted correctly and free of grammatical/mechanical errors?
Synopsis
We’ve spent the first few weeks of this course exploring the concept of empathy through reflection and discussion. So far, we’ve done this by looking at your educational and personal experiences as Americans and young adults.

For this paper, you will focus on expanding your study of empathy from your personal experiences to the professional community you wish to join. If you do not yet have a sense which professional community you want to join, pick one that you’re interested in and would like to learn more about.

Envision yourself as an apprentice in the field you’re writing about. You will gather a minimum of 6 sources (with at least 3 being scholarly and 1 popular news article that cites one of your scholarly sources) to justify your analysis of your professional community.

Structure
This paper is meant to be an opportunity for you to get an in-depth look at either your chosen field or one that potentially interests you. Your analysis will consist of five sections:

1. The important organizations in your field and required courses to earn a degree in it at UNR, and reflections on why; (Who and what do I have to know to become a professional in my field, and why do I think that is?)

2. The questions, subjects, and potential issues professionals in your field are interested in, and the methodology your field uses to approach them; (What am I interested in solving, and what do I do to solve it?)

3. The genres (kinds) of texts professionals in your field tend to write, and how their structure reflects their purpose; (How does the order and the way I say something amplify what I have to say?)

4. The differences between how professionals in your field communicate through writing with each other, vs. a more general audience; (How would I persuasively discuss my ideas with people well-versed in my field, and with people who know little about it?)

5. A reflective analysis of yourself as an apprentice entering the field. (How do I relate to this field? What parts of the professional viewpoint do I identify with? What do I have to learn to acquire this expert perspective? What personal and societal contributions do I want to make in this profession?)

Format Requirements (in addition to Format Template on Canvas)
- 5-7 full pages, not counting Works Cited,
- Note: You may use bolded sub-headings for each section, but no enlarged size/spacing.
Annotated Bibliography

Synopsis
In Paper 2, you practiced finding and evaluating a variety of source materials in order to build and articulate your understanding of a particular issue or profession. The Annotated Bibliography is a transitional assignment meant to draw on these skills to begin your Final Projects.

In this initial stage of your projects, you will compose an Annotated Bibliography. You do not have to have a specific research question or thesis claim in mind for your issue at this point; you are simply collecting a pool of information which you will eventually use to construct your research question and thesis claim.

We will not have a formal workshop for this assignment, but I will provide class time to work on it. I am also happy to read through any drafts you want to email me.

Your Annotated Bibliography will consist of a minimum of 6 sources, with at least 4 being articles from scholarly journals. Each annotated bibliography entry should be roughly half a page, in alphabetical order, and contain the following information:

1. A works cited entry of your source (single-spaced);
2. A brief summary of your source’s main idea;
3. Key enthymematic lines of reasoning in your source;
4. 1-2 quotes you might use in your paper;
5. Your evaluation of the source, in terms of quality and usefulness to your paper;
6. How this source connects to or diverges from other sources in your research (i.e., an organizational scheme for your sources).
   a. **Hint:** For this part, refer to other source authors by name in each entry to show how your sources are “in conversation” with each other:
      i. Ex: “Lauer’s ideas on recycling connect with Donaldson’s argument against ocean dumping...”

Format
- See Format Template on WebCampus
- 3-4 full pages

Things to Consider
- Are my Annotated Bibliography entries cited and formatted correctly?
- Do I have 6 sources, 4 of which are scholarly?
- Do I summarize each author’s main idea and then evaluate its merit?
- Have I identified key enthymematic lines of reasoning in the source?
- Do I explain how I intend to use this source, and relate it to my other sources?
- Do I engage my sources in conversation with one another?
Project Proposal & Work Contract

Synopsis
For the Annotated Bibliography, you all conducted independent research in different fields of study on a common topic. Now that you’ve compiled a cache of source materials, we will take the next step in synthesizing your research and forming a more official work dynamic for your groups: a Project Proposal and Work Contract. As the name implies, this assignment will be divided into two parts.

The first part of this assignment, the **Project Proposal**, should be 2-4 full pages. This part will contain the following:
1. Your research question (a question you will form based on your research, which you will then attempt to answer while defending said answer). **Your question should be in bold and single-spaced;**
2. The enthymemes/implicit assumptions within your research question (looking at these will help you draft a better question and arrangement of sources);
3. An explanation of why your question is important/deserving of research;
4. A rhetorical outline of your paper, showing how you will arrange your professional perspectives/fields of study;
5. Potential difficulties you may face in approaching your research question, and strategies for resolving them;
6. Reflections on your drafting process for this question and proposal, including what each person involved contributed.

The second part of this assignment, the **Work Contract**, has no specific length requirements, but must include the following:
1. A tentative work schedule (when you will meet, where, how often, etc.) that factors in other commitments in each member’s schedule;
2. A clear and detailed division of labor that is relatively equal among members (e.g., no outsourcing all of the writing or citations to one group member);
3. At least two strategies for holding each other accountable and resolving potential conflicts, and when/how you’d like me to intervene should those be unsuccessful;
4. What you expect from me as the instructor of the course, in terms of being an asset to your project/team;
5. How you would like to be graded on this project (as a team, individually, or a combination of the two);
6. Whether or not you would like some kind of anonymous peer evaluation to be factored into your grade;
7. The signatures of each group member and myself, indicating that we all accept the terms of the contract and our respective responsibilities.
During the Workshop for this document, you will present your Work Contracts to me as a group, and we will negotiate final terms together.

**Format**
- See Format Template on WebCampus
- 3-5 full pages *(Note: Start a new page for the Work Contract)*

**Things to Consider**
- Is your research question (RQ) narrow enough to be answerable, but broad enough to be arguable and/or have a range of possible answers?
  - Bad RQ: “Is X good or bad / right or wrong?”
  - Bad RQ: “How can we get everyone on Earth to do or think X?”
  - Good RQ: “What are some of the most beneficial and cost-effective strategies for approaching X?”
  - Good RQ: “What are some of the challenges of solving X with a Y approach, and how can they be resolved?”
- Does your Project Proposal defend the validity/relevance of your research question?
- Does your Project Proposal explain how your different disciplines and sources will come together to approach the question?
- Does your Project Proposal anticipate challenges in addressing your research question?
- Does our Grade Contract state in detail each of the required content points?
Final: Empathic Interdisciplinary Research Paper and Presentation

Synopsis
Now that you’ve compiled your sources, posed your research question and outlined your ideas in a proposal, and established formal working relationships, it’s on to the main event! This will be the final writing assignment of the course, and our focus for the remainder of the semester.

Paper Structure / Guidelines
First and foremost, length requirements: if your group has 3 members, your paper should be 12-15 pages (not counting the Works Cited); if your group has 4 members, it should be 16-20 pages, (not counting the Works Cited). Paper Structure / Guidelines

Here are some basic guidelines to give you an idea of what each section of your paper should accomplish. This is not a hard and fast format for how you should structure your paper, but these are things to consider:

1. Introduction (About 2 paragraphs)
   1.1. An attention-getting first line;
   1.2. Necessary background information on your issue;
   1.3. Thorough establishment and explanation of the gap/problem;
   1.4. Your research question or thesis statement, and how it attempts to fill that gap;
   1.5. The enthymematic assumptions behind either your research question or thesis statement (this should stand out clearly, either at the end of the first paragraph or beginning of the second);
   1.6. A brief outline of the structure of your paper, and the enthymematic assumptions you have on how each part fits together (refer to your group members as professionals, Ex: physicist Jake Snider, etc.).

Note: Think Swales’ Moves!

Things to Avoid in the Introduction
- Informal language (slang, contractions, “you,” cliche expressions, etc.)
- Unprovable statements (“Since the dawn of time…”)
- Absolutist language (“War always happens like this…”)
- Quotations and in-depth coverage of source information (save that for the Body Sequences).

2. Body Sequences (One Sequence = One Disciplinary Response to the Question/Thesis)
   2.1. An opening paragraph that briefly summarizes how you approach your thesis as a professional in your field (i.e., what your field is skilled at and what it focuses on);
   2.2. Paragraphs that:
2.2.1. Have a topic sentence that refer back to the thesis and summarize the point you’re proving in the paragraph;
2.2.2. Textual evidence via sources;
2.2.3. Explanation of how textual evidence supports your thesis, and connections to your other sources;
2.3. A concluding paragraph that shows the limitations of your field, and transitions into the next one.

Note: You must use at least 4 of your original 6 sources, with at least 3 of them being scholarly.

Things to Avoid in the Body Sequences
● Beginning or ending paragraphs with quotations;
● Improper citations and formatting for block quotes;
● Overly long paragraphs that cover more than one idea/argument;
● Topic sentences that do not make an argument or cover paragraph information;
● Paragraphs without at least one quotation to back up your points;
● No transitions or connections between sources and other Body Sequences;
● Informal language (see above).

3. Conclusion (About 2 paragraphs)
3.1. Synthesis of main ideas for each discipline, tying back to thesis;
3.2. Reflections on how each discipline complements and works with the others;
3.3. Speculation on future potential sites for disciplinary collaboration on this issue, and where further research could be conducted.

Note: Remember that you and your work are part of a larger conversation! Your group is building on what has been said previously by experts, and in turn making suggestions/recommendations for how other experts can build on what you’ve done.

Things to Avoid
● Restating the thesis and/or topic sentences verbatim;
● Quotations and introducing new information (conclusions are about wrapping things up).
● Informal language (see above).

4. Works Cited
4.1. Entries in alphabetical order;
4.2. Correctly formatted, via Easybib;
4.3. Make sure articles/episodes/chapters are in quotes, and journals/magazines/books/films are italicized!
Format Requirements

- See Format Template
  - Group names should be in alphabetical order on first page and header in upper right corner.

Presentation Structure / Guidelines

In addition to the research paper, your group will compose a formal project presentation to respond to your thesis and communicate your ideas to your peers. The format will largely be the same as the informal presentations you’ve done previously in the course, with a few notable additions:

- A rhetorical time-budget outline, completed as a group;
- A 300 word reflection on practicing your presentation, completed individually;
- Each presentation should last **12-15 minutes for groups of 3 and 15-18 minutes for groups of 4**, with group members talking relatively equally;
- An empathic example or question to involve the class;
- A visual aid, such as PowerPoint or Prezi (**have multiple copies and means of accessing your visual to avoid technology snafus**);
- A 1-3 page evaluation of yourself and other group members on this project, discussing specific contributions and problems relative to each person;
- **Professional attire required** (think job interview).

Support

At this point in the assignment sheet, you may or not be freaking out. No worries! As your instructor, I will be available during class, office hours, and email for help at any step of the process. Here are some of the built-in supports I will be providing through the next few weeks:

- Two Workshops;
- Individual Conferences;
- Class time devoted to your drafts based on specific writing tasks;
- **In addition to these, I highly recommend you schedule an appointment at the Writing Center!**

**Deadlines**

- Workshop 1 (Group of 3 = 5 pages min; Group of 4 = 7 pages min): **Tues, April 14th**
- Workshop 2 (Group of 3 =10 pages min; Group of 4 = 14 pages min): **Thurs, April 23rd**
- Presentations: **April 28th & 30th**