

***Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses.* James Paul Gee. Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press, 1990. xxi + 203 pp.**

Many people in "literate" societies, when asked to define *literacy*, almost always do so in terms of reading and writing abilities. This narrow interpretation of literacy, an offspring of reductionist psychology, has reigned supreme in many academic and educational contexts for decades, greatly shaping literacy theories and classroom practices. Within the past ten years, however, a large body of multidisciplinary research has begun to undermine the authority of this perspective by situating literacy in larger social practices.

Support for this emerging interdisciplinary perspective has grown, and an increasing emphasis has been placed on the interplay between language, educational practice, and societal features of power and domination. A "cutting edge" exemplar of such work can be found in a series of monographs, anthologies, and textbooks entitled "Critical Perspectives on Literacy and Education." *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*, the book reviewed here, is the introduction to this collection. Firmly located within the paradigm of "social" approaches to literacy, or what Gee calls the "New Literacy Studies," this volume validates many previous research findings and also makes some unique contributions.

Gee provides further proof of literacy's ties to social behaviour. He also acknowledges that the indivisible bonds linking language use and social interaction have serious consequences, especially when literacy is deployed to wreak injustice on individuals or groups. Like earlier "New Literacy" researchers, Gee exposes the covert function of reductionist literacy paradigms, namely their justification of educational practices that are party to social, economic, and political inequities.

Despite these similarities, *Social Linguistics and Literacies* (henceforth, *SL&L*) departs from other "New Literacy Studies" in the specific theoretical and pedagogical alternatives it proposes. According to Gee, this volume "...constitutes an overt theory of literacy and socially-based linguistics" (Introduction: xx) that counters traditional views and frames literacy in terms of abilities to display various social identities. Just as actors need more than lines to convincingly depict their characters, Gee argues that all humans engaged in any sort of social interaction must successfully integrate specific attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, thoughts *and* uses of language. Moreover, humans must be able to combine these elements in a myriad of ways in order to exhibit different social identities. Consequently, *literacy* as a mass term gives way to *literacies* as a count term.

These ideas are thought-provoking and controversial, yet

rife with implications for language education. Despite the wall of denial erected by psychological reductionism, many academic researchers have grappled with these issues and even tried to offer educational solutions. *SL&L* takes on this dualistic function of criticism and suggestions for change. Other North American researchers attempting this task include the "Critical Pedagogy" devotees of Freire's emancipatory literacy philosophy (cf. McLaren, 1989; Giroux, 1988). In the eyes of practitioners, many of these researchers succeed as critics yet fail to be constructive.

Gee may be an exception here, too, given his efforts to maximize comprehension and minimize frustration by avoiding excessive technical jargon, cryptic references, and abstract theorizing devoid of concrete examples. Gee's project is all the more distinctive because of the deftness with which he coherently synthesizes issues from a diverse range of perspectives, some of which include literary criticism, formal linguistic theory, poststructuralist social theory, comparative education, cultural anthropology, and critical language studies.

The rhetorical layout of this volume gives it an unusual structure. To appreciate its inherent logic, readers will need to focus on the volume's three parts, not the seven chapters that go into these parts. Impressionistically, at least to this reviewer, the structuring of these parts takes on both a visual and aural flavor when going from part One, "Background", to part

Two, "Introduction to a Social Linguistics", and finishing with the close of part Three, "A Theory of Discourses". The visual metaphor is that of a pyramid viewed from the bottom up. The first part, covering the greatest range of issues, is akin to the base of this pyramid. Moving upwards, the second part resembles the narrowing of the pyramid as the author zeroes in on the particulars of language. Part Three, the pyramid's apex, consists of Gee's precise and straightforward theory of Discourses and literacies. Aurally, one is reminded of a jazz score played live where different phases are evident, yet certain chords and sequences are repeated throughout the song. Major themes and issues resonate throughout the three parts, albeit at different tempos and in different keys, complementing the hierarchy of these parts.

The rationale for the volume as a whole is rare indeed as it stems from a moral mandate to reconceptualize language use, social theories, and educational practices. The mandate draws its strength largely from a careful historical analysis of literacy undertaken in Part One. This history, according to Gee, is a story of people's attempts to resolve literacy's fundamental contradiction: regardless of its oppressive or liberating capacities, literacy cannot be immune to the sociopolitical influences of human relations. Specifically, interpretations, definitions, and expectations governing literacy are always subject to the vagaries of human motives for solidarity and status.

Gee sees no easy resolution to

this contradiction, unlike those who seize upon solutions which rip literacy from its social and political origins. Gee claims that these are "facile" attempts spurred on by the parade of "myths" about literacy's great potential for improving political systems, social relations, and even individual intellectual abilities. What has sustained these myths so far, especially in education both in North America and abroad, are "scientific" distinctions between oral and literate cultures (see for example Goody, 1977; Ong, 1982; and Havelock, 1963) Beneath the fanfare and "facts," however, lurks a darker side where literacy's capacity to oppress is very real to those labelled "illiterate" or "functionally literate."

By confronting this contradiction, Gee discloses many unpleasant moments in literacy's history that continually reappear. Their eradication is the goal behind the "moral basis" of Gee's efforts. Because terms like literacy are often implicated in the larger social inequities of "literate" societies, the author claims that any attempt to designate "human" in the honorific sense must render the how's and why's behind their use of these terms as overtly as possible. He adds that such an endeavour should be the primary function of education given that (in "literate" societies) one's level of academic success often strongly corresponds to one's social and economic standing later in life. The generalizations and reasons we employ to make sense of concepts like social relations and language use are called *ideologies* in this

book, and the moral principle concerned with their explication is one Gee dubs a "Conceptual Principle Governing Human Discourse."

Part One goes beyond the theoretical realm to provide contemporary evidence in support of the moral basis behind Gee's "overt theory of literacy." Shirley Brice-Heath's *Ways with Words* is a seminal example of this current work. Heath's work stresses the socially situated nature of literacy practices, advocating not a singular literacy of the mind, but multiple literacies of the various social milieus. Heath's now-classic study has served as both a "New Literacy Studies" attack on the "oral-literate" distinction as well as an insightful glimpse into the connections between home-based language practices and one's later success or failure at school. Because of its clarity and relevance, Heath's study is useful for illustrating the major issues in this volume.

For those not familiar with this research, Heath conducted an ethnography of the home-based interactions existing in three different Carolina Piedmont communities: 1) Trackton, a black working class community; 2) Roadville, a white working class, strongly Fundamentalist community; and 3) the mainstream middle-class residents of Maintown. The outstanding element in Heath's study was her comparison of language practices in these homes with those of the school.

Her findings vividly depict how schools can function to

marginalize "non-mainstream" populations even at the level of seemingly insignificant talk. The Piedmont schools mirrored many of the language practices, including reading and writing behaviours, found in the mainstream homes. This large overlap in early home- and school-based language practices ensured that mainstream children were granted more immediate access to educational benefits like higher grades. The verbal and nonverbal behaviours found in the homes of Roadville and Trackton children, on the other hand, differed or conflicted with those expected in school. By endorsing views of "correct" and "incorrect" behaviours in their interactions with these students, the Piedmont teachers (like many across North America) viewed their linguistic and non-linguistic deviations quite negatively.

The microgenetic details at which tacit theories insinuate themselves into places like the Piedmont schools are dealt with more explicitly in part Two of *SL&L*. The connections Gee draws between language use and social allegiances enables one to see that teachers in Heath's study are not entirely to blame for misunderstanding Roadville and Trackton students. Instead, Gee argues, individuals, like these teachers, ascribe certain meanings to socially contested terms (e.g. "literacy") on the basis of the cultural models favored by those social groups to which they belong. These cultural models are prototypical "models" of how people, objects, and events are

assumed to be. Much of what insures conformity to the norms of some groups and not others is the perpetual need Gee claims we all have for status and solidarity with others.

The teachers in Heath's study could be described as having cultural models often at odds with the non-mainstream pupils. Certain ideologies, like those coloring the teachers' interpretations of literate versus non-literate behaviour, wove themselves into these models, accentuating the differences between mainstream teacher and non-mainstream student. A final division was probably created by the fact that Roadville, Trackton and Maintown students did not seek to establish solidarity with the same groups, nor did their notions of status always mesh. Unfortunately, these discrepancies were viewed by teachers in an asocial light and were often confused with "intelligence", "aptitude," and "literacy skills."

Heath found, however, that it was not by virtue of innate intellectual abilities that mainstream pupils were better able to "read and write correctly." The "head start" for them came before schooling because many of the behaviours and attitudes that would be expected later by their teachers were already taking place within the family environment. Moreover, the *attitudes* developed early on with respect to these behaviours would prove to be those deemed "good" and "successful" by future teachers.

Storybook reading is a case in point. While Roadville and Main-

town children were read to by their parents, Maintown children were encouraged to say, do, and believe in ways that teachers would applaud in the classroom. Taking characters, scenes, and events in a story and discussing them in other contexts was a common feature of mainstream parent-child discussions. The strong Fundamentalist attitudes of Roadville often discouraged this sort of decontextualized treatment of printed matter. When this ability to suspend the authority of the text became important in school, Roadville students would "fail." Trackton children, exposed to certain home-based ways not found in the other two communities, also encountered failure in school. The kinds of language uses stressed by many Trackton residents, e.g. group negotiation of written texts and verbal dexterity in oral narratives, were diametrically opposed to what schools deemed "normal," especially in the elementary school years.

Even though people from all three communities spoke mutually intelligible English, the functions, forms, meanings, and interpretations tied to this language still varied enough to lead to the kinds of differences in school behaviour Heath documented. This variation was not the result of a motivational/developmental deficit affecting residents only of Trackton and Roadville. Unfortunately, those who had some control over education, itself a social "good" Gee would argue, thought otherwise. These people were neither cognizant of the very real *social* factors

involved in language variation, nor did they realize how those factors could impact language at every level of use. Because their cultural models and practices did not parallel those of their teachers, Trackton and Roadville students were denied academic success, became "losers" in the educational lottery, and consequently found themselves increasingly isolated from dominant, mainstream institutions.

Part Three of *SL&L* represents a culmination of the major issues addressed thus far. To bring together these various elements, Gee presents a theory of literacies and Discourses. Views implicit in the previous two parts are made explicit in Gee's discussion of this theory's impact on educational practice. The explicitness demonstrated here also functions at a philosophical level to fulfill the "Conceptual Principle Governing Ethical Human Discourse" of chapter one as Gee's "overt theory of literacy" represents the author's attempt to live by the tenets of his professed morality.

This theory of literacy is rendered more meaningful by the discussion of Discourses preceding it. These "Discourses" represent a means of forging the links between variable social practices, cultural models, and ways of language use. While operating under various definitions in linguistics and literacy research, Gee establishes a somewhat unique reconceptualization of the term coupled with a distinctive orthographical feature: the *D* in *Discourses* is always capitalized.

In keeping with his moral mandate, Gee explicitly defines Discourses in chapter six. According to him, a Discourse is "...a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting, that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'."(143).

The different ways of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting in the Mainstream, Tracton, and Roadville homes in Heath's study represent three different *primary* Discourses while the school-based combinations are more public, *secondary* Discourses. Gee adds that any socially useful definition of literacy must incorporate these notions as well. Consequently, *literacy* is defined as: *mastery of, or fluent control over, secondary Discourses involving print* (153). Because literacy entails so much beyond an ability to decode or produce printed language, Gee argues that "involving print" is really unnecessary; it is there to "...assuage the feelings of people committed...to reading and writing as decontextualized and isolable skills" (153).

The definition of literacy offered in *SL&L* is not simply a change of words. It represents a fundamental shift in the characterization of people and in the capabilities they possess. Being "literate" is now something shared by the Trackton, Roadville and Maintown students. Of course, the influences of the social, political,

and economic forces within the Piedmont area, as with other areas across the world, are not amenable to egalitarianism of this sort. The mainstream children's primary Discourse enabled them to master more quickly the secondary Discourses prized by the schools, while the Roadville and Trackton students found their own primary Discourses sharply at odds with these privileged school-based Discourses. The schools, via teachers' grades and evaluations, marginalized these divergent ways of saying-doing-valuing-believing, by labelling them as "inappropriate" or "wrong."

Educators might well despair at the thought of trying to challenge the social reproductionist tendencies of formal schooling. Nevertheless, Gee does offer an alternative that, although not easy, may pave the way for truly different as well as "more just and humane" schools, teachers, students, and societies. Educators have some agency in helping to bring about this change. Of course, what is often the easiest and least costly choice for many educators is to follow in the footsteps of others without questioning. However, Gee argues that such behaviour is tantamount to endorsing a morally suspect way of life. By keeping certain ideologies, cultural models, and attendant dominant Discourses tacit, one is morally complicit with the continuation of many social inequities. Ripping literacy from its social womb and blaming individual "victims" for the larger social imbalances absolves the responsible institutions and individuals of

any guilt.

The road less travelled, but one Gee urges all of us to take, is the one leading to Gee's morally-based "discourse (read: Discourse) analysis." Heath's ethnography is a real world example of how to analyze critically and to render overt many of the tacit theories found in educational settings the world over. Gee refuses to stop here, however, as laying bare the morally suspect ideologies endemic to classrooms is only the beginning. Borrowing from Krashen's problematic distinction between *learning* and *acquisition*, Gee argues that classrooms need to be environments where learning and acquisition are allowed to flourish.

Gee claims that we *acquire* much of our fluency in a Discourse when we are unconsciously exposed to ways of saying-doing-believing-valuing in meaningful settings. Learning is also essential, as it involves the sort of critical, morally just analysis of the ideologies within Discourses. That is, Gee maintains that learning entails conscious attention to formal properties of a Discourse, analyzing, and comparing them to other Discourses. The only way to ever change a Discourse, and, by extension, inequitable social relations, is through developing learning activities that allow for *liberating literacies* where one develops a set of meta-features to critique, analyze, and alter a dominant Discourse. Gee adds the proviso that acquisition, however partial, of a Discourse is needed before one can develop a liberating

literacy.

Some may react negatively to Gee's reconceptualizations of literacy and Discourses, criticizing him for rendering these terms meaningless. Gee counters this potential objection by pointing out that Discourses will always ensure that not just "anything goes" with the meanings or uses one attaches to linguistic forms. Our need for status or solidarity with certain Discourses greatly figures into this system of checks and balances. Others, especially practitioners, may criticize Gee for seeming more invested in pointing out problems than in suggesting specific remedies that would affect classroom practices.

However, this volume was not meant to present how-to formulae nor to appease tradition. Its purpose has been to present a theory of literacy which emphasizes the fundamentally social and political nature of language use and the deeply moral obligation all of us have to explicate our theories about language use, social relations, and social goods. In place of a programmatic outline for pedagogy, Gee has constructed an opportunity space in which teachers and students can develop the literacies that will be most liberating for them: literacies whose capacities for change can extend beyond the towers of academia and the walls of the classroom.

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Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom.
Barbara Kroll, ed. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1990. 230 pp.

The study of composition at the post-secondary level is a relatively new practice which has become

widespread only during the past half-century. More recent is the emergence over the past two to three decades of composition studies as an academic discipline, and even more recent is the awareness that composition research and pedagogy must expand to meet the needs of the ESL population. As growing numbers of international students flood colleges and universities in the English-speaking world, and as English becomes increasingly important as a world language, ESL composition is a burgeoning field. Unfortunately, the inevitable result of such changing circumstances has been that L1 theory, research, and pedagogy have sometimes been uncritically applied to the ESL composition classroom.

This volume represents one of many current, ongoing attempts to contribute to our understanding of ESL composition. In its 13 chapters, which are grouped under the headings "Philosophical Underpinnings of Second Language Writing Instruction" and "Considerations for Writing Instruction," a number of issues pertinent to second language composition are addressed. Several articles deal with the important issue of teacher response. For example, Chapter 4, "Coaching from the Margins: Issues in Written Response," by Ilona Leki, and Chapter 10, "Feedback on Compositions: Teacher and Student Verbal Reports", by Andrew D. Cohen and Marilda C. Cavalcanti, discuss students' views of, and teachers' goals for,

worthwhile feedback. As we well know, the schism between teacher feedback and its intended results persists, and such a problem is exacerbated when the teachers and students are of different cultural and language backgrounds. Of equal importance is research on the implications of the currently popular process approach for ESL writing. Such issues are discussed in Ann M. Johns' "L1 Composition Theories: Implications for Developing Theories of L2 Composition," and Chapter 3, Alexandra Rose Krapels' "An Overview of Second Language Writing Process Research."

There are few tasks which continually challenge composition instructors more than topic choice, and having students from different cultural and language backgrounds further complicates the issue. Joy Reid tackles this subject in Chapter 12, "Responding to Different Topic Types: A Quantitative Analysis from a Contrastive Rhetoric Perspective." She investigates the possibility of mismatch between students' acquisition of topic knowledge in their L1 and the necessity of writing on such topics in English, the L2. Other topics of crucial importance to L2 composition, such as L2 writing assessment and the relationship between reading and writing, are also covered.

The historical overview of Chapter 1, "Second Language Composition Instruction: Developments, Issues and Directions in ESL", by Tony Silva, is especially valuable in that many current ESL composition teachers have been trained in an era in which the

process approach is presented as the only logical (and, of course, politically correct) approach to writing instruction. Practitioners relatively new to the field (those who have been teaching, say, 10 years or less) may lack the historical background needed to understand the extent to which behavioristic models of learning still permeate ESL writing pedagogy in the United States. Even those instructors trained in applied linguistics may not realize that an analog to the grossly outmoded, yet pervasive, Audio-Lingual approach to language learning has recently dominated the ESL composition field. Audio-Lingualism, made popular in the late 1950s by the advent of the portable tape recorder, is based on a stimulus-response model of learning which has long been believed inappropriate for language learning and for the acquisition of rhetorical patterns. Inexplicably, its traces remain firmly entrenched in language teaching and writing pedagogy.

What makes Silva's chapter somewhat less effective is his far-too-brief and almost patronizingly comprehensive critique. He claims that there has recently been a "merry-go-round" of approaches in which each candidate tends to be limited in scope, "evangelically" promoted, "accepted uncritically...rejected prematurely," only to be replaced by a new and equally flawed approach (18). He categorically denies consistency, depth, and progress in the development of ESL composition pedagogy. Although he may have an arguable

point, he stops short of giving the evidence necessary to argue it. Even though his "merry-go-round" argument is insufficiently supported, Silva does provide some insightful solutions as well as a description of an ideal model for relating theory, research and practice in ESL writing instruction. Chapter 1 should indeed be commended for its consciousness-raising value.

Chapter 2 is arguably one of the more insightful chapters in the volume. Johns discusses the theoretical orientations driving composition instruction today, delves into ideological issues, and makes the excellent and often neglected point that it is impossible to teach composition—or do anything else, for that matter—without a theoretical orientation, however tacit (see Gergen, this volume, for a discussion of Gee's views on tacit theories). She favors teachers' articulating their theoretical stances in the classroom, because making the "rules" explicit is one step toward student empowerment—it makes teachers' views and expectations clear to the students, which is a prerequisite for fairness in the classroom.

Other articles in Part I are more problematic. In fact, I have one overarching and serious criticism of a trend which appears in several chapters: the propensity of these authors—which seems to be a common orientation in the ESL writing field in general—to consider writing as a set of skills which can be isolated from any meaningful social context (see Gergen, this volume, for a review

of Gee 1991, which addresses this issue extensively). Writing is viewed through the traditional behavioral science paradigm in which all variables can be controlled and considered independently from one another, with the human factor ruled out. For example, in Chapter 5, Hamp-Lyons laments, and rightly so, that "It is a sad irony that in writing assessment research there is a real tendency for the writer to be forgotten in the difficulties and controversies surrounding such issues as topic choice, construct validity versus reliability, and the like." Yet she goes on to state that "...there is at present no developed classification of writer variables separate from variables associated with the task, the reader, or the scoring procedure" (p. 76). She tacitly assumes, throughout the chapter, that there must be some way to remove "humanness" from the assessment of writing—or, at least, isolate it from other "separate" variables such as the task and the reader. It would seem impossible to separate writer variables from such "other" variables because such variables are inherently confounded. Researchers such as Hamp-Lyons might benefit from reflecting on the paradoxes inherent in their research orientation [cf. Mishler (1986) for an extensive discussion of the problematic aspects of a traditional behavioristic approach to social science research].

Similarly, as Hamp-Lyons sees the writer as separable from such variables as the task, other authors in the volume seem to see writing as separable from its

context and its socially situated nature. For example, in Chapter 6, "Reading-Writing Connections: Toward a Description for Second Language Learners," Joan Carson Eisterhold attempts to differentiate between "language skills" and "literacy skills." Here, Eisterhold risks appealing to the claim that literacy can be reduced to an isolated set of skills, a claim which many would find contentious. First, there is evidence that the cognitive "skills" often (wrongly) associated with literacy in general do not necessarily transfer across literacies in different languages (Scribner and Cole 1981) and thus cannot be claimed inherent to literacy. Further, by overemphasizing the cognitive dimension of literacy, Eisterhold neglects its social context (see Gergen, this volume, for a review of Gee's theories of literacy vis-a-vis social context).

Youmans (ms.) extensively reviews arguments against the pervasive skills-based approach to literacy and its pedagogical implications. A major problem with this approach is that it incorrectly predicts that mastery of these "skills" leads to literacy (de Castell and Luke 1986; Ekwall and Shanker 1985). Smith makes the apt comment that "students are often taught and tested on one decontextualized thing at a time, in a predetermined sequence, in the false expectation that sooner or later this will make them expert readers and writers" (1986:109). Such programs have resulted from the well-intentioned but misguided use of cognitive psychological

constructs. In fact, many skills assumed necessary and/or sufficient for even minimal literacy simply are not. Moreover, the farther behind their classmates children are, the more they are subjected to increasingly decontextualized and meaningless "drill and kill" (Smith 1986), and consequently fall even farther behind. The basic fallacy guiding such practice is the assumption that the more successful children have attained their level of proficiency through a mastery of skills. In fact, evidence suggests that their knowledge is in fact often gained through more holistic learning via a type of social apprenticeship to a "club" as per Smith (1984), or a Discourse as per Gee (1991), rather than systematic acquisition of discrete skills.

Problems of the type discussed above are even more pronounced in the second section of the volume. A major criticism of this second section is that the authors tend to separate language from its socially situated nature within culture and to overemphasize the language issues. For example, in Chapter 7, "Composing in English: Effects of a First Language on Writing in English as a Second Language," Alexander Friedlander attempts to choose topics which would elicit knowledge acquired in either Chinese or English, but does not adequately consider the cultural issues in which such topics are enmeshed. He asks one group of students to write to a director of international studies on Qingming, a deeply-rooted traditional Chinese

festival of ancestor worship, while the other group is asked to write to a director of a university foreign student office, giving advice on foreign student programs. Using these two topics is monumentally problematic as they are likely to evoke very different emotional responses, to be more familiar to some students than to others, and to raise politeness issues. It would seem impossible to ask students to access knowledge acquired in one language versus another and not access the complicated, accompanying cultural baggage at the same time. This problem, which appears in several chapters, is simply the result of repeated attempts to measure writing as an abstract skill, or set of skills, in isolation from socially meaningful practices.

A related criticism of the volume as a whole is that the cultural differences that students bring to the writing task are often ignored or dismissed as negative influences. For example, in Chapter 13, "Writing with Others' Words: Using Background Reading Text in Academic Compositions," Cherry Campbell discusses ESL students' proficiency in integrating outside reading into essays with no consideration of different cultural norms for doing so. She does not, for example, consider the vast cross-cultural differences in rhetorical patterns which might affect students' assimilation of outside material into their writing, though she does imply that such study would be interesting.

Similarly, Kroll might have

been more insightful in Chapter 9, "What Does Time Buy? ESL Student Performance on Home Versus Class Compositions," if she had not been so heavily judgmental of "good" versus "bad" writing. Kroll continually uses phrases such as "...knowing what constitutes good writing," and "...the attributes of effective writing" (p. 152; emphasis added), without acknowledging that writing's "goodness" or "effectiveness" is not absolute; rather, it depends on the cultural context in which it is produced. She vaguely defines "good" writing as that which exhibits "overall organizational success" (p. 142), and goes on to specify that such success entails criteria such as "remaining on the focused topic throughout the essay (p. 144)."

Such criteria are considered "good" because of their prominence in the essayist style of the white middle-class of the United States. Because of the privileged status of this group, such standards are seen as absolute and are thus expected of students from more marginal cultural backgrounds as well. However, it cannot be assumed that such criteria are necessary for "good" writing in all cultures. For example, Gee (1991) analyzes stories produced by African-American schoolchildren which are often judged "off topic" by Anglo listeners precisely because they do not appear to remain "on the focused topic." He asserts that African-American listeners have no problem following what he demonstrates to be the logical structure of the narratives. It seems,

then, that Kroll should reconsider her choice of value-laden words, or at least she should have attested to their cultural relativity. Further, Kroll, like Campbell, might have considered the possibility that the influence of ESL students' acquired, culturally based rhetorical patterns on their writing is not necessarily negative. Most ESL writing teachers have certainly come upon instances of eloquence and uniqueness of expression in student writing which arise from these very same cultural, rhetorical differences which she implicitly maligns.

However, not all chapters of Part II are plagued by such problems. For example, "The Teaching of Topical Structure Analysis as a Revision Strategy for ESL Writers" by Ulla Connor and Mary Farmer is informative in that it offers a promising, linguistically-based heuristic for ESL writing instruction. Students identify and underline sentence topics, and then draw a diagram which corresponds to the structure of their essays in order to analyze cohesion. Many of us are familiar with the recent well-intentioned but failed attempts by ESL teachers to use transformational grammar in the classroom, and it is refreshing to see an apparently reasonable way to integrate linguistics and composition pedagogy. The one criticism of this article is that the model is not presented in such a way as to be interpreted and actually used by teachers. Because this is a how-to article, the authors should have given more specific how-to instructions. (This is not the

only article, however, that ends abruptly—underdeveloped endings are a problem with nearly all the chapters of the volume.)

Another article to be commended, as it advocates more egalitarian relations between students and teachers, is Chapter 10. Cohen and Cavalcanti's study is insightful and informative in that it illuminates areas of match and mismatch between student expectations and teacher response and suggests ways to increase the efficacy of teacher response. For example, the authors reveal that students are sometimes offended by teacher criticism of their essay content and believe that teachers should confine their comments to issues of form. Cohen and Cavalcanti suggest that teachers articulate agreements with students on feedback procedures. This is in line with Gee's (1991) position that, like teachers' theoretical perspectives (see discussion of Chapter 2, above), the "rules" of education, in order not to be oppressive to students, must be clearly and explicitly articulated.

Second Language Writing has problematic aspects which make critical reading a must. But if one considers the caveats mentioned here, and looks carefully at the studies' findings, the book can be of great benefit, primarily as a stimulus for future inquiry. Each chapter opens up areas of study which are shown to be in need of substantial further research. This newness, this initial exploration, may be the reason that some of the studies are rough around the edges. Despite some questionable articles,

the volume nevertheless addresses very interesting and valid questions about L2 writing research and certainly opens the door to some interesting investigations.

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***Reclaiming Pedagogy: The Rhetoric of the Classroom.* Patricia Donahue and Ellen Quandahl. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989. 179 pages.**

The book consists of twelve articles written by an equal number of authors and edited by Patricia Donahue and Ellen Quandahl. The articles discuss a rich variety of topics and thinkers (Kenneth Burke, Derrida, Barthes, Freud, Bakhtin, Stanley Fish), always with one eye on classroom practice and the other on theory. As the editors claim in the introduction, "the real subject here is a new wave of composition research, encouraging us to read classroom practice through critical theory, and promising, moreover, a mutually enhancing interaction of theory and pedagogy." The idea, then, is to "reclaim pedagogy as a theoretical field of study, a critical practice," not in order to illustrate or justify classroom activities, not in order to use only those aspects of a theory that support what one already does, but in order to integrate theory and practice so that one can affect the other, and so that, instead of affirming what we already do, theory will allow us to resee what we do. "To resee what we do," write the editors, "is precisely the aim of the interactive pedagogies in this volume."

And these "interactive pedagogies" find their justification in the need to respond to "the

repressions engendered by the process model, repressions that come from the claiming revolutionary status for this model and from forgetting the significant similarities between it and the traditional model of product." The contention is that process models are frequently not only content blind but also unable to take advantage of the notion that "we [and our students] are always already within a historical context that shapes beliefs and practices." It follows that no text comes to be except through the knowledge the writer brings from the world he is in, a knowledge that is not only his but one that he already shares with his prospective readers. Therefore, unless we conceive of composition pedagogy as blind to the social contract from within which all of us necessarily operate, whether from temporary centers of power or from margins that reveal centers, unless we regard composition as a form of imposition rather than dialogue, that is, unless we conceive of composition pedagogy as authoritarian rather than interactional, conformative rather than generative, reproductive of conventional wisdom rather than creative, there is little chance that the student's knowledge, ideas, experiences, and dialects will be respected since our very action presupposes conservation. And conservation can be a Narcissus who, as Caetano Veloso would say, dislikes anything which is not a mirror.

These and other ideas are especially well illustrated in three of the articles in the collection:

Maria Salvatori's "Pedagogy: From the Periphery to the Center," Dennis Foster's "Interpretation and Betrayal: Talking with Authority," and Randall Knopper's "Deconstruction, Process, Writing."

Maria Salvatori develops her argument for an interactive pedagogy discussing two "scenes," one "framed" by a text-centered and the other by a reader-centered pedagogy. She discusses at length E.D. Hirsch's concept of cultural literacy, criticizing it as "a theory of reading that privileges and counts on prior background information can ultimately stifle a reader's involvement in reflexivity during the reading act and obliterate the understanding and the practice of reading and writing as interrelated, self-reflexive, and reciprocally illuminating activities." What Hirsch's and Knight's readings seem to be doing, according to the author, is to sacralize the traditional myths of authority, leading readers/students to a veneration stance which makes dialoguing with the text and questioning the text impossible. Salvatori's final argument is that these notions, once retheorized, will lead composition teachers and students to regard, for example, an author's work "as the progressive perfecting of an intention, rather than an intention perfected." How exactly this differs from current process pedagogies is not made clear, and one finishes reading her article with the feeling that this reader-response theory is nothing but a heuristic which, though it may stimulate creativity and question

traditional notions, will remain "untranslatable" to daily classroom practice. That, however, may change if, as the author puts it, "we bring pedagogy from the periphery to the center of our profession" and "learn to conceptualize [it] as more than teaching methods and teaching techniques."

In "Interpretation and Betrayal," Dennis A. Foster points to the dilemma of critical writing which demands that students must simultaneously respect authority and resist it, leading to what he calls "a paradoxical blend of conformity and independent thought." His argument is that the only way to resist authority is to first recognize it, so that interpretation becomes a necessary step for betrayal, that is, the violation of "the sense of wholeness produced by the paradigm of rationality." To illustrate the point, Foster conceives and proposes assignments on specific texts, presented to the students' in three different forms at three different stages, starting with the students reading the text on its own terms, followed by a stage of resistance to the text's logic, and concluding with an assignment in which students become participants in the meaning-making process. To clarify this process, Foster develops a very illuminating discussion of these assignments in relation to Marabel Morgan's book *The Total Woman*.

Randal Knopper's "Deconstruction, Process, Writing" attempts to rescue deconstruction from its heuristic status. He argues that deconstruction found its way into "our thinking about

writing because its version of reading as a meaning-making process suits theories of writing as process." Unhappily, however, few traces of deconstructive activity, if any, remain in a final text. The explanation seems to lie in that, as Hillis Miller puts it, post-structuralism is a theory of reading and not of writing. In other words, reading is analysis and writing is composition. This notion tends to emphasize "the flux of ideas behind writing"—a flux which, as a rule, is subdued by the necessary hierarchizations of "acceptable" prose. What does Knopper have to say about this? He believes that the "basic maxims for saving readers from difficulty, for easing their passage through a text, for avoiding excessive demands on short-term memory—that a writer 'orient' readers by providing a telling title and using headings, guide them by quickly presenting an overarching thesis, use topics sentences to subordinate paragraphs to the thesis and to encapsulate units of meaning, provide periodic summaries that divide the argument into graspable stages—all aspire to a hierarchy and control that a post-structuralist perspective would consider delusory... or unfortunate.

What is there to replace these hierarchizations? Knopper presents some "thin" suggestions for assignments, one by Sharon Crowley (have students "write opaque prose once in a while"), the other by Gregory L. Ulmer, who suggests that students engage in "exercises in plagiarism and misreading." Knopper seems to en-

dorse such assignments, asking whether there "might [not] be benefits to a text that displays a writer's process of discovery and invention," since such a revelation would also bring to light the amount of repression involved in doctoring one's writing to suit a thesis. Should we have our students write like Derrida? The answer is a "perhaps" rather than a "yes." On the one hand, Knopper seems to believe that to extend deconstruction into the classroom would "mean taking students' texts as never finished;" on the other hand, such writing, with its "unspeakable syntax" and "unconventional units of coherence" (or lack of coherence?) would threaten current essayistic practices and be strongly resisted. Yet, that is precisely what deconstruction thinks of itself as being: a means of resistance, subversion, demystification, redefinition, recontextualization, desacralization of authority. Its capacity to succeed, Knopper seems to be saying, is hardly an issue worth considering.

To conclude: *Reclaiming Pedagogy* takes us then on a tour of the difficult land of critical theory, with privileged stops at some verbal castles where we are allowed to eavesdrop briefly at the chamber doors of Bakhtin, Barthes, Derrida, and Stanley Fish. We hear what they say (we are not sure if what they are saying has anything to do with us), and because we are all teachers of writing who believe that students are too passive and incapable of questioning authority, we try to determine if these theories allow us to resee what we do and

redo or undo what we see. Yet, because we are not allowed into the chambers of some of these theorists, we have to be content with the fragments of their discourse and somehow patch these together and make sense of them. This is a notoriously difficult task, but surprisingly most authors of *Reclaiming Pedagogy* manage to illuminate what goes on in our composition classes and suggest the possibility of change.

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