With Hope: A Student-Centered Model of Critical Pedagogy for First-Year Writing

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Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

English

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April 14, 2023

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, composition pedagogy, first-year writing, WPA studies, pedagogy modeling, curriculum design

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ABSTRACT

While critical pedagogy, as introduced by Paulo Freire (1970), carries an extensive legacy of theoretical interpretation for rhetoric and composition praxis, this study argues that there is a lack of implementable models of practice in the context of first-year writing, particularly for new instructors and graduate teaching assistants. This study uses a three-part methodology. First, relevant scholarship is synthesized in four parts: critical pedagogy as theory, critical pedagogy as design for instructor accompliceship, critical pedagogy as method for students, and relevant critiques. Then, the project summarizes a gloss analysis of institutional climate, including a list of theory-informed, self-reflective instructor pre-work questions. Finally, the central model-building is conducted through a theory-informed coding of the Virginia Tech University Writing Program blueprint Literacy Narrative and Worknets projects.

The result of this approach is a proposed implementable model (Miller, 2014) of critical pedagogy in practice for English 1105 at Virginia Tech, including invitational language, scaffolding exercises, and supportive assignments to affirm student agency, engage in instructor accompliceship, and create a climate of love and care in the writing classroom. This model is designed to transform critical pedagogy from unapproachable methodology to workable method that empowers and encourages instructors to try alternative approaches to the classroom. Implications of this work include furthering of diverse, inclusive methods of pedagogy that interrogate power boundaries, honor student/instructor identities, and complicate institutional power structures for WPAs and instructors.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This project describes an approach to teaching first-year writing at the university level that is based on Paulo Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy, a school of thought that centers the student as the authority in the classroom, rather than the teacher. Essentially, Freire (1970) argues for allowing students to explore their identities, their autonomy, and their existing power imbalances within their education, while the teacher stays out of the way. Possible effects of teaching in this way include a classroom that embodies empathy, care, and engagement for students, as well as a larger awareness of complex power structures.

However, one of the largest problems within this scholarly conversation is a lack of suggestions for how to "do" critical pedagogy. While critical pedagogy exists widely in scholarly theory as a methodology, or study of methods, there are very few actual methods—or practical, repeatable, theory-based suggestions—that instructors can implement in their teaching. This study seeks to answer how the institutional climate—the branding, goals, and policies—of Virginia Tech invites an approach of critical pedagogy, as well as what a method of critical pedagogy might look like in the context of two projects within one of Virginia Tech's first-year writing courses. This project first considers relevant background scholarship on critical pedagogy before conducting a two-part analysis: first of the institutional landscape of Virginia Tech, and then of the two projects in their original format. The result is a model of practice that is usable and applicable for instructors teaching writing at Virginia Tech.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the mentorship and support of my committee, not just in the scope of this thesis but in personal and professional contexts beyond. Together, the three of them formed a cognitive and cerebral network that honored my intentions with this study, fostered my curiosities for their field more broadly, and fully welcomed me as an apprentice to their expertise. Even more significantly, they supported me when I faltered, when I was afraid, when I felt alone. I would not be where I am, nor who I have become, without them.

To Dr. Carolyn Commer, for showing me a whole new world on my first day of graduate school in Modern Western Rhetoric, for taking me under your wing as a TA, for your eternal wisdom and knowledge throughout every step of my journey. You and your class were the "sign" that I was subliminally looking for when I felt so uncertain that I'd made the right programmatic choice. You assured me subconsciously in the first five minutes of the first class of Modern Western Rhetoric (and so many times after) that this was where I was meant to be. Thank you for your patience as I was growing, and your encouragement as I was becoming. Thank you for being someone I constantly seek to emulate, and aspire to one day model myself. Thank you for giving me wings, for teaching me to be brave. Thank you for sharing ideas with me, for your incredible expertise. Thank you for showing me the power of concision, of thinking boldly, of taking risks in my thought processes and my writing. I cherish you and our relationship then and now.

To Dr. Derek Mueller, for entering into my life serendipitously, for taking a chance on me, for seeing me then and seeing me now. Thank you for replying to that email I so nervously sent you my first semester, an email that would start a true mentorship and dear friendship. Thank you for protecting my heart and my dreams, for turning my eyes towards the stars, for

standing by my side even in moments of darkness. Thank you for the long conversations, the afternoon musings over tea and Raven's Roost that turned into publications and conference papers, the bursts of humor that carried me through tough times, the teasing out of new ideas and different approaches. Thank you for teaching me to hold lightly, care deeply, and think courageously; thank you for showing me where to look for hope, for glimmers, for goodwill. Thank you for believing that I can do this, and so much more. Thank you for advocating for me, for being "in the room" for me and with me always, even when you aren't physically in the space. You've sponsored me in so many ways. You are my kindred spirit, my celestial twin, everything I hope to be as a future WPA.

And finally, to Dr. Megan Weaver. Thank you for coming along on this incredible journey with me, for making me the teacher I am, for your unfailing belief in me both personally and professionally. I've never told you this, but in many ways, you not only saved my love of teaching that I thought I'd long lost — you saved me. You came into my life at a time when I was isolated, when I wanted nothing more than a mentor and a friend and someone to look up to, when I felt like I didn't belong in academia anymore. You lifted me up, inspired me, showed me what it means to not be alone. Thank you for seeing my potential, for always, *always* standing behind me, and for standing in front of me to keep me safe when you didn't have to. Thank you for listening to me, for believing me, for being there for me. Thank you for your nuance and curiosity and expertise. Thank you for showing me what teaching *can* be, rather than what it can't. Thank you for your bravery, your inclusivity, your sponsorship; thank you for your time and your wise words that always find me when I need them most. Working with you is an honor. You are my north star. Thank you for everything.

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Chapter 1: Teaching With Hope

In late Fall of 2020, I sat in my makeshift home office, haphazardly constructed in a corner of my bedroom, in a one-on-one Zoom meeting with my then-mentor, Dr. Frank Shushok, Vice President of Student Affairs at Virginia Tech. The topics of discussion were nearly the same, with one distinct exception: two publications coming down the line, COVID-19 testing procedures, a taskforce I was assisting with, and… my plans for graduate school.

After five years in Student Affairs, it was time to think of the next step. My unit all agreed on this. I'd largely outgrown my current project management role, and I was ready for more. And though my original intention was to focus in higher education, with the goal of continuing down the same path towards more administrative responsibility and eventually rising to a leadership position, it was my mentor who asked me to pause and consider a different option. Where does your heart call you? he asked me. Where is your soul drawn? And, after some nonsensical rambling on my part to indicate I wasn't sure, he said to me: you might not see it right now, but I think you might make one hell of an English professor one day. Maybe give teaching a try.

His words, while I appreciated his ever-unfaltering belief in me, caused a prickle of sweat to break out on the back of my neck and along my palms. I *did not* belong in front of a classroom—at least that's what I believed. I was best behind the scenes. I was an adhesive agent, the glue that kept the administrative machine working smoothly. Though I'd taught in a very different type of classroom for over a decade—competitive horseback riding—the immense responsibility of a college writing classroom felt overwhelming, terrifying, and wholly unfaceable.

I couldn’t deny, however, the unequivocally strong pull I felt to return to English. And even though I didn’t want to admit it, I knew why. It was because of the student I couldn’t get out of my head: the quiet, academically focused, painfully lonely undergraduate who relied on a carefully constructed, inoffensive invisibility in every class. Who didn’t want to take up too much space. Who was afraid to tell anyone she was queer. Who desperately wanted a classroom that challenged or circumvented the typical dynamic between teacher and student, for a faculty member to indicate that she belonged, that she was welcomed, that she mattered. That student was me.

When I entered my graduate work, I had no idea what pedagogy was beyond a formulaic definition. I certainly didn’t know how to teach a class, let alone how to teach a class that was any different from the classes I’d taken as an undergraduate myself. And here lied one of the strongest roots of my anxiety: because my identity didn’t conform to overarching societal norms, I didn’t see how I could fit into the traditional authoritative model of the classroom. In truth, I wasn’t comfortable taking a teacher-centered approach, and I had no desire to do so, because my queerness automatically positioned me on the fringes of nearly *any* sort of power structure. And I certainly had no interest in trying to reclaim or reinvent those inherent binaries by asserting hierarchical dominance over a group of first-year students. Taking that position wouldn’t make me feel any more liberated, wouldn’t heal any old exclusionary wounds, and, most disturbingly, might result in me actually reinforcing harmful patterns. The classroom was not the arena for me to exercise poorly-motivated justice for my own experiences at the expense of others.

My first semester in graduate school, I learned that there were ways to carefully and systematically approach these troubling classroom standards with solution-based thinking—and as a student, I actually saw faculty teaching in a way that completely reformulated what I knew

of the university classroom. I felt seen, I felt celebrated, I felt that I mattered in the space. I felt that my otherness was not a disadvantage, but actually a valued difference. Very rapidly in that first Fall, a soul-level fire bloomed within me: it was a realization that my assumptions about teaching didn't necessarily have to manifest into reality. Not only that, I could study how to do it differently. I had faculty modeling how to do it differently. I had mentors who affirmed that my instincts to shift the values of the writing classroom to a care-based approach were not only valid, but backed by an entire school of pedagogical thought.

This introduction is not intended to illustrate that approaching the writing classroom with a mindset of alternative pedagogy, particularly as an almost painfully green GTA, was simple, easy, or without significant effort. In the politically tumultuous summer of 2021, my partner and I agreed to an interview on queer marriage following the fall of Roe v. Wade that had the unfortunate consequence of garnering some significantly negative local attention. In the weeks that followed, my excitement for teaching in a way that was so different from any classroom I'd ever known dwindled significantly.

In retrospect, this singular incident, no matter how unpleasant, is one minor example of a much bigger picture. It is also, more unfortunately, far less significant than the negative experiences of so many other queer people, let alone other minorities in the dominant culture of the United States. Even writing out the experience, I feel the sinking guilt of complaining or griping about a few anonymous people bullying me online. *You weren't physically attacked,* echoes in my mind. *Your life wasn't threatened. You might be gay, but you're a white, cisgender woman with an immense amount of privilege. It doesn't matter if people bully you online. Get over it.*

The inverse of that thought of course is the real issue: those who are minoritized have been trained by a hegemonic and heteronormative world to believe that this sort of behavior, from microaggressions to open hostility, is a scaled spectrum that is, at least on the milder end, acceptable. That absorbing trauma is not only okay, but that we should be grateful it wasn't worse. And though I wanted to believe it would be different, I was afraid that entering the classroom with an anterior approach to the normal teaching model of instructor as authority might accidentally result in further trauma for me, or worse, my students.

I still wanted to be excited about my potential heuristic of teaching, I still wanted to sponsor a method of practice that championed students first, that embraced a different or alternative power structure. But after that interview, which was such a stark reminder of how isolating and cruel the world can be, I questioned whether a desire to teach differently was, quite simply, a shout into the void. If a minor press story about a wedding caused such vitriol, why did what I envisioned for the classroom matter? Even if the way I hoped to teach made a minor difference in the life of one student, minority or not, did that minute difference matter if the environment beyond the classroom was still so intolerant, so inhospitable?

In February of 2022, Dr. Shushok wrote a short piece addressed to the Virginia Tech community, titled "Where Wishing has Fluff, Hope has Teeth." That letter, noting the immense heaviness and grief of the recent two years, encouraged reflection upon the work of Dr. Rick Snyder, who articulated that hope can be fostered through intentional practice, through goal setting, through putting one foot in front of the other. As Dr. Shushok commented, "perhaps you're reading this and thinking 'I'm low in hope.' If that's the case, try this. Set some goals and write them down, make plans to achieve them with specific next steps, and believe you can make progress with your effort" (Shushok).

The practice of keeping hope is not simple, and it is even less so in recent years. As Dr. Shushok suggests in his letter, it is a method in itself: a discipline that must be tended to, maintained, and nurtured. It is not without its own frustrations and setbacks, as all research is. Sometimes it calls for reinvention, and thinking outside the box. Hope shines bright in the work of critical pedagogy, as I quickly discovered the further I walked down its winding path, dutifully placing one foot in front of the other. Dale Jacobs' 2005 article represented one of the strongest manifestations of hope in practice during that uncertain summer before I entered the classroom—calling on Freire (1994), hooks (2004), and other pillars of critical pedagogy, Jacobs concluded with the following phrase: "If we let it, hope can be a collaborative and imaginative process by which we overcome despair and reclaim agency in our pedagogy, pushing us forward to collectively reimagine the future and its possibilities" (p. 800).

That hope of reimagining, of possibilities, of overcoming despair and reclaiming agency, is exactly what motivated not only my approach to this project, but my approach to the classroom. Ultimately, I had to realize that teaching in this way was not necessarily about measurable change, about bandaging wrongdoings, about stitching old wounds. Rather, it was about reclamation, celebrating possibilities, and extending a subtle nod to my past self. It was a conscious, ethically-based choice to believe in something hopeful.

Summary of the Problem

In just a quick scopic analysis of relevant scholarship on critical pedagogy, critiques of classroom application usually fall into two broad categories: critical pedagogy in practice is labeled as either difficult to implement due to its fluid definitional bounds (Breuing, 2011; O'Sullivan & Smaller, 2013; Tinning, 2002), or "dated" compared to other heuristics of practice (Mesta, 1998; Yoon, 2005). As the review of scholarship in this project illustrates, the intricacies

of these critiques are more complicated than this simple summation, but to understand the identified problem this pedagogical model seeks to address, it is important to realize the validity of both of these perspectives.

A further complication to the actual practice of teaching writing at the college level, and *how* to teach writing at the college level, is the curriculum model: the Writing Program Administrator (WPA) or the programmatic leadership team is faced with the difficulty of interpreting the needs of students from all majors and backgrounds, the alignment of the writing program with the greater university mission and goals, the needs of faculty and instructors as well as new teachers (especially graduate students), demands from administrative voices, and much more. Add to this complicated role the emotional labor, the mental fatigue, and the stigma towards the profession, and the tasks of the role only become more complex (Bishop, 1999; Bishop & Crossley, 1993; Micciche, 2002).

Therefore, the WPA, first-year writing committee, or other deciding stakeholders charged with the task of curricular design must consider how a model of instruction can be ready for classroom implementation with minimal personal labor from the instructor of record. Simultaneously, the curricular designer is frequently challenged to design a curricular climate that is supportive, invitational, and welcoming of individual interpretation. Generally speaking, it is less the curricular director's role to determine the specifics of *how*—as in with what particular instructor disposition or pedagogy—this curriculum should be taught, and more *what*—as in the skills and outcomes—should be taught to undergraduate students. The baseline education and teaching toolset of the instructor or the graduate student is most typically attributed to coursework, practicum, and professional development opportunities.

Even with preparatory background knowledge, a new instructor or graduate student who is interested in a critical pedagogy lens to teaching first-year writing might be left with very few resources for what this nuanced, complex, varied heuristic looks like in the day-to-day operations of the classroom. For example, a graduate student who is the instructor of record for the first time might understand that one central concept of critical pedagogy, in theory, is to decenter the dominant interests of the instructor in favor of the interests of the students (Bizzell, 1991). However, if that graduate student, who is teaching for the first time and experiencing all the nerves, uncertainties, and stresses that accompany that positionality, tries to imagine how that decentering of dominant interests might actually work in assignment, project, or classroom activity form, implementing critical pedagogy in practice suddenly becomes far more challenging. Quite simply, it's easy to dismiss critical pedagogy as too complex when there is already so much to think about.

In other words, there isn't necessarily a gap between critical pedagogy in theory and critical pedagogy in practice. Rather, there's a lack of formative modeling, materials, and replicable suggestions for how it can be done. In the field of rhetoric and composition studies, critical pedagogy exists primarily as a methodology, or a rationale for teaching, and less as method, or a correlative, adaptable set of recognizable steps.

This is not to suggest that critical pedagogy can be simply distilled into a plug and play model. The complexity of its philosophy prevents and rejects oversimplification, and it is not the intent of this project to argue that critical pedagogy can be reduced to a checklist. Instead, positing critical pedagogy as a theory-informed method rather than a methodology is meant to be illustrative of inherent possibilities, as well as provide a replicable series of procedures to

identify, in a set curriculum, how to adapt, interpret, and otherwise implement critical pedagogy in practice in the first-year writing classroom.

My own experience, and the origin of this project, is one example of the pervasive lack of tangible materials on critical pedagogy in practice. As a new graduate instructor with some misgivings about a traditional model of teaching, my draw towards critical pedagogy was naturally informed—however, when I began seriously researching how to "do" critical pedagogy in my classroom, I was surprised that not only did I find almost no models to draw inspiration from, but overwhelmingly I was met with scholarship that articulated how it could not be done. This experience is confirmed by Elizabeth Pittard (2015), who noted how a curious instructor is unlikely to find encouraging resources and far more likely to find discouraging accounts of how critical pedagogy is tricky, untenable, or unsound. This is not to say there were no suggestions of critical pedagogy in practice, but I found implementable tools to be few and far between.

The Virginia Tech University Writing Program's English 1105 curriculum, at its surface level, includes four projects with an invention portfolio for each unit: a literacies project, an introduction to rhetoric project, a rhetorical analysis project, and a reflection project. This design manifests the five principles and outcomes for 1105 classes: rhetorical knowledge, writing processes, genre conventions, multimodal transformation, and reflective practice. Yet, the curriculum map also carries a certain amount of interpretability, even if an instructor chooses the template model of implementation. This is especially true for the four-unit invention portfolio, which is up to the instructor to define, design, and produce.

With this background information in mind, the results of this analysis will produce a theoretical, yet practical, working heuristic with specific suggestions for how instructors might

scaffold, support, or otherwise reinvent English 1105 assignments and activities through a critical pedagogy lens.

Research Questions

To understand how critical pedagogy might be implemented in practice for English 1105, I used the following research questions to guide the design, methodological execution, and analysis of this project:

1. How does the curriculum of English 1105 at Virginia Tech invite a critical pedagogy approach?
2. What might a theory-informed, replicable critical pedagogy method to teaching English 1105 at Virginia Tech look like in practice?

Methods

This project uses a three-part methodology: first, I conducted an analysis of relevant scholarship surrounding critical pedagogy to derive three central analytical themes. Using these three themes, I performed an analysis of the locus of Virginia Tech's institutional climate to determine relevant in-roads and rhetorical contexts for how critical pedagogy might work at the university level. Then, I performed a textual analysis of two relevant University Writing Program project blueprint documents to identify potential in-roads for critical pedagogy in practice. With this analysis, I offer a workable model, drawing from Benjamin Miller's (2014) definition of model-building, to propose a critical pedagogical method of teaching English 1105 at Virginia Tech.

Study Roadmap

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to identify the origin of this project, articulate the relevant place of this research both in the context of Virginia Tech and the field of

composition pedagogy, and to identify the methods and research questions used to formulate the drawn conclusions. Chapter two provides a topical review of relevant scholarship centered on three themes of critical pedagogy theory: theoretical foundations, impacts of critical pedagogy for instructors, and implications of critical pedagogy design for students. Included in this analysis is an acknowledgement of relevant critiques and problematizations of critical pedagogy in practice. In chapter three, I perform a gloss analysis of university scope in the context of critical pedagogy, before describing the methods used to analyze the two identified English 1105 curriculum documents. Chapter four demonstrates the results of these methods, providing an analysis for how a method of critical pedagogy might be implemented in English 1105 at Virginia Tech by other instructors and graduate students. Chapter five presents the discussion and implications, articulating further questions, considerations, and avenues for future exploration. Finally, the appendix includes relevant reading lists and other tools built from this research used in practice to scaffold this method.

Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Scholarship

Forming a scholarship-based understanding of critical pedagogy can feel a bit like assembling a puzzle without a reference image, or charting the night sky without actually looking at the stars. In scholarship, critical pedagogy occupies both chameleonic undertones and bold definition; it is simultaneously philosophy and method, theory and practice. There are so many possible in-roads, its branches sprawling and at times thorny and unmapped, still very much in the limitless wilds of disciplinary formation. Along with this inherent wildness—this metachromatic growth—comes a fair amount of rhetorical discord. The scholar who seeks to understand critical pedagogy's theoretical path must also understand that—as in any origin story—there are skeptics.

The skeptics or critics, for a variety of reasons both personal and pedagogical, view such work on a sliding scale from problematic to an anathema, even Faustian in nature. In practice, critical pedagogy could be posited as a danger to many of the traditionally understood fundamentals of teaching, and teaching writing in particular—after all, just the idea of decentering the instructor from the authoritative position might seem disturbing—even terrifying. Therefore, in order to formulate a diversified knowledge base of critical pedagogy's scholarship-informed beginnings, it is important to fully absorb, investigate, and examine the fraught, troubled, or lachrymose reactions to critical pedagogy, but to do so with a critical eye and an open heart.

Regardless of the presented heuristic; method or methodology, scheme or schema, radical practice or rose-colored theory, the scopic aesthetic of work on critical pedagogy reflects a kaleidoscopic range of diadic desires. For the purposes of this research, I've categorized the spectrum of pedagogical interpretation into two broad defining tenets of critical pedagogy: a)

critical pedagogy must include some form of justice or reinvention, designed with empathy at the core; and b) critical pedagogy must investigate and expose boundaries of oppression in a way that facilitates collaborative communication and emancipation. Further, this empathetic theorization of critical pedagogy in practice seeks to forge, tacitly or literally, bonds of shared allyship—or the more radical,[1] equalizing language of accompliceship (Clemens, 2017; Green & Condon, 2020; Powell & Kelly, 2017), thus depositioning the idea of instructor as "liberator" and students as "liberated." Rather, critical pedagogy seeks to position the student and instructor as working side-by-side, or more generously hand-in-hand, united together in the mission of resistance.

Another important understanding of critical pedagogy is its fluid semantics: throughout scholarship, critical pedagogy has been congruously phrased, readapted, or reinvented, to sometimes be called inclusive pedagogy (Florian, 2015; Shapiro, 2020), radical pedagogy (Bizzell, 1994; Freedman, 1987), liberation pedagogy (Freire, 1970), problem-posing pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002), revolutionary critical pedagogy (McClaren, 2017), etc. While recognizing the broadly interpretable implications of language usage here,[2] I make an effort in this review of scholarship to mirror the terminology used by the cited scholars, with *critical pedagogy* as the default or central term. I also acknowledge the complex connection between critical pedagogy and antiracist pedagogy (Baker-Bell, 2020; Condon & Young, 2016;

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[1] The use of "radical" here aligns less with the inflammatory definition of radical as a form of violence and more with the theoretically informed definition of radical as invested, active, and critically aware: see (Freire, 1970; Giroux and McClaren, 1991; Sweet, 1998).

[2] On the choice of language: the terms critical, radical, inclusive, and sometimes "confrontational" (Fishman and McCarthy, 1996; Strickland, 1990) pedagogy are sometimes used synonymously or interchangeably. While this project recognizes the slight (though no less important) semantic differences and the implications of those varied implications, the scope of this study limits full exploration, and thus for the purposes of this work these terms are considered compatible or corresponding. This usage is not to be confused with conflating trauma-informed pedagogy (Harrison et al., 2020) to critical pedagogy, which operates under different, though similar, heuristics.

Wagner, 2005). On the following page, I include a chart that describes the applicable scholars and timely appearance of these varying pedagogical approaches.

Table 1: Pedagogical Terminology Expansions of Critical Pedagogy

Terminology	Notable Scholars	Approximate Year of Appearance	Central Concepts
Liberation Pedagogy	Freire, Shor, Giroux, Kynard	1970	Oppressed/oppressor; power binaries; freedom practices in speech and dialogue
Problem-Posing Pedagogy	Freire, Shor, Giroux	1970	Enacting student voice; posing questions over answers; problem-based learning, decentering instructional dominance
Radical Pedagogy	McClaren, Giroux, Sweet, hooks, Freedman, Bizzell	1980	Liberal ideology; flipped classroom practices; alternative assessment; accompliceship and institutional critique
Confrontational Pedagogy	Strickland, Fishman and McCarthy	1990	Positioning as resistant/oppositional to traditional classroom environments; community building
Inclusive Pedagogy	Shapiro, Kincheloe, Florian	2018	Alternative assessment; queering/antiracist practices; student identity, intersectionality

Because the focus of this project is on a broadly applicable heuristic to a specified curriculum, an acknowledged limitation of this research is that the links, divergences, and genealogical associations between antiracist pedagogy and critical pedagogy are recognized but not specifically analyzed. For example, one specific genealogical trace between critical pedagogy and antiracist pedagogy is Henry Giroux's (1991) "border pedagogy," a definitional predecessor of antiracist pedagogy and descendant of critical pedagogy. Generally, antiracist pedagogy seeks to take up and actionably address concerning gaps and ambiguities in the original framing of critical pedagogy, using language such as destabilizing whiteness rather than destabilizing generalized power (Beavers, 2021; Marrero, 2009; Sanchez & Branson, 2016). Further research might draw parallels or divergences between a specifically antiracist pedagogical approach and a critical pedagogical approach to teaching English 1105. For the interest of this study, antiracist pedagogy and critical pedagogy are included in the same general family tree, and recognized as congruous, not conflated.

This chapter summarizes three central touchpoints in the extensive body of research on critical pedagogy. First, I identify critical pedagogy as theory, as a heuristic of generative ideals to facilitate model-building in curriculum and instruction. Then, I illustrate critical pedagogy as a design framework for instructors, including how implementing such a lens comes with both challenges and reward. From there, I review relevant scholarship on student engagement with critical pedagogy, or critical pedagogy as method, reflecting important adaptations or in-roads to invent, operate within, or facilitate a critical pedagogy atmosphere within the classroom itself.

The final section of this chapter offers a gloss of notable critiques and problematized interpretations of critical pedagogy in practice, as well as theoretical convergences and offshoots,

both essential facets to include in the analysis of relevant scholarship in order to understand the need for further model-based design.

Critical Pedagogy as Theory: A Foundational Gloss

To grasp the relevant theory of critical pedagogy scholarship, it is crucial to begin with identifying boundaries and parameters that characterize this particular school of thought. The scopic restraints of this study prevent a full articulation of all theoretical in-roads, so this particular subheading focuses on four relevant sub-themes: oppressed/oppressor, *conscientização,* eros, and hope.

Oppressed/Oppressor: Understanding the Bodies in the Room

In *Keywords in Composition Studies*, contributor Karen Fitts (1996) offered in the entry "Pedagogy" that Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was one of the most paramount texts "in ushering the contemporary era of critical, sometimes called 'oppositional' or 'radical,' pedagogy" (p. 169). Indeed, in making an honest attempt to structure a rhetorically attentive survey of critical pedagogy theory, Freire is a natural starting point. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) laid the theoretical groundwork for liberation pedagogy—the forefather of critical pedagogy. One central facet of liberation pedagogy is criticism of what Freire referred to as the banking model of education: representative of teachers as "depositor" and students as "depositories." In other words, in the banking model, the classroom operates without any sense of mutual autonomy of teacher and student, or communicative framework between the two parties in the space (p. 71).

In order to understand Freire's theorization fully, it is key to clearly define oppressed and oppressor for the purpose of analysis. First, in acknowledging one challenge or limitation of Freire's characterization, the oppressed and the oppressor are not described in any sort of

demographic nuance: rather, Freire's oppressed and oppressor are holistically characterized, broadly interpretable, and, if any binary is drawn, it is along the lines of class (Freire, 1970; Jackson, 2007). Therefore, Freire's (1970) oppressed might be understood as those who are dehumanized (oppressed) and those who enact dehumanization (oppressor); or the dominated versus the dominator, as enacted by multiplicities or layered expressions of power (p. 47). In implementation of this model, though Freire's theorization was largely limited in specifics to class, scholarship extends oppressed and oppressor to include: persons with disabilities[3] and persons without disabilities (Baker-Shenk, 1986; Charlton, 2010; Middleton et al. 1999); female bodies and male bodies (Moane and Campling, 1999; Stromquist, 2014; Yang, 2016); queer populations and straight populations (Kumashiro, 2002; McCready, 2013; Meyer, 2007); racial minorities and racial majorities[4] (Apple, 2003; Haymes, 2002; Kohli, 2012);[5] even those who are unable to evacuate and those who have the privilege to evacuate when faced with environmental disasters (Jenkins and Nowell, 2010). Another complicating oppressed/oppressor characterization is student to student—particularly when this power structure is dependent on the context of privileged/unprivileged (Bacon, 2015). Of course, this list is not exhaustive of all analogies to Freire's theory, but illustrates the broadly interpretable nature of the heuristic.

It is worth also briefly exploring Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality within this context. Intersectionality is inherently entwined with the oppressor and oppressed structure, and by extension theorizes that both the instructor and the student might simultaneously act as oppressor and oppressed, depending on their identity spectrum. For example, I myself am queer, which falls into an oppressed binary. However, I am cisgendered

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[3] Phrasing chosen with consultation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (2019) and "Guidelines for Writing About People With Disabilities" (The ADA National Network, 2018).

[4] With acknowledgement of complexity and limitation of Freire's definition as it applies to oppressor and race.

[5] Notably, this citation represents just a few examples of theorization of Freire's oppressed/oppressor and race.

and white, both of which fall into oppressor binaries. Even my queerness, as a lesbian, rather than a transgender person or other queer sub-minority for example, is arguably a greyer boundary of oppressed/oppressor, because gay and lesbian people are sometimes understood as having a much greater degree of privilege than other queer people (Weiss, 2004). Scholarship reflects the inherently "murky" (Nash, 2008) nature of intersectionality theory, but simultaneously its methodological angle towards emancipatory practice and social justice (Moradi, 2017; Ramsay, 2013; Simon et al., 2022). While not fully explored in this particular study, student/instructor intersectionality in pedagogical practice represents another generative avenue of exploration for critical pedagogy in action (Few-Demo et al., 2016; Grzanka, 2020; Smele et al., 2017; Villa-Nicholas, 2018).

Now that I have established the basic structure of critical pedagogy's operation: identifying and challenging the binary between oppressed and oppressor, I move to articulate the characteristics of critical pedagogy as they appear in relevant research. To aid in organizing the many possible distillations of Freire's theory, this section of the scholarship review will explore three tenets: teaching for critical consciousness, or *conscientização* (Freire, 1970); teaching with love and *eros* (hooks, 1993); and teaching as a practice of hope (Giroux, 2003; Ichikawa, 2022). Finally, this section will explore tangential secondary references to critical pedagogy scholarship.

Conscientização: Seeing the Shadows

Freire's *conscientização* (1970) remains a central building block for any heuristic of critical pedagogy: teaching critical consciousness, or teaching *with* critical consciousness, involves attending to and illuminating sociopolitical boundaries, showing boldly obstructions of justice, and uncovering how power works in a given context, whether that be the classroom or

society more broadly. In essence, critical consciousness involves acknowledging, and seeing, the shadows and darkness that haunt the oppressed/oppressor social structure.

Further, critical consciousness works not only as a product of critical pedagogy itself, but a guiding principle for understanding its theoretical offshoots. In other words, the process of thinking critically and developing critical awareness is a relatively universal concept, recognized for its importance, regardless of the method of teaching (Cannizzo, 2021; Landreman et al., 2007; Monjaras-Gaytan et al., 2021). In building a definition of liberation pedagogy, Ann E. Berthoff (1990) captured the variety of possibilities of critical pedagogy: facilitating community for instructors, consistency in messaging and avoidance of "fad" teaching, even a mechanism of defense against the demand for a nationalization of curriculum. Freire (1970) himself described liberation as "...a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (p. 79). The concept of *conscientizaçāo* segues well into the discussion of "radical" pedagogy, as frequently encountered in work by Henry Giroux (1991, 1996), Ira Shor (1997, 1980, 2014) and Peter McClaren (1989, 2007). Timothy McGettigan (1999) concisely summarizes radical pedagogy as "...all about knowledge and education, and how they can (or *should*) change to best serve the purposes of both educators and the educated" (p. 1). Critical pedagogy, and by extension radical pedagogy, offers a multivariable modeling of the term radical—radical can be a mindset of a student or an instructor, a pedagogical choice made in the classroom, or even a method of design. In its primary form, radical pedagogy—or the radical pedagogue—is operating in a state of radical mindedness, as described by Friere (1970):

> ... the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled…This person does not consider himself or

herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side. (p. 39)

To understand the body of work surrounding critical or radical pedagogy, and the theory behind it, is to realize—with attentive consideration—not only its imperfections but its broadness, its ranginess: as Fedotova and Nikolaeva (2015) stated, "In understanding the subject of radical pedagogy there is no unity" (p. 787) and in the words of Henry Giroux (1979): "Radical pedagogy in North America appears to be suffering from a kind of schizophrenia" (p. 257). By extension, it is important to understand that critical consciousness, and teaching critical consciousness in the classroom, is also a broad and untethered concept that requires examination of the dynamics and positionalities of both the teacher and the students.

Invested in the teacher experience of critical pedagogy and democratic dynamics in the classroom, as well as the development of critical consciousness, Shor (1992, 1996, 2002, 2009) investigates knowledge sharing as democratic engagement, empowerment of students to speculate, act, and speak for themselves, and critical thinking as an invitational process of agency. Shor (2009) called attention to Freire's identification of fraught homogeneity between students and teachers, and boldly states that teaching well is intrinsically difficult in a difficult world, but that teachers who do not aspire to higher standards in fostering care for students is an act complicit in furthering the turmoil of a troubled world. Shor (1996) also frequently called back to John Dewey (1938) ahead of his time in his articulation of education as a mutually architectural endeavor between teacher and student, an early proponent of student agency, inclusivity in the process of learning, and designing pedagogy for aesthetic symbiosis. As Shor and Freire (1987) said together in conversation, "...education is simultaneously a certain theory of knowledge going into practice, a political and aesthetic act" (p. 31).

Eros: Teaching from the Body and the Mind

Rhetorical *eros*—or the seeking and appreciation of pleasure and aesthetic joy (Schwab, 1954), the craftsmanship and appreciation of the good (Demos, 1934), and desire and satisfaction (Robinson, 1945)—is a similar concept in critical pedagogy to rhetorical *agape*, or love demonstrated selflessly towards others (Sprecher and Fehr, 2005), even humanity in a general sense (Enright et al., 2022).

In connecting *eros* to critical pedagogy in practice, Burch (1999) noted that even its mercurial definition aligns with the principles of critical pedagogy:

> The symbolic association of eros with qualities such as passion, knowledge, questioning, community, empathy, and a vision of the good, not to mention its perpetually incomplete character, gives the concept a rich inventory of meanings. The various qualities attributed to eros, significantly, inform the associational dimensions of democracy. (p. 124)

Further, McNinch (2008) described the intersections of critical pedagogy, *eros,* and the experience of the queer instructor and queerness in curriculum.

A critical noticing of Freire's semantic choices is the rejection of adjectival phrases like domesticator/domestication of students, instead welcoming a certain sense of wildness or a space for *eros* in practice, in accord with bell hooks (1993), who encourages a release of control, specifically the fear of loss of control, in the classroom in favor of letting knowledge bloom organically, meeting students' desires to encounter learning fully in both mind and body. hooks wrote in "Talking Back" (1986) that "[m]oving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life, and new growth possible" (p. 128).

hooks' emphasizes throughout her scholarship (1994, 2013) the idea of critical pedagogy—also called engaged pedagogy or pedagogy of hope[6]—as an active form of continuous learning that places particular emphasis on justice and (re)clamation, along with empathy, care, dialogic engagement, and the aforementioned concept of *eros*. Further, hooks (1989) frequently faced the liminality of the critical pedagogue's experience head-on: how struggle, pain, and suffering are an inherent part of living in an oppressed body, and from (and perhaps only through) that struggle is pleasure, reinvention, and world-building from the margins possible.

The concept of *eros*, as well as hooks' (2000a, 2000b) larger body of work, has ties to radical feminism and feminist theory: particularly a form of radical feminism intent on a multifaceted approach to creating a community rejectionary of binaries not only of gender but imperialistic gain, class, and racism, etc. Some might consider hooks' approach utopic, or even perpendicular or misaligned with some feminist conceptions of power and how the female body might wield it in the classroom (Buffington, 1993). However, her body of work on both feminist theory and pedagogy is one of the most frequently explored, written about, and revered touch points of modern pedagogical conversation. Contemporaries to hooks and subsequent scholars write in perspectives from the margins, borders, and other liminal spaces with the mindset of ethical teaching (Bizzell, 1991; Carolissen et al, 2011; Hill et al., 1998), as well as evocative/emotion-driven pedagogy, freedom practices within the classroom, resistance and recovery to majority institutionalization, and more (Jaramillo and McLaren, 2009; Lanier, 2001; Low, 2021; Specia and Osman, 2015).

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[6] A further semantic congruence to critical pedagogy.

Hope: Utopia, Possibility, and the Future

A final key aspect of critical pedagogy to consider in theory is its angling towards hope, the future, and improving experiences. While the constant identification of power binaries might assume an inherent pessimism, critical pedagogy actually uses this interrogation to elevate, assuming a pronoic stance of what can be done, rather than what can't be done. In other words, those who take up critical pedagogy see actionable change as a weapon of positive good, rather than a weapon of mass destruction.

Henry Giroux and Peter McClaren (1991) articulated in their co-authored chapter: "Critical pedagogy commits itself to *forms of learning and action that are undertaken in solidarity with subordinated and marginalized groups*" (p. 155, emphasis in original). Giroux's (1991) work challenges the frequent critique of Freire's critical pedagogy as narrow or hyper-patriarchal, arguing that at its core, the theory should instead by credited more towards "negotiation among discourses, and subject positions as social practices that are both determined and determining" (p. 166).

Giroux's emphasis on discourse and critical pedagogy provides an apt foundation for the marriage of critical pedagogy and critical language awareness (CLA) (Fairclough, 1989, 1992): affirming the interconnectedness of language as a weaponized mechanism and domination/oppression (Alim, 2005), and thus suggesting that in order to support transformation of this repressive system of learning, critical pedagogy needs to be at the core (Crookes, 2010; Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Wallace, 1997). While Giroux (1989) recognized the untethered nature of critical pedagogy, and elaborated on three central discourses of education (conservative, liberal, and radical/lived-cultures), he identified three pillars of view that critical

or radical pedagogy may, or must operate within: "cultural production, pedagogical analysis, and political action" (p. 67).

Giroux (2004, 2006, 2010, 2011) is careful, however, to acknowledge that even in times of darkness and cultural discord, critical pedagogy is not a cry for seeking a different understanding, as such an act imposes oppressive values back onto the oppressed—rather, the intention is to open a space for risk taking, for safe exploration, for envisioning a hopeful future and a reclamation of justice, even if that future does not have immediate answers. Giroux affirms that scholars who pursue critical pedagogy, and by extension the pursuit of affirming students in their dialogic identities, embody "...a spirit of hope, a belief that schools are places where students can find their voices, reclaim and affirm their histories, and develop a sense of self and collective identity amidst the language of larger public loyalties and social relations" (Giroux & McClaren, 1989, p. xii).

On the topic of hope and discourse, Giroux establishes another rhizomatic offshoot to the work of bell hooks. Indeed, the metaphor of critical pedagogy as rhizomatic feels particularly germane in this movement from scholar to scholar. While critical pedagogy may not be entirely united in its scope of scholarship, the circuitry is atmospheric—rather than a volume of work, critical pedagogy is united as constellations are: the boundaries are imagined, the dots joined by the illusory invention of the mind. Rather than an explosive, savioresque burst of light in a dark world, critical pedagogy provides a map of stellar cicerones, designed to catch the eye and open opportunities for those who care enough to look at the sky.

Although not the only explorable sub-theories within the greater landscape of critical pedagogy, the intention behind centering the theoretical context within the themes of

oppressed/oppressor, *conscientização*, eros, and hope is to identify the most important throughlines for the second part of this project, the implementation of curricular modeling.

Critical Pedagogy as Design: Instructors as Accomplices

This subsection in the review of scholarship is intended not to position the instructor at the forefront of critical pedagogy in practice, but to identify potential patterns and effects of implementing critical pedagogy *on* the instructor. In the following subsections, I explore critical pedagogy as a learning vessel not just for students but teachers themselves, as well as mapped possibilities for enacting critical pedagogy as classroom design.

The Unpopular Approach: Harmonizing Critical Pedagogy and College Writing

Across the landscape of the modern institution, when identifying relevant contact zones or rhizomatic plots where critical pedagogy could bloom, the writing classroom is almost an immediate candidate (Bizzell, 1991). Bizzell writes that writing teachers have very little interest, at least most of the time, in enacting some sort of language-fueled penalization system on teaching students to write correctly: "Indeed, one might read the history of modem composition studies as a series of attacks on classroom uses of power" (p. 847). However, despite the organic connectivity between the writing classroom and critical pedagogy, implementation remains a grappling, challenging concept in scholarship.

A frequent concern of those skeptical or critical of critical pedagogy is the perception of labor, pressure, and difficulty for the instructor: as Elizabeth Pittard (2015) noted, a teacher wanting to know more about the possibilities of critical pedagogy "is almost three times as likely" to encounter an article discouraging them from even trying (p. 341). Certainly, it is prudent to understand that the endeavor of critical pedagogy might be broadly or disciplinarily

considered the path of greatest resistance, the road less traveled, an uphill endeavor that is sometimes rocky, slippery, and imperfect.

In the words of Carmen Kynard (2013), another pillar of critical pedagogy scholarship: "Few seem to imagine that critical pedagogy, cross-language relations, and the acts of teaching folk to read and write well can function simultaneously" (p. 245). In acknowledgement of the abundance of scholarship that is (legitimately) cautioning, or potentially critical or discouraging to any instructor interested in trying to implement critical pedagogy, this subheading seeks to illuminate—with the ideals of critical pedagogy at its core—the possibilities, hopeful outcomes, and potential benefits of critical pedagogy instructorship, as well as the implication of shifting the mindset from instructorship to accompliceship.

Reinventing the Wheel: Evolving to Critical Accompliceship

Carmen Kynard writes in the introduction of *Vernacular Insurrections* (2013) that her grandmother, on the occasion of witnessing something contradictory or untrustworthy, used the phrase "*runnin with the rabbits but huntin with the dogs*" (p. 19). In other words, the instructor who hopes to implement critical pedagogy must have a mindset of questioning, of zealous curiosity, of alternative practice even when they are entangled with the metaphorical "enemy" to such autonomy. Indeed, one of the pitfalls or criticisms of implementing critical pedagogy from an instructor's perspective is the (mis)conception that it cannot be fully embraced: in other words, there's no way—particularly in the modern model of the institution—to reach a truly Freirian heuristic (Dillabough, 2002; Ross, 2018).

However, at the risk of what might be characterized as oversimplification, other scholarship reflects a language and invitational perspective on the instructor's role in implementing critical, or radical, or inclusive, pedagogy. For example, Kincheloe (2008) wrote

that critical pedagogy is, among other qualities, "[e]nacted through the use of generative themes to read the word and the world and the process of problem posing—generative themes involve the educational use of issues that are central to students' lives as a grounding for the curriculum" (p. 10). Kincheloe (2008) continued that critical pedagogy is "centered on the notion that teachers should be researchers—here teachers learn to produce and teach students to produce their own knowledges" and "[g]rounded on the notion that teachers become researchers of their students—as researchers, teachers study their students, their backgrounds, and the forces that shape them" (p. 10).

What Kincheloe sets up in these statements is the idea that critical pedagogy is, at its core, a learning process not just for the student but the teacher as well. Rhetorically, Kincheloe does not suggest any perfection in the process of enacting critical pedagogy: rather, the point stated is that, not unlike the throughline that defines the lives of many academics, critical pedagogy is another method of doing research. As Kincheloe (2008) continued, this is not to say that radical or critical pedagogy is not rigorous, and that maintaining the delicate balance of the complex stakes at hand is not difficult, but the language specifically has the rhetorical effect of lowering the preconceived anxieties some instructors might feel. Perhaps what is most generative about Kincheloe's set list of characteristics of critical pedagogy is that it avoids constrictive parameters while establishing a sense of bounds to work within. My goal within this study is to model a similar approach, while taking those values a couple steps further by providing concrete curricular examples.

The Andragogical Lens: Working Within Institutional Bounds

Critical pedagogy in practice for instructors draws close ties to Malcolm Knowles (1970, 1977) theory of andragogy—simply put as the science of teaching adults, rather than teaching

children. Knowles' theory extends to a holistic approach to the classroom closely aligned with some of the more replicable outcomes of critical pedagogy; including learning contracts, design-based content presentation, and "... establishing a climate that is conducive to learning, that is dominated or characterized by trust, by informality, by openness, by mutuality, by mutual respect, warmth, caring, etc." (1977, p. 209). The word "dominated" is ironic in the greater context of critical pedagogy—however, the phrasing of "dominated by trust" suggests a reinventive lens on the traditional binary of domination between teacher and student. Rather than the teacher dominating through academic constructs typically defined in higher education, the teacher instead asserts themselves in the classroom as the force of trust.

On a similar theorem, drawing from Freirian pedagogy, Stephen Sweet (1998) outlined four specific elements of radical instructorship:

1) Radical teachers do not test or grade in the traditional fashion.
2) Radical teachers surrender considerable power to students.
3) Radical teachers abandon lecture in favor of dialogue.
4) Radical teachers couple learning with activism. (p. 101)

Although Sweet's usage of Freirian pedagogy is aligned specifically with teaching sociology, the concision and clarity of these four characteristics provides an apt starting point for articulating how the instructor might become not only as a learner themselves in implementing a critical pedagogy lens, but how instructors might shift in their mindset of teaching from depositor to accomplice.

The shift in language from depositor, or even instructor, to accomplice—regardless of field or discipline—is a process defined by mindset and action (Arnold, 2019; Hall et al., 2019; Jones, 2021; Powell & Kelly, 2017). In using the language of accomplice, critical pedagogy for

the instructor becomes something tactical, something strategic, an opportunistic vessel to operate subversively—yes, acknowledgedly within the bounds of their home institution—through, for example, institutional critique, exposition of power binaries within the structure, and analysis of the oppressive forces at hand (Apple, 2005). On this topic, Tony Scott (2009) affirmed: "that we should risk letting our practices as teachers, scholars, and writers be dangerous" (p. 31) and further, "[a] more fully social view of writing subsumes subjectivity and textuality within a highly fluid, recursive process which embraces possibilities for agency and transformation—both of authors and audiences" (p. 190). Part of the instructor's mindset, therefore, involves embracing the danger of critical pedagogy, rather than shying away from its possible pitfalls.

Shawna Shapiro (2020), in theorizing how the instructor might approach "inclusive" pedagogy, articulated that instructors—or accomplices, for the purposes of this analysis—do not need to see this approach as one of climbing mountains, or of making an overhaul all at once:

> Start small. Aim for quality of changes, rather than quantity. Most of all, remember that inclusive pedagogy is not simply an add on to what we already do. It is, rather, an opening up of our classrooms and our curricula to facilitate a greater sense of belonging and connection for all of our students. (p. 160)

Shapiro cited that these practices in the classroom might look like the instructor asking themselves reflective questions, as well as four immediately implementable strategies: "community building," "inviting lived experiences," "preparing for discomfort" (and sitting with it accordingly), and, in summation, placing conversations around inequality out in the open within the classroom (pp. 157-159).

Although there is undeniable discord in the theorization of what critical pedagogy is or isn't, and what it might look like in practice, a consistent throughline suggestion for instructors is to embrace Freire's (2008) call, or act, of bringing love into practice:

> Whether or not we are willing to overcome slips or inconsistencies, by living humility, lovingness, courage, tolerance, competence, decisiveness, patience-impatience, and verbal parsimony, we contribute to creating a happy, joyful school. We forge a school-adventure, a school that marches on, that is not afraid of the risks, and that rejects immobility. It is a school that thinks, that participates, that creates, that speaks, that loves, that guesses, that passionately embraces and says yes to life. It is not a school that quiets down and quits. (p. 212)

Thus, accompliceship for instructors does not need to be a total overhaul of the institutional systems, nor does it need to be an act of impossible anarchy, nor does it need to be a matter of laying one's job, one's career, one's academic life on the line—rather, scholarship shows that by rigorously, ruthlessly, and reflectively challenging their own perspective or assumptions, by dauntlessly choosing love and kindness and generosity with students, Freire's tradition is honored (Darder, 1998, 2017; Fraser, 1997; Schoder, 2010). Practicing pedagogy based in love, in its fierceness and mildness, might feel intimidating to some. Yet, while Caldwell and Sholtis (2012) focused on the secondary classroom, they show that the practices leading to care and love in the classroom are arguably straightforward: listening actively, emphasizing belief in students and encouragement first, offering extra credit and time on assignments, accepting more than one answer or approach to the question, demonstrating willingness to adjust rules and expectations accordingly, showing grace and avoiding one-shot credit opportunities all naturally accord to critical pedagogy.

Queering Kindness: Critical Pedagogy as Instructional Attitude

Another throughline to practical implementation of critical pedagogy, that warrants further scholarly work, is the pedagogical method of queering, or using a queer lens in instructional approach. I've separated this subsection because of the complex but congruent relationships of queer pedagogy and critical pedagogy to teaching in general, as well as to draw specific conclusions of how queer pedagogy might inform critical pedagogy in practice. For example, in examining work interested in queering the composition classroom, trends show that although complicated and imperfect (Monson & Rhodes, 2004), approaches to queering and inclusive queer practices for instructors not only follow a pattern of decentering traditional authoritarian patterns, but emphasizing liberational tendencies and intentions (Alexander & Gibson, 2004; Alexander & Rhodes, 2011).

However, queer pedagogy and critical pedagogy are not always acknowledged as explicitly connective, despite their inherent similarities. As Bryson and Castell (1993) noted: "Many influential and widely cited authors in post-critical pedagogical discourses today are queer — yet few are 'coming out' as queer, are 'speaking *as* one,' and almost no one is talking about the impact of sexual difference on pedagogical processes in relation to *their own* sexual identity" (p. 287). While there is still a gap in explicit connections between the two approaches, Spurlin (2002) writes on the inherent possibilities in exploring both approaches in the classroom:

> These intersections further imply a shift in our teaching assumptions pertaining to where we locate pedagogical authority, how we conceive of language, textuality, and disciplinary knowledge, and how we position ourselves as academics and public intellectuals in our classrooms and institutions, in our research communities and professional organizations, and in the wider public domain. (pp. 10-11)

Queer pedagogy is one of the most central methodologies or philosophies concerned with dominance and identity—and as Alexander and Wallace (2009) described, queer pedagogy provides one in-road for more clearly understanding heteronormativity within academic structures in terms of both identity and authority. But even more importantly—and this is not to downplay queer pedagogy in its own domain—taking a queer approach to both instructor positionality and instructor kindness presents two philosophical throughlines to better understand critical pedagogy praxis.

On the topic of positionality, for decades, scholarship on teaching college writing has wrestled with the role of the teacher, and several scholars have—through various methods—argued for decentering the traditional authoritarian positionality of the instructor, reinvention of archaic writing practices, and consideration of the variety of expectations falling on the modern college student (Beaufort, 2008; Elbow, 1968; Schreiber & Worden, 2019). Simultaneously, the field articulates the significant labor the writing teacher must undertake and the variety of roles to balance (Reid, 2004) so the call to constantly reinvent might begin to feel tired or even impossible. Scholarship studying happiness and kindness pedagogies related specifically to professorial wellbeing in the composition classroom is largely underdeveloped, however, general scholarship indicates the correlation between acts of kindness and happiness (Curry et al., 2018; Ko et al., 2021; Otake et al., 2006). It is possible, then, that though implementing critical pedagogy is not necessarily seamless or effortless, the payoff to teacher ethos—particularly related to happiness—could be significant.

But kindness is, for a variety of reasons, a value in the classroom that is frequently spoken of rather than enacted, reduced to semantic promise rather than actual practice. In some critical cases, kindness may even be seen as a fault. What literature shows, however, is that

tacitly *queer* approaches or genres give students an impression of kindness. For example, Nusbaum et al. (2021) described that students, when presented with a visual syllabus, "rated the hypothetical professor as kinder, more creative, and more approachable than those who viewed syllabi with a less visual design" (p. 2). Further data of visual syllabus responses include a greater impression of instructor empathy and student safety in the classroom (Ilchenko, 2018) as well as lower stress, a greater impression from students of instructor engagement and investment, and general high positivity (Kaur, 2021). Because the graphic or visual syllabus stands in such stark contrast to its textual counterpart, it could certainly be a form of queering the traditional genre. In a similar positioning, the anti-literacy narrative—discussed later in chapter four, represents a further process of queering the traditional literacy narrative. In other words, there is an inherent symbiosis between alternative critical approaches and alternative queer approaches to teaching.

Queering kindness as a teaching value or academic culture involves, as Thaler and Jauk (2022) noted, a mutuality of vulnerability and asking self-reflective questions as a form of action. A feminist approach to kindness pedagogy, according to Magnet et. al (2014), means an acknowledgement of the complexity of students' lives. Queering kindness might mean treading down the path of the sometimes heavily-rejected notion of being a friend to students explicitly, embracing friendship as a value that can be elastic, flexible, and moderated, as well as specifically aimed at furthering social justice on campus (Cornejo, 2014; De Welde, 2022).

The scholarship in this section indicates that although the path to critical pedagogy is complicated, daunting, and imperfect, the instructor actually has a variety of options in implementation: including classroom philosophy, personal disposition, activity and course practices, and effort in inventing accompliceship. The connective thread between the ethos of an

instructor as a proponent or steward of critical pedagogy and the theory itself of critical pedagogy might be characterized as elastic: amalgamated but fluid, expandable, protracting and contracting. In concise summary, the instructor who shows up to the classroom with a mindset of kindness, humility, generosity, and investing in students' lives with good intention is already making a step, even if that step is small, towards enacting a framework of fostering critical pedagogy.

The following section explores critical pedagogy in action: what scholarship documents as methods or motions of walking out this work for students.

Critical Pedagogy as Method: Placing Students in the Center

One central crux of this study is the tension between critical pedagogy as methodology, a relatively well-explored subset of scholarship, and critical pedagogy as method—a largely underexplored subset of scholarship. The intention within this categorial sector is to identify throughlines and examples of critical pedagogy in practice, as well as paramount teaching techniques that possess assemblable collectivity for use in a larger modeling.

Teaching Critical Thinking to the Teacher

In 2014, the WPA Council published the "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-year Composition" with four guiding principles for instructors and administrators to articulate what exactly the results of teaching first-year writing should be: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and composing; processes; and knowledge of conventions. These outcomes further include how instructors can "[help] students learn" each of these objectives — for example, under critical thinking, reading, and composing, the outcomes statement reads that faculty should help students learn "the kinds of critical thinking important in their disciplines" (p. 2). Yet, one homogenous theme throughout scholarship on critical pedagogy is the interplay,

connectivity, and entanglement between the *teaching* of critical thinking and the *teacher* of critical pedagogy (Burbles & Burke, 1999; Cowden & Singh, 2015; Fernandez & Balboa, 1993; Rafi, 2009).

One of these acknowledgements by Rahimi and Sajed (2014) is the interlocked circuitry of critical thinking and critical pedagogy; the cyclical relationship between the two: "Empowering the learners, a primary aim of critical pedagogy, would be achieved when teachers are practitioners of critical thinking themselves in their teaching practice. Only can critical thinkers educate learners to be critical" (p. 44). In other words, the instructor who employs critical thinking themselves then has the ability to empower students to think critically, and that critical thinking is directly concomitant to the transformative, invitational intention of critical pedagogy.

In designing this outcome for students, however, the instructor faces a variety of challenges: as Graziano (2008) detailed mixed results in his experience of implementing critical pedagogy in a pre-service course with 22 students, and that one major concern is without further support from "school personnel" colleagues, or mentors, "students will likely find comfort in traditional teaching methods and abandon the possibilities of exploring critical pedagogy" (p. 161). Other issues include a divergent focus between research (or classroom) agendas and enacting the principles of critical pedagogy (Miskovic & Hoop, 2006) A valid concern, certainly, but other voices (Bizzell, 1991) articulate that, at times, looking too far ahead into the what-if scenarios of critical pedagogy prevents students from experiencing a sense of "utopia now," or the ability to foster hope, and that instructors cannot "... convince them [students] that we wish them well if we project no faith that there is a 'well' to be achieved, a common good to come" (p. 862).

Assessment, Collaboration, and Dialogue: Implementation Strategies

Models of critical pedagogy in practice include collaborative writing assignments (Goodburn & Ina, 1994), facilitating dialogue (Kaufmann, 2010), and un-grading or alternative assessment practice (Inoue, 2004). As Braa and Callero (2006) note on the topic of grading and critical pedagogy:

> One of the structural challenges to implementing critical pedagogy is the requirement of a formal grade for each student as a summary measure of individual performance. Traditional grading policies typically encourage individualistic learning and may even be structured to promote competition among students. In some extreme cases students may develop a fetish relationship to the grade itself and become alienated from the learning process. (p. 365)

Thus, the instructor's choices in assessment become even more paramount should the instructor choose a critical pedagogy lens.

Another crucial element of centering student experience in the classroom, as Bartolomé (2004) explained, is giving students the opportunity to provide perspectives from their own lives, as well as clearly illustrating societal concepts like false meritocracy, social disorder and antagonism, and alternative explanations for minority academic experiences. In essence, despite the teacher's understood power position, it is possible for students to view them less as a dominating force in the classroom and more like a guide, illuminating for them models of power, (dis)functionality, and previously disguised boundaries, particularly for minority populations.

On a related note, Bartolomé (2004) illustrated a further crucial point for implementing critical pedagogy for students: in telling the story of a young student-teacher's small act of violating established power dynamics in her school, she explains that "[a]lthough this particular

student's act of subversion was not particularly radical or extreme, my point is that it is precisely this outrage and sense of student advocacy—reflective of increased political and ideological clarity—that I believe that all teachers, but in particular, teachers of subordinated students, must possess in order to do right by the young people that they serve" (p. 119). This point combines with Bizzell's (1991) assertion that ultimately the disposition of the teacher: including their courage, openness, and humility, is crucial to determining whether critical pedagogy can actually work—and therefore, that disposition directly affects the experience of students. So, in order to implement any of the critical pedagogy-based assignment structures, activities, or philosophies, the instructor must first do the work to fully invest in the ideas (and ideals) of what critical pedagogy *can* be.

Fishman and McCarthy (1996) offered what they theorized as a "Deweyan alternative"[7] to radical pedagogy, with vignettes of classroom encounters with students, that supports a midway of enacting de-centered instruction: "This Deweyan alternative seeks to effect student transformation by having the teacher set the conditions for doubt, ownership, and cooperative inquiry. In doing so, the teacher is neither a lecturer nor conspicuously at the center of the class. In fact, Dewey says it is crucial that teachers become learners and allow students to become teachers" (p. 363). A consistent throughline in implementing critical pedagogy for students is exactly this point: while acknowledging that the teacher may not be fully able to move themselves from the central position in the room, the teacher can instead set specific guidelines and classroom philosophies that encourage students to step out of the normative, oppressive boundary of depository.

[7] In reference to John Dewey (1938)

Inviting Conversation: Rhetorical Positioning of Instructor and Student

One simple act of setting these guidelines or philosophies is introducing the concept for students that not only are they allowed to have their own opinion on a reading, assignment, or aspect of disciplinary knowledge, but that they should be encouraged to offer this opinion—an invitation that likely very few students are accustomed to experiencing (Dysthe, 1996; Guerra, 2016; Lindquist, 2004; Shor, 1996). Naturally, a concern for both instructors and students themselves in inviting student opinion so openly is what occurs, and how it is handled, when student opinion becomes oppressive, harmful, or counterproductive. As Kirylo et al. (2010) described, in order to fully embrace dialogic teaching in practice with critical pedagogy, "...the teacher must challenge the content of a student's rhetoric without preventing that student from speaking up again" (p. 334). The authors advocated using counter-narrative[8], borrowed from Critical Race Theory (and a tangential connection between critical pedagogy and antiracist pedagogy) to gently, though thoughtfully, enhance student perspective to positionalities that might be harmful or insensitive (p. 334). Other strategies include reminding students to actively listen (Santellano et al., 2021)—and ultimately, as Andrews (2020) explained in an interaction with a student upset by a lesson on homophobia: realizing that while it might not be possible to avoid students occasionally speaking insensitively or offensively, the goal of critical pedagogy is more to open a space for dialogic engagement, not to eliminate the possibility of students speaking with preconceived discrimination.

Inviting student opinion, or extending an invitational gesture to do so in the classroom (Robinson & Kakela, 2006), closely aligns with Foss and Griffin's (1995) proposal of invitational rhetoric: a feminist methodology of inviting perspectives, laying differences out in

[8] For further exploration of counterstory in practice, see work from Martinez (2018, 2020)

the open, and according value to all voices. Some perspectives show that while there are pitfalls or sticking points for some students, other students express consistent desire to experience an alternative to the monologic classroom, in favor of greater dialogic engagement (Kalsoom et al., 2020). As they elaborated:

> The students' responses reflected that teachers do not welcome open interaction among them or with her; however, they accepted that teachers are easily accessible through emails, and other social media. Moreover, they conveyed that they do not get enough room for the group and teamwork; it is not part of essential pedagogy…. Such activities render them with opportunities for comparative analysis and develop maturity in their thought and action, consequently transforming them into critical thinkers. Unfortunately, such hopes do not prosper; this sad state of affairs was reinforced by teachers who agreed that 'students perform at their best when taught as a whole class,' again conforming to the theory that students were the empty glasses and the teacher would fill them with the jug in their hand. (p. 35).

Further work recognizes the complex landscape of the institution as related to student privilege: indeed, critical pedagogy may be more challenging to enact for students who do not fall into traditionally oppressed groups. However, other scholarship shows the value of amending or changing—as would be true to the heart of the theory itself—the fluid "model" of critical pedagogy to suit and "confront" (using this verbiage lightly) the privileged student (Allen & Rosato, 2009). As the authors noted:

> We do believe, though, that there is an implied pedagogy for the oppressor in critical pedagogy discourse. Students from the oppressor group are to be engaged in a pedagogy that challenges them to gain a consciousness of how they contribute to hegemony. They

are asked to form a critical consciousness of how society and schools function to reproduce social inequality through cultural and institutional processes. And above all, they are asked to intervene in hegemonic constructions on behalf of the oppressed and challenge members of their own group. The oppressor student is asked to align with the oppressed in acts of social transformation that are revolutionary and democratic. (p. 170).

Ultimately, what the patterns of scholarship reveal in implementing critical pedagogy for students is the necessity of fluid adaptation. Given the variables established in any institutional environment, there is simply no "one size fits all" model for installing a critical pedagogy curriculum in the classroom. Far more evidently, it is a matter of doing the work to critically analyze the *possibilities* for critical pedagogy in a specific classroom environment, acknowledging the constraints at hand, and making careful, responsible choices to enact the heartlines of radical or critical teaching, rather than committing to a grandiose overhaul that may or may not be successful.

Now that I have explored scholarship in the three thematic clusters identified for this study, in the following section, I articulate the adverse conversations around critical pedagogy, including hindrances both in philosophy and practice.

Hatching the Insurgent: Criticisms and Concerns

Critics of critical pedagogy fault a lack of tangibility, a utopian idealism, or a myopic characterization of what "works" in the classroom (Alexander, 2018; Ellsworth, 1989)—others cite a perceived lack of control leading to anarchy, or further damage, trauma, or marginalization created by those ill-equipped to bring such a dynamic or ambitious climate to the classroom (Gabel, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Tinning, 2002). Further work suggests that critical pedagogy glosses over troubled histories in favor of a righteous, noble, or savioresque mindset

(Yoon, 2005). Certainly, these critiques are founded and not unwarranted, particularly in the early developmental years when critical pedagogy was still a very new, and controversial, method of practice—as seen in work by Knupfer (1995) and Lather (1998) as two examples. Another example by Durst (1999) illustrated the trials and challenges of this more demanding or elevated form of pedagogy for new instructors and graduate instructors.

One of the most notable critiques within the discipline came from Maxine Hairston (1992) who described the radical nature and political ideology of critical pedagogy's foundation as personally troubling, calling it "regressive" and "... a model that puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student" (p. 180). Similarly, Sharon O'Dair (2003) argued that composition instructors prioritized their own activism over teaching of effective writing, and narrated another common critique of critical pedagogy, that students are concerned with higher education only to improve occupational success. In other words, concerns about the political undertone of critical pedagogy include fostering a certain sense of insurgence or rebellion among students.

Although the specifics vary, the consensus from those both in favor and against critical pedagogy as an operative lens is that implementation presents challenges, whether those be societal (Shudak & Avoseh, 2015), institutional (McArthur, 2010), positional (Jeyaraj & Harland, 2016), or logistical (Fobes & Kaufman, 2008).

While not an exhaustive summarization of critiques and polemic objections to critical pedagogy, this section is intended to provide a clear impression of parallel conversation against critical pedagogy in practice (or attempted practice). The following section explores

continuations of critical pedagogy; its thematic hauntings and extensions, before I transition to concluding thoughts.

Rhizomatic Clusters: Critical Pedagogy's Extensions

Because this project seeks to show the flexibility of critical pedagogy, as well as its elasticity in practice, illustrating some of the subtle undertones to other relevant theories in writing studies further enhances the analytical framework, particularly as I begin the transition to methods and results in chapters three and four.

One such example of these undertones appears in Robert Brooke's (1987) theorization of "underlife," or complex identity formation that lies below, or under, the expected norm. For example, Freire might articulate that only those who can recognize the indocility, the praxeological "underlife" of critical pedagogy, are those who are actually aware of not only the oppressed/oppressor binary, but those capable of seizing the opportunity critical pedagogy presents. Underlife also connects to the role of the WPA in the complex picture of implementing critical pedagogy: I explore, in chapter three, the hidden curriculum of first-year writing programs, and how this hidden curriculum is entangled with the expectations of major university stakeholders and the multiple responsibilities of the WPA.

In addition, critical pedagogy follows, in both scholarship and practice, a growth pattern or inception that follows Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) post-structuralist rhizomatic theory: rather than expanding in an arborescent form, critical pedagogy is much more sporous, non-linear, non-terminous (McMahon, 1997; Morss, 2000). Indeed, theorizing critical pedagogy as rhizomatic offers a certain freedom to accept its erotic nature, its randomness, its torrid ambiguity (Mcwilliam, 1997). Within the same thread of critical pedagogy and critical theory as synchronous or balletic, other scholarship reflects on the undeniably Derridaian (Clemitshaw,

2013; Peters, 2003) as well as Foucauldian nature of the work, though Foucault and other post-modernist work typically falls along the meridian of anti-utopian, while critical pedagogy is frequently called utopian (Biesta, 1998a; Gur-Ze'ev, 1998; McClaren, 1995; Mesta, 1998). Foucault, in his own teaching, could be identified as a formidable scholar in actually practicing critical pedagogy without explicitly intending to do so, just by enacting his decentralization of power in the classroom (Deacon, 2006).

Conclusions

While acknowledging that articulating the landscape of critical pedagogy in scholarship is a labyrinthine task, this chapter offered a topical application of relevant scholarship in three phases: first, I presented foundational theory of critical pedagogy for the writing classroom, taking care to establish axiological understanding. Then, I detailed critical pedagogy as a heuristic of design for instructors, identifying how critical pedagogy serves not only as a framework of learning for students, but an andragogical approach of further education for teachers themselves. From there, I synthesized scholarship focused on various in-roads of critical pedagogy in practice for students, showing the variety of approaches and adaptations to implement theory in practice. Finally, I included select critiques and counter perspectives to critical pedagogy to acknowledge the limitations and challenges within each insular contact area, and its theoretical offshoots in preparation to transition to the methods and results of this study.

The general summation of this scholarship reflects the aforementioned two broad defining tenets of critical pedagogy: a) critical pedagogy must include some form of empathetically founded justice or reinvention; and b) critical pedagogy unveils boundaries of oppression in a way that fosters collaborative communication and emancipation.

This organization by thematic cluster is specifically designed to align with the two centric questions posed by this research: How does the curriculum of English 1105 at Virginia Tech invite a critical pedagogy approach? And, what might a theory-informed, replicable critical pedagogy method to teaching English 1105 at Virginia Tech look like in practice? The assembled scholarship in this chapter informs the following analysis of the English 1105 curriculum at Virginia Tech, as well as the structure of the subsequent proposed model.

Chapter 3: Methods

Building upon the introductory context and topical exploration of scholarship in chapters one and two, chapter three seeks to apply the resulting analytical framework into a workable, replicable method for implementation in the classroom. To begin, this chapter offers an overview in three parts: first of the climate at Virginia Tech, then the structure of the University Writing Program, and finally the design of the English 1105 curriculum. Within each of these sections, I offer specific suggestions for how an instructor might reflect on their own critical consciousness and positioning within the university solar system. This pre-work is particularly important before implementing critical pedagogy in an instructor's teaching, because without individual critical awareness, the instructor is not able to effectively address their own inherent authority within the classroom space. While not the only questions to consider, these scaffolded reflection prompts are designed with a basis in theory and broad applicability for instructors of all levels and experiences.

Then, using a method of document analysis for thematic patterns, I apply the critical pedagogy lenses identified in the review of relevant scholarship to two specific assignment blueprints within the English 1105 curriculum: 1) the literacy narrative, and 2) the rhetorical analysis project, worknets.

From this analysis, I propose how instructors might model some of these critical pedagogy themes and praxis in their classroom at Virginia Tech. Reflecting the thematic disposition of critical pedagogy, this modeling is intended to be exploratory, generative, and interpretable, rather than a rigid, fixed, or authoritative assertion of what *must* be done. Rather, this chapter looks to offer tactile suggestions of what *could* be done.

Virginia Tech: Service and Invention

In consideration of scope, this study focuses specifically on the writing classroom at Virginia Tech: a land-grant, public research institution with a large student body and a large-scale writing program. This subsection offers pertinent background information about the university as a whole: a brief summary of the student demographic, a gloss of the motto and branding, and the context of two guiding bodies within the university: The University Strategic Plan and the Pathways General Education program.

University Demographic

Virginia Tech's reputation as an innovation-centric R1 institution precedes it: A 2022 U.S. News and World Report granted the institution top-30 rankings measured by 17 different categories to assist incoming first-year students in deciding where to attend college. In internal data collection, "Facts About Virginia Tech" reports statistics including research expenditure in the top five percent in the United States (para. 9), over 37,000 students (both graduate and undergraduate), and approximately 280 degree programs across the undergraduate to graduate level (para. 2).

Virginia Tech's University DataCommons reports that the institutional student population is a wide spectrum of demographics, from international students, first generation students, and a variety of racial minorities — as well as a blend of collegiate classifications, including an active corps of cadets, an honors college, and many athletics programs. Yet the numerical data reflects that of the over 30,000 undergraduates, Virginia Tech is still a PWI (predominantly white institution) with 18,000 white, non-Hispanic students (aei.vt.edu).

This is not an exhaustive analysis of the student body of Virginia Tech. Rather, this brief statistical rundown is intended to illustrate how Virginia Tech has a diverse undergraduate and

graduate population in terms of experiences, backgrounds, and minority status: yet, the inherent binaries and complications that exist in the structure of a large PWI are very much at-play. For instructors interested in critical pedagogy and assuming critical consciousness themselves, as well as depositioning themselves as the authority in the classroom, it's important to be aware of the university makeup to realize the range of student identities entering the classroom.

This is a line to walk carefully, as the instructor must also, of course, be cognizant of assumptions or biases: for example, the instructor who does not hold any sort of minority status should not attempt to visualize or otherwise "put themselves in the (minority) students' shoes" when designing the classroom experience around critical pedagogy, as this would be a violation of the oppressor further asserting dominance over the oppressed. Likewise, it doesn't align with the thematic intention of critical pedagogy to completely ignore the demographic makeup of the institution either. Rather, interacting critically with the available data, examining and observing climatic messaging of the university, and most importantly, critically reflecting on their own positional status within the department, college, and university more broadly is what is crucial.

Therefore, in consideration of this complex task, some reflective pre-teaching questions that the instructor might answer before designing their implementation of critical pedagogy are:

- What are the privileges and power structures within my university that work in my favor?
- Where do my own statuses, identities, and prior experiences place me within the web of these power structures?
- What is the demographic profile of my university? Where does my personal identity fall within this profile?

These questions are undeniably challenging to answer, and, particularly in the spirit of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2017), necessary to constantly revisit. By presenting these

questions, I do not expect that an instructor will find easy, uncomplicated answers. They will much more likely be fraught, complex, and difficult to define. But this fraught, complicated, challenging setup mirrors the spirit of implementing critical pedagogy in itself—and the courage to ask these questions is a worthy pursuit for those who wish for a more empathetic model of teaching.

University Branding and Motto

A further consideration for instructors is the messaging about the university brand and mission. The brand identity sets a crucial rhetorical tonality for students, particularly first-year students selecting a university—and has a permeating relevance within the academic community of the institution as well. For example, an institution with a religious throughline—like Liberty University—has a very different rhetorical impression with a mission like "Liberty University develops Christ-centered men and women with the values, knowledge, and skills essential to impact the world. Here we *Train Champions for Christ*" (Liberty University Mission Statement) than a large-scale land grant institution like Virginia Tech, with a mission statement that reads: "Inspired by our land-grant identity and guided by our motto, Ut Prosim (That I May Serve), Virginia Tech is an inclusive community of knowledge, discovery, and creativity dedicated to improving the quality of life and the human condition within the Commonwealth of Virginia and throughout the world" (Virginia Tech Mission Statement).

Any pedagogy—including critical pedagogy—will be affected, and must reconcile, with the general messaging of the university. Certainly, an instructor could make a decision to align or subtly subvert such messaging, or a combination of the two, but any decision requires an active selection of how to proceed with the brand. Further, an instructor interested in critical pedagogy—who understands its rhizomic, almost sporous nature—must also consider if the

university climate is a place where critical pedagogy can grow and thrive. Much like other fungal or unrooted species, critical pedagogy's fluidity and fearless pursuit for justice ideally allows it to grow anywhere—but to grow and thrive is a different consideration altogether.

Virginia Tech is, in many ways, complementary in its branding language to the ideals of critical pedagogy. "Facts About Virginia Tech" opens with the following paragraph: "Dedicated to its motto, *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve), Virginia Tech pushes the boundaries of knowledge by taking a hands-on, transdisciplinary approach to preparing scholars to be leaders and problem-solvers" (para. 1). Although this introduction to the university context is not meant to posit an analytical perspective directly, it is worth acknowledging the specific tonality of this language. Phrases like "push[ing] the boundaries of knowledge" and "a hands-on, transdisciplinary approach" mirror much of the illustrative language present in critical pedagogy scholarship. Drawing back to the foundational work of Freire (1970), a common throughline of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the movement beyond binaries and boundaries.

A 2017 rebranding of Virginia Tech's university platform supports two central claims: the commitment to *Ut Prosim*, as well as a guiding institutional question: "what are you going to do to make a difference?" (Williams, 2017). Action—specifically positive action—remains a central tenet of nearly all of Virginia Tech's public-facing media. Thus, critical consciousness, acting against oppressive binaries, risk-taking, reinventing the classroom all might fall into this mission of action.

Virginia Tech's collective commitment to growth and action, diversity and inclusion, discovery and fostering of humanity all are arguably compatible frameworks that could allow critical pedagogy to thrive. Action and words are, of course, different—and a common critique of higher education at large is the proliferation of empty promises. Yet, if critical pedagogy is the

growing lifeform to perpetuate a different experience for students, the soil—the matter that makes that growth viable—is the university mission itself.

Based on the reading of relevant scholarship and study of the contextual landscape, I developed the following further elaboratory questions for instructors when considering their university schema:

- What does it mean for me, in consideration of my own positionality, to be an instructor at Virginia Tech (or other university)? How do my own values and experiences align or divert from the university mission?
- Does my teaching philosophy align with the university branding? How so, and where are potential gaps or divergences?
- What are potential oppressed/oppressor structures furthered (even inadvertently or unintentionally) by my university's branding? Who is the intended audience of this messaging? Who is this branding designed to support, and who does it actually support?
- How does my curriculum align with the university mission and brand? How does it divert?

Pathways and the Strategic Plan

Two other institutional structures are worth exploring in the context of both critical pedagogy and the University Writing Program: the University Strategic Plan and Pathways General Education.

The University Strategic Plan first integrated specific diversity-focused initiatives in 2019, with four priorities encompassing a vision, goals, and milestones (inclusive.vt.edu). One of these priorities, as is listed on Virginia Tech's InclusiveVT website, is "Elevate the Ut Prosim (That I May Serve) Difference" which includes three goals: 1) Increase representational

diversity, 2) Increase cultural competency, and 3) Address critical societal issues impacting humanity and equity (inclusive.vt.edu). Of the many milestones Virginia Tech has identified to achieve these goals, there are four specific outcomes worth noting for this context:

- Ensure 100% of graduate programs of study include a required cultural competency component by 2022.
- Increase undergraduate students graduating with at least two Pathways courses that satisfy the Critical Analysis of Equity and Identity in the United States core concept to 25% by 2024.
- Increase undergraduate students graduating with at least two Pathways courses that satisfy the Intercultural and Global Awareness integrative concept to 25% by 2024.
- Increase representation of underrepresented minority staff and administrative and professional faculty to 25% by 2024 (inclusive.vt.edu).

These milestones are significant and ambitious, and rhetorically indicate a commitment to expanded representation, cultural competence, and programmatic perpetuation of inclusivity and awareness university-wide—however, the language of the proposed action steps is generally quite vague.

Two notable examples of this obscurity include “explore strategies to increase the development and incorporation of inclusive pedagogy practices into academic courses” and “develop and build upon current efforts for global engagement to create positive change in a world without boundaries” (inclusive.vt.edu). While these statements sound promising, they are arguably difficult to implement or execute, particularly for an instructor: who might desire the perpetuation of these themes, but lacks the institutional power to enact real change. This is

another opportunity for a model or method of critical pedagogy to honor the spirit of these goals, while also problematizing, analyzing, and critiquing them rigorously.

One example of programmatic guidance that seeks to enact the University Strategic Plan is The Pathways General Education Program. "Pathways" is designed to justify the following claim: "Undergraduate students at Virginia Tech deserve a vibrant, flexible, and meaningful general education program, one that helps them to integrate their learning across disciplines and tackle challenges of the future" (pathways.prov.vt.edu) and articulates the following principles to hold up this goal. 1) integration "[a]llows students to engage in Ethical Reasoning and Intercultural and Global Awareness across the entire curriculum," 2) inclusivity "[a]ddresses the needs and challenges of diverse populations of students in inclusive classroom experiences," and 3) relevance "[s]upports learning theory and best practices to deliver a curriculum steeped in real-world application and connections among a variety of perspectives and ways of knowing" (pathways.prov.vt.edu).

Pathways comprises seven core concepts and two integrative concepts, and includes 45 credits that may also be fulfilled through AP, dual enrollment, and transfer courses. English 1105 fulfills pathways core concept one, discourse, and integrative concept two, intercultural and global awareness. Pathways also consists of assessment and data collection, which includes collecting and evaluating student work for competency according to the subgoals of each outcome. For the University Writing Program, "compliance with this assessment initiative is essential to maintaining the program's favorable standing with routine accreditation processes in accordance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)" (hokieswrite.com).

In some instances, English 1105 and English 1106 are required Pathways and foundational courses for various majors (like Mechanical Engineering) or strongly recommended

(like Political Science). Thus, the diversity of students who pass through the English 1105 and 1106 curricula inherently marry with some of these Strategic Plan milestones and Pathways outcomes: the first-year writing classroom is one of the largest educational confluxes within the university, organically placing students from a wide variety of backgrounds, identities, and academic majors into one intimate (with only twenty students per section) setting. However, simply placing the students into the space does not mean that it inherently upholds the goals and values—that is up to the instructor, the climate and culture of the class, and the fostering of pedagogical practices that facilitate those outcomes.

In reviewing their university's own strategic plan and general curriculum programs, the instructor might reflect on the following:

- How does my writing classroom fit into the picture of the strategic plan and the general curriculum, from the university's perspective?
- How does my writing classroom fit into the picture of the strategic plan and general curriculum from my perspective?
- Where are the blurred lines, inconsistencies, or other vagaries present in the language of the university strategic plan or general curriculum program? What is left unsaid or unclear?
- Who is articulated as the audience and proponent of these programs? Is the onus placed on the faculty, administration, or the university more broadly? In other words, who's responsible for upholding the listed objectives and goals?

The University Writing Program

The University Writing Program at Virginia Tech represents a central contact point for undergraduate students, with enrollment in English 1105 (First-year Writing: Introduction to

College Composition) and English 1106 (First-year Writing: Writing from Research) classes exceeding 7,000 students over 360 sections, as well as over 70 instructors, leadership team members, and graduate teaching assistants (HokiesWrite). Like many large-scale composition programs at R1 universities, the University Writing Program includes a curriculum design that is simultaneously ready for classroom implementation with minimal personal impact from the instructor of record, yet also welcomes and supports individual influence should the instructor choose a particular lens, topic, or focus to direct the course.

There are a variety of challenges present within the University Writing Program structure. Paul Heilker, former director of the University Writing Program (then the Composition Program, as it was known until 2021) wrote in 1996, when he'd just taken over the leadership position, of the variety of emotional challenges associated with a program of this scale and magnitude: "As a friend told me recently, trying to administrate a writing program is like trying to turn a fully laden supertanker cruising at full steam. I have no power over the laws of physics" (p. 26). Heilker also described the tensions between faculty/administration/WPA, balances of labor and perceptions of labor, and profound loneliness, both personal and intellectual: "...I've no one new with whom I can share the experience of flirting with, being seduced by, and committing to an attractive body of knowledge" (p. 24).

Heilker's piece, while aged now, paints a rather grueling picture of the programmatic operation at Virginia Tech. Later, another former director Eileen Schell (1998), published an article during her leadership at Virginia Tech identifying similar tensions between the untenured WPA, co-directorship, and field-propelled leadership styles. That piece, in addition to illuminating some of the further complications, also articulates tacitly a leadership style very much in line with critical pedagogy: one of critical consciousness and shared narrative

collaboration over a traditional list of broad disciplinary suggestions for seizing control of an often uncontrollable structure.

Another complicating factor for the University Writing Program is its collegial situatedness: it is inherently entwined within the English department at Virginia Tech, yet many English majors are not required to take English 1105 or 1106, for a variety of reasons including testing credit (like Advanced Placement exams). While English 1106 is a prerequisite for English classes above the 1000 level, students also have the option to fulfill the requirement through other courses, like Communications 1016.

In other universities, such as Syracuse University, these first-year writing courses are delineated from the mantle of English with a different course code, like “Writing” rather than “English.” It’s well documented that the field or major or department delineation “English” has a common stigma: outdated, unaware of the times, unadaptable, or dying a slow death (Beidler, 2003; Miller & Jackson, 2007; Smith & Costello, 2015). Therefore, a cognizant instructor must also reconcile with the assumptions students may bring into a class labeled “English” particularly when the English classroom can be a site of significant trauma and negative experiences (Denny et al., 2018; Dutro, 2011). This is not to say that there are no challenges with a writing program that exists externally to the enclosure of a university’s English department, but in the case of Virginia Tech, the sometimes tangled binaries and relationships between the two bodies puts additional strain on curricular implementation.

There are several subsets within the body of over seventy teaching instructors: full professors, assistant professors, collegiate professors, instructors (including senior and advanced), PhD students from the Rhetoric and Writing program, MA students from the English program, and MFA students from the Creative Writing program. In addition, because Virginia

Tech's English department has three different majors and three minors (including specializations in pre-education, creative writing, professional and technical writing, and literature) the faculty have varied research interests, pedagogical approaches, and academic dispositions. In other words, teaching first-year writing is not necessarily a top priority for every faculty member in the department.

Virginia Tech is not necessarily completely unique in this wide range of experience and prior backgrounds, but the breadth of levels of instructors for English 1105 and 1106 provides an additional difficulty for a unified model. Certainly, instructors—particularly new instructors—might feel some frustration at the interpretability of the curriculum maps, but when the full picture of the program is considered, in order for there to be any room for interpretive adaptation or even personal identity, intentional vagueness arguably *must* exist.

In reviewing the structure of the writing program within their university, the instructor might ask:

- What are the power structures present within my writing program? Who are the major stakeholders with influence upon the writing program?
- What is the main mission or goal of the program?
- How do my prior experiences with English courses or other departments impact my day-to-day interactions with my current department or program?
- How do my personal values around teaching writing align or divert from my program?

English 1105 Curriculum

The Virginia Tech University Writing Program's English 1105 curriculum, at its surface level, includes four projects with an invention portfolio for each unit: a literacy project, an introduction to rhetorical contexts project, a rhetorical analysis project, and a reflection project.

This design manifests the five principles and outcomes for 1105 classes: rhetorical knowledge, writing processes, genre conventions, multimodal transformation, and reflective practice. Yet, the curriculum map also carries a certain amount of interpretability, even if an instructor chooses the template model of implementation. This is especially true for the four-unit invention portfolio, which is up to the instructor to define, design, and produce.

English 1105 has the following course description, required to appear in all syllabi and in the course catalog: "Introduction to rhetorical analysis, visual rhetoric, critical writing, and critical thinking; intensive reading of works in multiple genres; practice in writing and revision; fundamentals of oral presentations" (HokiesWrite). Elaboration on this catalog description is included on HokiesWrite: "In this course, students are introduced to composition's rhetorical dimensions; they are asked to consider the purpose, audience, occasion, and genre that are called for in a variety of writing, speaking, or visual assignments" and, perhaps most importantly, "Each student's writing is taken seriously, and they are asked to engage seriously with their peers' writing as well" (hokieswrite.com).

The language of this elaboration is crucial to consider because, beyond the course description, it inherently places students at the center of the course structure: recognizing their ability to interpret accompanying complexities and dimensionalities within a variety of rhetorical scenarios. Further, just a simple statement to take the writing seriously both within the classroom between peers and outside the classroom in assessment—in other words, viewing student work without a deficit mindset, and as something more than elementary or simplistic or unimportant—sets a specific tonality for how the pedagogy of these courses should ideally be implemented.

Within the four projects, instructors are free to interpret the assignments as they like, though the program has suggestions and blueprints to align with the course outcomes. The course

outcomes are accompanied by their own individual guide sheet on HokiesWrite, which includes activity suggestions, discussion questions, and elaborations on the rhetorical goals for students. In the University Writing Program Handbook, the description of the expectation for course emphasis is bookended by the following statement: "... nuanced, practice-based experiences that foreground the interdependence of reading, writing, and thinking with curiosity, wonder, and research-based inquiry" (HokiesWrite). The spirit of curiosity and wonder is woven both tacitly and explicitly into the curriculum: it is up to the instructor how, and whether, that wonder and curiosity is fostered.

Instructors might reflect on the following questions when evaluating their own assigned course curriculum:

- What is the overlying spirit or lifeblood of the curriculum? What opportunities for fostering student curiosity exist within its bounds?
- How does the curriculum set respect for student work as a precedent? If it doesn't, how can the language of a syllabus or course map be adapted to reflect this?
- Do the course outcomes leave room for instructor interpretation?
- What does this course value based on the basic description? What does the course value based on a more nuanced interpretation of that basic description?

Appendix I includes a full combined list of all these pre-work questions for instructors with identified aligning concepts, as well as further invitational prompts to work through instructor intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) within their institutional landscape. In the next section, I shift to articulating and describing the method of analysis for the two central projects in English 1105.

Coding Process

As a method, coding is known for its simultaneous appeals and frustrations: while it is a broadly interpretable process, it can also feel slippery and sometimes uncertain to work within self-defined parameters to scaffold a data set. In the context of this study, being mindful of the possible pitfalls of coding the blueprints was even more crucial: I knew that in order to articulate the data in its best possible illustration, I needed to prioritize keeping the coding system scopic for chosen projects as well as manageable in its number of codes so as to avoid lack of fluidity and continuity. The following two subheadings articulate further necessary context around the coding process.

Summary of Design Approach

As with many coding processes, deciding on the approach for both the literacy narrative and the worknets projects was a complicated task. Because critical pedagogy has such a wide-reaching range of possible interpretations and applicable themes, my goals in establishing a coding system were primarily to identify 1) what thematic takeaways, based on the scholarship, are most applicable to the assignment, and 2) how can these thematic codes be translated to a replicable model for instructors.

Essentially, this system of coding is not the only possibility for a first-year writing classroom assignment sequence. There are many other ways to read assignments or projects depending on how the instructor chooses to interpret the theory and secondary resources: for example, an instructor who is *not* teaching at a PWI, or an instructor teaching composition at a community college, or an instructor teaching at a private college with a different learning model might choose to code their assignments differently. That said, I designed the coding model with the idea of general applicability, replicability, and transcribability. I wanted the connections

drawn to be trackable and followable for instructors teaching in the University Writing Program at Virginia Tech, as well as legible for a broader audience of instructors who might use a coding system for their own curricula. Essentially, I wanted to derive codes tailored to this specific scenario, in this program at Virginia Tech, that might also transpose to other university curricula as well.

In the general spirit of critical pedagogy, this coding model should be considered a humble first step, an honest attempt at building a process, rather than a distillation of what is a very complicated and nuanced theoretical body into a superficial or cursory set of steps. In this way, the intent of this coding is elaboration upon established principles to make a new method, rather than a summarization of currently understood methods.

Creation Process and Coding Image Legend

Some of my initial coding process was informed by a close familiarity with the assignment blueprints, as well as a theory-based application of critical pedagogy to my own iteration of these projects in my course. Because of my own interest in WPA work and curricular design, I spent significant time on the front end of planning my own English 1105 course not only with critical pedagogy in mind, but with the intention of understanding how the University Writing Program had synthesized this course map. In this project, course map analysis—and an understanding of the WPA perspective—is equally, if not more, important.

WPAs are frequently critiqued in so many aspects of their role, with curriculum design as no exception (Enos & Borrowman, 2008; Horner, 2007; Tingle, 2007). In this same vein, the WPA is frequently the steward or sponsor of a specific program's hidden curriculum (Bergenhenegouwen, 1987; Giroux, 1978), or the unstated labors, efforts, values, and underlives (Brooke, 1988) of a public curriculum. Thus, an often thankless job is riddled with additional

unrecognized responsibilities and emotional weight on top of a precedent of generalized disdain, mistreatment, or open hostility.

This is not to say that an instructor interested in critical pedagogy as a method should avoid critiquing the WPA, or their curriculum, or the programmatic structure at large. Doing so and blindly following the curriculum risks the opposite of critical pedagogy and student-centered learning, particularly in the case of a program run by tyrannical hands. What I am articulating is that in order to effectively implement a critical pedagogy method, an instructor doing their due diligence will look not only at the webbing of power binaries between student and institution, but between the WPA and the program/department/administration as well. It's worth being cognizant of the hidden curriculum and power at play on all levels before launching into any sort of critical look at the curriculum or its leadership.

A large facet of critical pedagogy is awareness: an evolved awareness not only of one's own positioning, but an openness to awareness of others' positions as well without assumption or propositioning. Although my personal relationship with my program is quite different, I recognize that other instructors feel differently, and one does not necessarily need to love their leadership to be a critical pedagogue—but a critical pedagogue embraces love and hope and utopic vision in their practice, and therefore can be critical of the WPA while also acknowledging the difficulty of their position.

Understanding this, as I spent time reflecting on how exactly I wanted to analyze the documents for this project, I sought to theorize not so much what the possible problems within the blueprints were specifically, but what opportunities lied within them. This meant looking for what *was* working about the curriculum design, rather than what was *not* working. Not all instructors will feel comfortable with this approach, and no curriculum is problem free. Being

critical is, of course, a foundational part of critical pedagogy. Rather, in an effort to encourage my own development of critical awareness as well as pedagogical goodwill, it was intention to start from a generative place, rather than a deficit mindset, just as I work to do with my students, while also giving credence and credit to the unseen labor and hidden curriculum of English 1105.

During the process of coding, I began by analyzing the three theoretical subsets, identified in the review of relevant scholarship in chapter two, within the context of English 1105: 1) critical pedagogy as an atmospheric theory, 2) critical pedagogy as a design mechanism for instructors, and 3) critical pedagogy as a method for student-centered learning. I knew that in order to derive the greatest meaning from the blueprints themselves, I would need to be very specific in how I chose to code from these three subsets, which all bring rich interpretive possibilities. I also acknowledged that I might need to code more than once, and ultimately, I did two coding processes: first, I used four codes in specific acknowledgement of those three themes: critical consciousness, student agency, critical pedagogy as method, and critical accompliceship/dominance of trust. I chose these codes *a priori*, with an understanding that I might need to redress, reframe, or readjust upon deeper analysis.

In the second analysis, I coded for specific language that invites a scaffolding of critical pedagogy within the class structure more broadly. This secondary coding evolved after my first read of the blueprints. There is some crossover between the two processes, but given the purpose of the study, I believed it was important to highlight the invitational language for the instructor separately to avoid confusion and to provide a natural scaffolding for the suggested activities.

At this point, I also want to provide a figure legend for the presented images later in chapter four. Accompanying this code, I have included a series of images, some generated in the coding program MAXQDA, some of my own annotations and highlights according to the color

scheme listed below. The MAXQDA images have two parts, the first presented is a "document portrait" that represents the comeuppance of each code in respect to the text of the document. The second is the measured frequency and occurrence of each code, left to right, from most frequent to least frequent. I've presented these images for each document. The annotated snapshots are shown for both coding processes. More detail is included as the images appear in the text themselves, with corresponding labeling and methodological explanation as part of their captions.

The descriptions of each code are summarized below:

Critical Consciousness (Yellow). This code identifies sub-messaging with the blueprints geared towards students' development of critical consciousness. In this scenario, I extend the definition of critical consciousness beyond interrogation and investigation of power binaries to an adapted delineation based on the context and goals of the course. I imagine coding for critical consciousness in the context of English 1105 as specific moments within the blueprints that support the process of further developing critical consciousness, or the relevant skills and thought processes to elaborate and further investigate systems of oppression. This is not to assert that students within 1105 cannot possess critical consciousness already, nor that they're incapable of doing such work within the context of the class: rather, this description is intended to be applicable to students from all backgrounds and identities, including those who may be very unfamiliar with any permissible exploration of power structures.

Student Agency (Blue). This code specifically refers to passages and themes within the assignments that offer, celebrate, or otherwise encourage students to bring their individuality to the intended product of the project. This code is categorized by language that specifically signifies to the student, based on the climate of the classroom, that they are welcome to enter the

project as they are. This language is also invitational, offering though not requiring a sense of personal vulnerability, emotional exposure, or intense personalization within the scope of the project. Rather, the student is free to choose how they would like to approach the subject.

Critical Pedagogy as Method (Green). This code highlights nods, indications, and suggestions toward critical pedagogy in a method-form. For example, storytelling, reflection, memory work, etc. all fall into a methodological toolset sponsored by critical pedagogy more broadly. I selected this coding because I did not want to make the generalization within each of the project blueprints that the assignment itself was inherently a method of critical pedagogy. Rather, I wanted to carefully highlight exact occasions or moments where documented methods of critical pedagogy are brought to the forefront within the text itself. This way, an instructor less familiar with the body of work of critical pedagogy might be able to more easily trace or follow these keywords and phrases within their own curricular blueprints, or, alternatively, implement a version of this language into their own assignments.

Critical Accompliceship/Dominance of Trust (Pink). I proceeded very carefully in the designation of this code, because I wanted to maintain specific awareness of some of the challenges inherently present in instructor accompliceship within the scholarship of critical pedagogy. It might be too ambitious, for example, for a new instructor or graduate student to fully release all constructs of dominance in the classroom for a variety of reasons. These reasons could include personal insecurity, fluidity of identity, gender disparities, deference to honorific and merit, etc. It could be considered unrealistic within the structure of Virginia Tech for an instructor to completely decenter themselves in favor of placing students at the forefront. Yet, calling back to Knowles' (1977) description, creating a classroom culture dominated by trust, with goodwill and mutual certitude, might be possible. For example: a graduate student might

not feel comfortable giving students complete freedom of interpretation when it comes to an assignment. They might not feel settled or able to support students in giving full liberty to write on any topic the student chooses. However, the graduate student might consider framing the set topic as individually personalized, as welcoming of a variety of identities, experiences, and evocative expressions. An important part of accompliceship is the act of standing behind the line with the oppressed party, rather than extending a hand from a noted safe place of privilege. By inviting students to write about anti-literacy, for example, an instructor embraces a role of accomplice, of support and mutual learning, while still maintaining a sense of surety for themselves. A faculty member I greatly respect recently asked: do you want to be the instructor students are afraid of, or the one they call first when something goes wrong? Do you want them to be scared to talk to you, or trust you to advocate for them and support them? The faculty member continued to explain that his teaching philosophy is much like his parenting. When a student is struggling, or something goes wrong, he wants to be the first number they call. This is exactly what it means to carry a dominance of trust.

Secondary Coding Process

The second coding process involved just one code, which I name as invitation for instructor interpretation:

Instructor Invitation (Purple). This code identifies passages and thematic threads where the instructor might scaffold relevant critical pedagogy throughlines in the larger context of the course. This code adds an interpretive lens where the instructor might customize, adapt, or otherwise invent applicable scaffolding to support the project in the form of activities, daily topics, freewrites, or other exploratory exercises. Whereas the Student Agency code specifically invites students to assume their own identity within the project, this code targets instructors,

signaling to them that they can support students in this project through a variety of critical pedagogy-based techniques.

This coding process was used on the overview and instructions of each blueprint assignment.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the methods to conduct this analysis in a format that is theoretically informed yet tactile. While the primary product of this study is the heuristic of practice for instructors, it is also crucial—in accordance with the tenets of critical pedagogy—to not only produce a replicable method of pedagogy, but to carefully outline the *approach* to this process of production. The following chapter offers exploratory results, imaging, and analysis of this coding process in action.

Chapter 4: Results

Building upon the scopic analysis of institutional climate as well as the methods identified in chapter three, chapter four offers a tactile representation of these processes in practice. First, I begin with the literacy narrative blueprint, identifying coded throughlines to critical pedagogy in application to the classroom, then suggesting scaffolding approaches in assignments and classroom activities to support the language directives. This same approach is applied to the worknets blueprint, with tangible moments of learning and supportive steps to encourage a climate of empathetic goodwill and care for students.

Document Analysis: Literacy Narrative

The first project in the sequence of English 1105 is the literacy assignment, with a suggested implementation of either a literacy narrative or digital literacy narrative. Presented within the context of the first unit of English 1105, the central purpose of the literacy narrative is to introduce, and complicate, the concept of literacy as students at Virginia Tech begin their college journey. While some assignments in the writing classroom may have a tendency to forefront the assignment first, rather than the learning objective, the idea of the literacy narrative in English 1105 is that students learn the unit objective of complicating literacy, understanding writer ethos, and experiencing storytelling and memory work as method *through* the project, rather than in addition to the project.

Broadly within the field, the literacy narrative is posited as a metaphorical coming of age for university students—an exploration into their background and future, their habits and dispositions (Alexander, 2015; Eldred & Mortensen, 1992; Scott, 1997). Soliday (1994) described how the literacy narrative acts, on the surface, as an examination of habits of reading and writing, but on a deeper level, as a method of liminal exploration: "...literacy stories are also

places where writers explore what Victor Turner calls 'liminal' crossings between worlds" (Turner, 1980, as cited in Soliday, 1994, p. 511).

Along with this liminal world crossing, the genre of the literacy narrative has a natural correlation with ideological critique as one aspect of reflective practice (Alexander, 2015). As Alexander continued, the literacy narrative is frequently revered as one of the most effective places for students to gain further consciousness and awareness of oppressive systems, as well as cultural competence, diverse worldviews, and sociopolitical structures. Thus, when looking at the greater picture of this assignment within the landscape of Virginia Tech, the connections to the course outcomes—and the greater mission of the university—are well supported.

Yet, the literacy narrative is also posited as a genre that needs reinvention, too often treated as a "bridge" assignment between high school work and academic writing (Hall & Minnix, 2012). While the genre being a bridge between these two realms is not necessarily a bad thing, it is widely considered a stale concept, one that even risks approaching students with a deficit mindset—in other words, that they need to have an "ease in" to college writing and are not already capable of performing at adequate levels. One of the concerns that Hall and Minnix (2012) further elaborated upon is the danger of the genre for at-risk students and minorities, who may be uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and resistant to telling such vulnerable information in this way. This, I argue, is where the blueprint of the University Writing Program Literacy Narrative diverts from the typical conventions of the literacy narrative to resemble more of a "mutt-genre" (Wardle, 2009), with a framing that is naturally compatible with critical pedagogy, less requiring students to address narrowly-framed experiences, and more inviting students to explore a wandering between worlds.

The literacy narrative has the following descriptors and parameters within the curriculum map:

- Foregrounds literacy and rhetorical vocabulary and constructs writerly ethos by examining past literacy experiences,
- Focuses on memory work, background with literacy learning, emphasis on scenes and people (as sponsors of literacy), attitudes toward reading and writing, and deliberation on what literacy (in general and in specific situations) is and does,
- May include literacies not valued in schools, defining other literacies in relation to how alphabetic literacy works, or acknowledging both literacy successes and struggles. (University Writing Program)

These specifications are crucial for understanding not only the coding process of this project, but the subsequent recommendations for scaffolding assignments based on the outlined theoretical basis. I analyzed the blueprint literacy narrative assignment, as is available on HokiesWrite.

Finally, prior to introducing the analysis, it is worth reiterating the following four qualities of radical instructorship introduced by Sweet (1998). An instructor who wishes to take a critical pedagogy approach arguably *must* understand, and embrace, these four key points:

1) Radical teachers do not test or grade in the traditional fashion.
2) Radical teachers surrender considerable power to students.
3) Radical teachers abandon lecture in favor of dialogue.
4) Radical teachers couple learning with activism. (p. 101)

The analysis was conducted with the intended audience of instructors who are willing to embrace this criteria.

Tracing the Throughlines

Figure 1 shows the “document portrait” and theme map of the codes within the blueprint itself, as created in MAXQDA, with the spread of the four codes in order of appearance recorded throughout the document, according to their thematic clustering. Figure 2 shows the frequency of the codes as they appear throughout the assignment, with critical consciousness (yellow) most frequently, student agency (blue) second most frequently, followed by critical pedagogy as method (green) and finally instructor as accomplice (pink). The units within these two images *do not* correspond to discourse units: in other words, each block does not correspond to one word. Twenty unique passages were coded for this account. Figure 3 illustrates how and where the codes are spread across the first page and second of the assignment.

Figure 1: Literacy Narrative Document Portrait and Theme Map

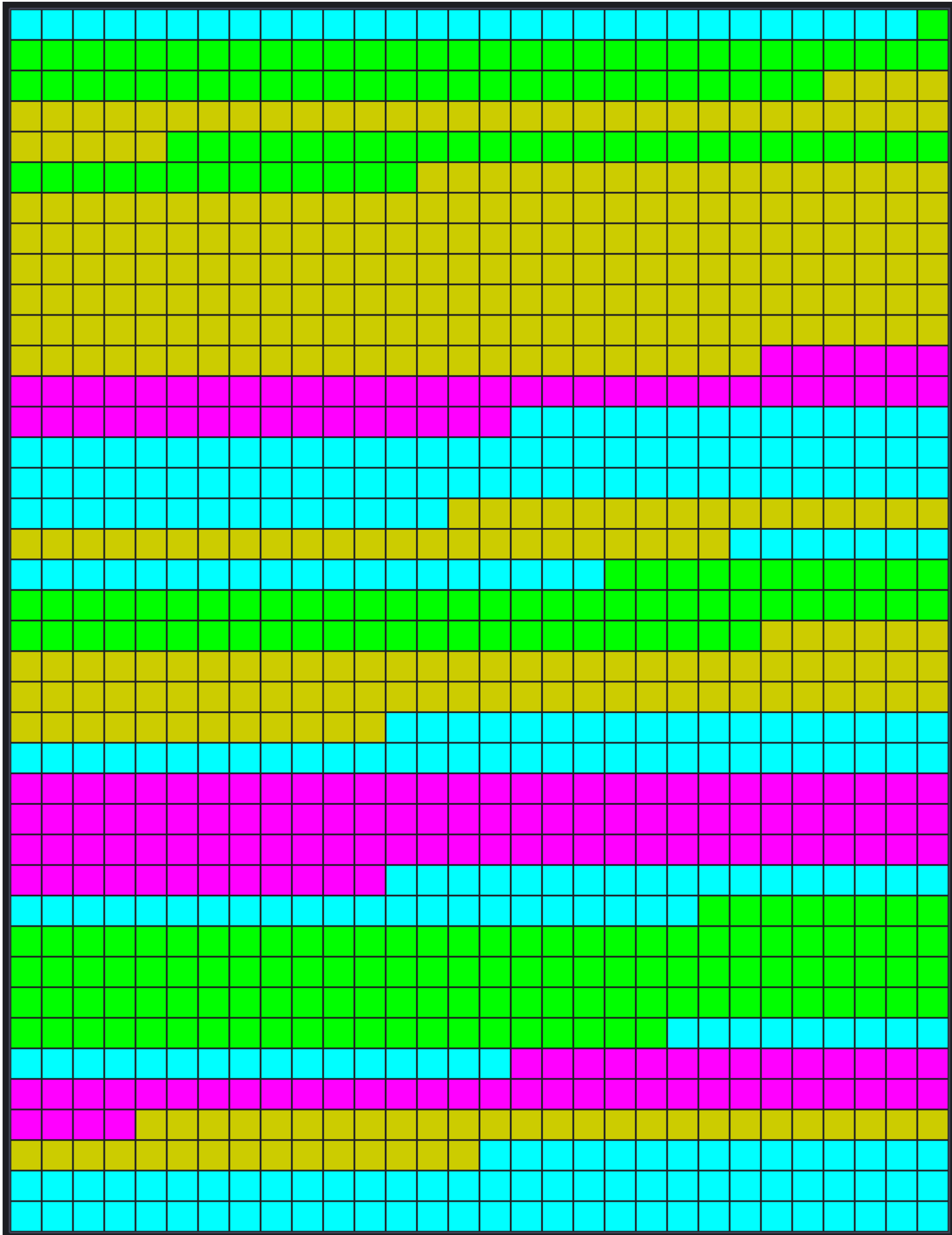


Fig 1: Created in MAXQDA, this thematic mapping shows first the appearance of each code within the document. Notable context here is that the blocks *do not* correspond to singular words as a unit, rather just a convenience of visual organization to show placement and frequency. This method also does not account for uncoded text, showing the portrait as a congruent unit, rather than with the gaps of uncoded text as present in the later annotated figures.

Figure 2: Literacy Narrative Code Occurrence Clustering

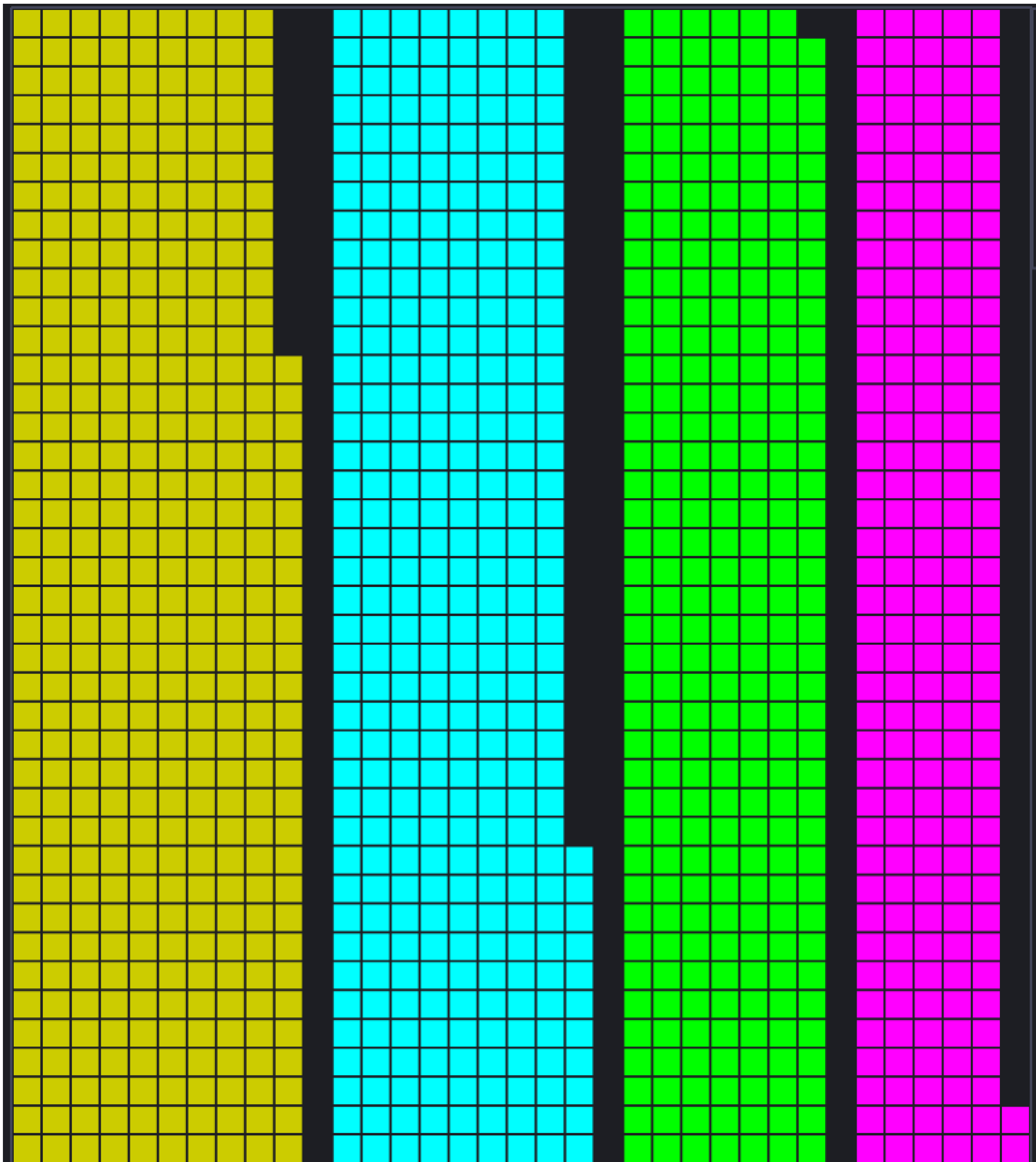
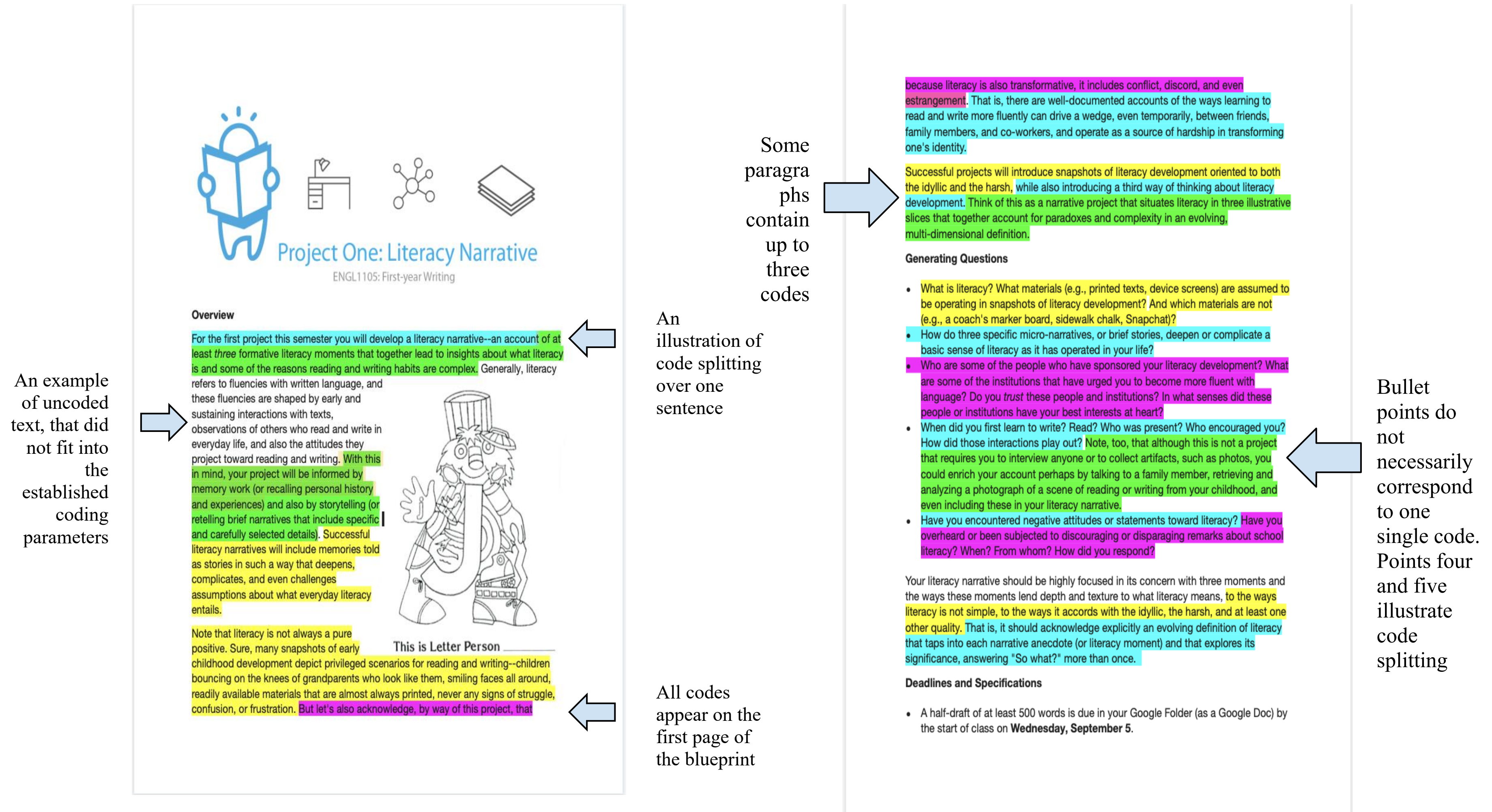


Fig 2: Created in MAXQDA, this clustering shows the frequency of the codes as they appear throughout the assignment, with critical consciousness (yellow) most frequently, student agency (blue) second most frequently, followed by critical pedagogy as method (green) and finally instructor as accomplice (pink).

Figure 3: Raw Coded, Annotated Literacy Narrative Blueprint



Project One: Literacy Narrative

ENGL1105: First-year Writing

Overview

For the first project this semester you will develop a literacy narrative--an account of at least *three* formative literacy moments that together lead to insights about what literacy is and some of the reasons reading and writing habits are complex. Generally, literacy refers to fluencies with written language, and these fluencies are shaped by early and sustaining interactions with texts, observations of others who read and write in everyday life, and also the attitudes they project toward reading and writing. With this in mind, your project will be informed by memory work (or recalling personal history and experiences) and also by storytelling (or retelling brief narratives that include specific and carefully selected details). Successful literacy narratives will include memories told as stories in such a way that deepens, complicates, and even challenges assumptions about what everyday literacy entails.

This is Letter Person

Note that literacy is not always a pure positive. Sure, many snapshots of early childhood development depict privileged scenarios for reading and writing--children bouncing on the knees of grandparents who look like them, smiling faces all around, readily available materials that are almost always printed, never any signs of struggle, confusion, or frustration. But let's also acknowledge, by way of this project, that because literacy is also transformative, it includes conflict, discord, and even estrangement. That is, there are well-documented accounts of the ways learning to read and write more fluently can drive a wedge, even temporarily, between friends, family members, and co-workers, and operate as a source of hardship in transforming one's identity.

Successful projects will introduce snapshots of literacy development oriented to both the idyllic and the harsh, while also introducing a third way of thinking about literacy development. Think of this as a narrative project that situates literacy in three illustrative slices that together account for paradoxes and complexity in an evolving, multi-dimensional definition.

Generating Questions

- What is literacy? What materials (e.g., printed texts, device screens) are assumed to be operating in snapshots of literacy development? And which materials are not (e.g., a coach's marker board, sidewalk chalk, Snapchat)?
- How do three specific micro-narratives, or brief stories, deepen or complicate a basic sense of literacy as it has operated in your life?
- Who are some of the people who have sponsored your literacy development? What are some of the institutions that have urged you to become more fluent with language? Do you *trust* these people and institutions? In what senses did these people or institutions have your best interests at heart?
- When did you first learn to write? Read? Who was present? Who encouraged you? How did those interactions play out? Note, too, that although this is not a project that requires you to interview anyone or to collect artifacts, such as photos, you could enrich your account perhaps by talking to a family member, retrieving and analyzing a photograph of a scene of reading or writing from your childhood, and even including these in your literacy narrative.
- Have you encountered negative attitudes or statements toward literacy? Have you overheard or been subjected to discouraging or disparaging remarks about school literacy? When? From whom? How did you respond?

Your literacy narrative should be highly focused in its concern with three moments and the ways these moments lend depth and texture to what literacy means, to the ways literacy is not simple, to the ways it accords with the idyllic, the harsh, and at least one other quality. That is, it should acknowledge explicitly an evolving definition of literacy that taps into each narrative anecdote (or literacy moment) and that explores its significance, answering "So what?" more than once.

Deadlines and Specifications

- A half-draft of at least 500 words is due in your Google Folder (as a Google Doc) by the start of class on **Wednesday, September 5**.

Fig 3: Figure 3 is representative of the raw coding process using the first four codes. Arrowed annotations on both pages indicate particular points of interest: code splitting, paragraph occurrence, etc. Also illustrated in this image are instances of blank text, or text that does not fit into this particular coding schema.

Beginning with figure 1, the first glance illustrates how the blueprint specifically opens with student agency: in this case, the opening phrase is “For the first project this semester you will develop a literacy narrative--an account…” and the rest of the sentence, which is coded as critical pedagogy method, is “...of at least *three* formative literacy moments that together lead to insights about what literacy is and some of the reasons reading and writing habits are complex” (University Writing Program Literacy Narrative). Just simple choices in language in the opening of this assignment, like positioning the addressee as “you” rather than the more impersonal “the student,” as well as placing the origin of the project into the hands of the student with hopeful language like “develop” rather than the possibly deductive phrasing of “write” suggests that the student is invited to approach this assignment with full artistic expression and as they are. Even the use of the phrase “an account” rather than “narrative” invites a specific invitation to invent the composition of the project as it suits the student.

Critical pedagogy as method is introduced in the rest of the sentence, which not only provides structure for students (three moments) but also acknowledges the complexity of literacy as a genre, topic, or skill. Much of the methodology of critical pedagogy surrounds the process of complicating: complicating power structures, complicating assumptions, complicating biases, complicating stigmas against love and generosity in the classroom, and so on.

Thus, just a single sentence both establishes the student at the center of the assignment, and inherently introduces a method of approaching, complicating, and otherwise “poking” a sometimes gate-kept, sometimes significantly fraught topic. The language throughout the blueprint is reminiscent of hooks’ (1994, 2013) description of hope pedagogy. The literacy narrative is framed as an active point of learning, of investigating, as well as giving significant care and attention to memory, past experiences both kind and cruel, and engagement with

meaningful dialogue around the moment the student finds themselves in as they encounter this assignment: usually a first-year student on the uncertain cusp of adulthood.

This tonality of hope, interpretation, and investigative agency continues throughout the remaining text of the blueprint assignment, and easily introduces another familiar representation of critical pedagogy in practice—storytelling. The "counter" or methodological twin of storytelling in the context of critical pedagogy is counterstory, as described by Martinez (2014, 2020) and Decuir-Gunby and Walker-Devose (2013), a closely entwined practice with Critical Race Theory that uses storytelling to destabilize majority narratives with authentically represented minority perspectives. For an instructor interested in critical pedagogy along with a literacy narrative assignment, using language as the blueprint does, while specifically including a possibility of counterstory, is a natural adaptation of this work in practice. Further evidence of similar methodological connectivity appears on page two (figure 3) which words the parameter of these formative moments as "micro-narratives" (University Writing Program Literacy Narrative). I coded this section as student agency because of the specific invitation to complicate, deepen, and otherwise problematize the role of literacy in the student's life, but this is a code that could also easily cross-pollinate to critical pedagogy as method. Micro-narratives, or miniature renderings within a larger, sometimes not explicitly told story, accord with critical pedagogy for the first-year writing classroom in their more measured approach to alter-narratives and counterstory. In other words, a first-year student might not feel entirely comfortable with a single untied counterstory, but exploring the concept through micro-narratives might 1) establish an in-road to airing of oppressive literacy experiences and 2) aid students in establishing critical consciousness.

Another key element of the literacy narrative blueprint that I specifically want to explore

in this analysis is coded as instructor accompliceship under the generating questions. This bullet point reads as: "Who are some of the people who have sponsored your literacy development? What are some of the institutions that have urged you to become more fluent with language? Do you trust these people and institutions? In what senses did these people or institutions have your best interests at heart?" (University Writing Program Literacy Narrative). First, this series of questions directly asks the students to consider people in their lives, "literacy sponsors" in reference to Deborah Brandt's (1998) framework of those who give credence and quality to a type of literacy apprenticeship (or, alternatively, serve as a negative or deductive force in a literacy story). Then, it asks students to consider the institutions—synonymous in this interpretation with structures—that have "urged" the student's literacy. Most crucially, the blueprint question asks about trust, and not "how" the student trusted these people and institutions, but "do"—as in in the present, in this moment—the students trust these people and institutions.

Again, this code has some chameleonic tendencies: it also works as a foray into critical consciousness, asking students to examine bodies—both lived and metaphorical—of power, and it places agency into the students' hands by letting them determine *if* they actually trust these bodies. I coded this segment as instructor accompliceship, however, specifically because of this question about trust, and the positioning of the instructor alongside the student. In this question, the instructor rhetorically gives key subtext that indicates their understanding of the complexities, and flaws, of literacy-based institutions, and places themselves beside the student in invitation to explore these complicating factors.

It's especially important to consider how, in the holistic picture of the literacy narrative assignment, the student is positioned within the classroom. Because this is the first major

assignment of the class in many students' first semester of college, what the literacy narrative succeeds in doing, based on the blueprint language, is establishing a sense of student autonomy and identity. Because of the rhetorical positioning of the assignment as a whole and the specific language of the assignment, students are invited into a space that centers their own experiences, honors the darknesses and shadows, and subliminally—or directly, depending on the disposition of the student—offers a place to consider power structures and how those structures have directly influenced that student's literacy story.

Building from the Foundation: Scaffolding the Literacy Narrative

As evidenced through this analysis, the blueprint assignment of the literacy narrative, coded in this structure, provides multiple in-roads for implementing critical pedagogy as a method. In this section, I offer several concrete suggestions for how to 1) include further language that synthesizes critical pedagogy within the same structure of the blueprint, 2) give students further options to explore literacy through a critical pedagogy lens and 3) scaffold symbiotic activities to fully embrace this approach.

Indicative Language

As illustrated by the analysis, the language throughout the blueprint already invites goodwill, trust, and student agency within the project. For instructors who are interested in taking the critical pedagogy approach further, one possibility in language adjustment is to open the prompt to consider literacies beyond writing and reading—to include literacies of a variety of types, disciplines, and experiences. Doing this not only increases the student agency by allowing them—within reasonable structure—to have control over their approach to the genre, a fundamental tenet of critical pedagogy.

Based on the scholarship and context of the assignment, the following example language illustrates one method of how to do this rhetorical signaling work in practice:

> *You will use memory work (recalling personal experiences, events, and other formative elements in your own life) to illustrate at least one story surrounding literacy in any of its varying definitions: perhaps you would like to write about an experience with written language, spoken language, or non-verbal language. Think broadly! Literacy can extend beyond the "English" discipline to the sciences, physical activity, hobbies, and more.*

This language extends a critical pedagogy approach in the following ways: first, trueness to the blueprint of the assignment, which already works from a critical pedagogy standpoint; then, an offering to students to explore various forms of literacy with specific examples, and finally synthesizing scholarship from rhetoric and composition studies on the impact of the literacy narrative with scholarship on critical pedagogy to increase the possibility for a student-centered assignment experience.

To further establish trust with the student, in the vein of hope pedagogy and accompliceship, the instructor might consider a statement that invites the writing to be exploratory, done with care, and prioritizing of investment over perfection—for example:

> *Your literacy narrative is thoughtful, inspired, and matters to you. I do not want to waste your time, or mine, with a story that doesn't matter to you or that you don't care about. I want you to care about what you're writing about! I am less interested in perfection and far more interested in you discovering something new about literacy in your life.*

While not overly emotional or elaborately written, language like this might further establish the tonality of mutual care, prioritizing of student investment, and, at least rhetorically, a reduction of pressure on the student to produce something "perfect" as a product of past-trauma

from other teachers and classrooms. Trust is, of course, earned and not bought with simple language: but in order to position trust and a dominance of trust, it is the instructor's responsibility to consistently remind the student of the established culture.

This factors specifically into the coding process for instructor invitation (figure 4). This code reflects where the instructor might consider classroom activities and approaches that honor and establish this trust that would then be reinforced within the language of the assignment.

Other small details of orienting the language toward critical pedagogy include invitational positioning of the parameters of the assignment—referencing work done in class, while also inviting students to divert, should they choose to:

> *Offer a definition of literacy in your narrative. Please note, this definition can be as personally tailored as necessary. Your definition may align with those we've discussed and will continue to explore in class, or it may divert.*

This, like all aspects of critical pedagogy, could be argued to be overtly risky—critics of critical pedagogy might say that the student who chooses to divert from definitions outlined in class is not fulfilling the particulars of the assignment. But the critical pedagogue realizes that the student who engages thoughtfully, with care, and with honor to their own experiences *is* fulfilling the particulars of the assignment, not only because they are examining their own critical consciousness, but because they are treating the assignment with specific attentiveness to their identity and interpretation of what literacy means.

Figure 4: Raw Coded, Literacy Narrative Blueprint (Instructor Accompliceship)

Project One: Literacy Narrative

ENGL1105: First-year Writing

Overview

For the first project this semester you will develop a literacy narrative--an account of at least *three* formative literacy moments that together lead to insights about what literacy is and some of the reasons reading and writing habits are complex. Generally, literacy refers to fluencies with written language, and these fluencies are shaped by early and sustaining interactions with texts, observations of others who read and write in everyday life, and also the attitudes they project toward reading and writing. With this in mind, your project will be informed by memory work (or recalling personal history and experiences) and also by storytelling (or retelling brief narratives that include specific and carefully selected details). Successful literacy narratives will include memories told as stories in such a way that deepens, complicates, and even challenges assumptions about what everyday literacy entails.

This is Letter Person ________

Note that literacy is not always a pure positive. Sure, many snapshots of early childhood development depict privileged scenarios for reading and writing--children bouncing on the knees of grandparents who look like them, smiling faces all around, readily available materials that are almost always printed, never any signs of struggle, confusion, or frustration. But let's also acknowledge, by way of this project, that because literacy is also transformative, it includes conflict, discord, and even estrangement. That is, there are well-documented accounts of the ways learning to read and write more fluently can drive a wedge, even temporarily, between friends, family members, and co-workers, and operate as a source of hardship in transforming one's identity.

Successful projects will introduce snapshots of literacy development oriented to both the idyllic and the harsh, while also introducing a third way of thinking about literacy development. Think of this as a narrative project that situates literacy in three illustrative slices that together account for paradoxes and complexity in an evolving, multi-dimensional definition.

Generating Questions

- What is literacy? What materials (e.g., printed texts, device screens) are assumed to be operating in snapshots of literacy development? And which materials are not (e.g., a coach's marker board, sidewalk chalk, Snapchat)?
- How do three specific micro-narratives, or brief stories, deepen or complicate a basic sense of literacy as it has operated in your life?
- Who are some of the people who have sponsored your literacy development? What are some of the institutions that have urged you to become more fluent with language? Do you *trust* these people and institutions? In what senses did these people or institutions have your best interests at heart?
- When did you first learn to write? Read? Who was present? Who encouraged you? How did those interactions play out? Note, too, that although this is not a project that requires you to interview anyone or to collect artifacts, such as photos, you could enrich your account perhaps by talking to a family member, retrieving and analyzing a photograph of a scene of reading or writing from your childhood, and even including these in your literacy narrative.
- Have you encountered negative attitudes or statements toward literacy? Have you overheard or been subjected to discouraging or disparaging remarks about school literacy? When? From whom? How did you respond?

Your literacy narrative should be highly focused in its concern with three moments and the ways these moments lend depth and texture to what literacy means, to the ways literacy is not simple, to the ways it accords with the idyllic, the harsh, and at least one other quality. That is, it should acknowledge explicitly an evolving definition of literacy that taps into each narrative anecdote (or literacy moment) and that explores its significance, answering "So what?" more than once.

Deadlines and Specifications

- A half-draft of at least 500 words is due in your Google Folder (as a Google Doc) by the start of class on **Wednesday, September 5**.

Fig 4: Figure 4 is representative of the raw coding process using the second code, for instructor accompliceship. While there are more instances of blank text here, equally notable is the frequent occurrence of accompliceship comeuppance, both on page one and two of the assignment, with large blocks of discourse units indicating this particular method.

Literacy Sponsors and the Anti-literacy Narrative

Another option for instructors is to consider the specifics of how students might approach the assignment. This adjustment can be made in conjunction with the suggested language as articulated above, or separately positioned.

For example, an option aligning with surrendering control as an instructor is to allow students to write *specifically* about a literacy sponsor in accordance with Brandt's (1998) definition. This option might be articulated as follows:

> *Perhaps you would like to write about a literacy sponsor, someone who had a profound influence — positive or negative — in your literate life.*

In one, simply written sentence, the instructor invites students to approach the genre from an alternative perspective, by focusing on another person rather than themselves specifically (which also gives a nod to counterstory, and the concerns of composition scholars to the celebration of vulnerability at the expense of student trauma), and invites students to do what some instructors might think of as the unthinkable—to write about something *negative.*

Because so much of critical pedagogy is tied to identity, belonging, and decentering authority, giving students the option to explore negative experiences with literacy *within* the literacy classroom is, in some ways, the ultimate form of releasing control on the part of the instructor.

On this note, another way to reinvent the literacy narrative through critical pedagogy theory is to offer students the choice of the anti-literacy narrative. In this case, students would still have the choice to write about any form of literacy—a sport, a hobby, another discipline, an unwritten or unread language—but, in the spirit of counterstory, they would be addressing specific barriers, disruptions, upsets, and subversions to their own literacy experiences. The

blueprint already nods to this concept with the following language: “But let's also acknowledge, by way of this project, that because literacy is also transformative, it includes conflict, discord, and even estrangement” (University Writing Program Literacy Narrative). Coded as instructor accompliceship—acknowledgement of the inherent darkside of literacy and stepping behind that line to the side of the student who has experienced that darkside—this language invites students to bring their negative experiences to the forefront. Further language that encourages anti-literacy exploration might look like this:

> *literacy can be something idyllic, something harsh, something difficult, something beautiful, something rangey, something specific. I encourage you to be creative and give me a snapshot of what literacy actually means in your life.*

To continue the dominance of trust, in order for students to feel safe to explore their anti-literacy, it becomes even more important to establish a climate right from the beginning that honors the diverse range of experiences students bring into the first-year writing classroom. Possibilities for scaffolding these alternative positionings of the literacy narrative are articulated in the following section.

Shoring the Walls: Activities to Establish Classroom Climate

The approach the instructor chooses to take to the literacy narrative will, naturally, influence the activities to introduce the key concepts to students. The first consideration is the breadth of readings that attune to the theme of the assignment: asking a student to consider their own counterstory should, organically, be accompanied by a diverse array of counterstory examples. Likewise, asking students to write about a literacy sponsor should be accompanied by

lived examples of narratives that highlight sponsorship. Anti-literacy narratives should be accompanied by examples of negative, or fraught, literacy experiences.[9]

Beyond readings, in-class activities and discussions to introduce these key concepts include carefully designed free-writes, discussion questions, and exercises to build the atmosphere of trust and student agency. Some example free-writing prompts to scaffold the critical pedagogy-minded literacy narrative include:

- Describe an experience where you were participating in an activity, hobby, sport, or class where you felt an intense sense of passion, interest, or belonging. What was that moment like?
- Describe a teacher, coach, or mentor who left a strong impact on you (positive or negative).
- Describe a time that you felt profoundly like you were *not* good at something. What was it, and how did it make you feel?
- What do you think of when you hear the word literacy? If you aren't sure, don't look up a definition. Draw from your own experiences.

An additional activity that helps students to consider alternative approaches to the assignment and works as a generative drafting process is an activity based on the literacy sponsor option, that might be called "letter to a literacy sponsor" or "dialogue to a literacy sponsor." This activity can be done in class or out of class, and translates easily to multimodality: students could make a slidedeck, infographic, digital card, or other artifact to align with the digital option. In this assignment, students might receive instructions that read along the lines of:

[9] For a suggested bibliography of readings appropriate for these criteria and for the audience of first-year students, see Appendix I.

When you think about how you arrived at [university or institution], and the journey you're taking here, there is probably a teacher, a parent/guardian, a friend, or maybe an author, movie, actor, or other "agent" of literacy that supported you and helped you along the way to where you are now. This is your opportunity to write a brief letter to that person or other literacy sponsor, telling them the role they played in your literary life thus far. As always, remember that "literacy" can be many things — not just reading and writing. Thus, your sponsor could be a coach, a teacher from another discipline, an extracurricular teacher, a mentor of another kind, etc. I've included a letter to one of my literacy sponsors on the following page. Alternatively, you might consider writing a letter of complaint or an un-thank-you to a negative sponsor. Let your feelings toward this person be fully known.

A few key points to note about this language: it opens the idea of sponsorship beyond reading and writing while still keeping the definition of literacy; allows students to reduce the personal connection, if this assignment enacts too much vulnerability, by giving the choice of an impersonal sponsor; and it gives students the option to scaffold their anti-literacy narrative by exploring an anti-sponsor. Finally, and this is critical for releasing control and offering a level of vulnerability on the part of the instructor: a critical piece of this assignment is sharing a letter written by the instructor themselves.

While not the only options, these three acts: associated readings, relevant free-writes, and activities that specifically build a culture of critical pedagogy within the classroom—all contribute to the overarching goals of the thematic positioning without significant additional labor from the instructor. Because these activities are specifically informed by theory *and* the blueprint assignment itself, the goal in this offering is for instructors to feel empowered to enact

critical pedagogy with relatively low risk and low additional effort.

Document Analysis: Worknets

The second blueprint assignment considered for the purpose of this analysis is the third project within the 1105 curriculum: the rhetorical analysis project, typically the most involved and climactic project of the semester. This project is specifically suggested for Pathways assessment for English 1105. The curriculum map offers three suggested approaches: worknets, an educational experience analysis, or a visual analysis. The expectation at this point in the course is students have a concrete understanding of rhetorical terminology and broad rhetorical situations, and are able to interact with additional sources within a rhetorical context.

Similar to the literacy narrative, the rhetorical analysis represents a genre-pillar within the structure of the first-year writing classroom. Recognized for its fluidity and adaptability in subject, including digital analysis (Fife, 2010), as well as its applicability to a variety of multidisciplinary contexts, including Writing Across the Curriculum and development of transferable skills (Graff, 2010; Merrill, 2000; Reif & Bawarshi, 2011). Like the literacy narrative, scholarship reflects multiple directions and focuses for which to tailor the assignment to best serve students, suggesting everything from problem-based learning (Bower, 2003) to using film and popular culture as the analytical text (Tan & Matsuda, 2020).

For this study, I have chosen to analyze the worknets option for the following reasons: worknets introduces a heuristic for interacting with scholarly sources in a significantly different way than what is "typical" of an analytic assignment, places student identity and agency at the forefront of the analysis, and includes a visual element that is distinctly untraditional and even altern to the standard genre conventions. Finally, worknets has a great deal of potential for

critical pedagogy scaffolding through activities and classroom experiences, just as the literacy narrative.

The curriculum map offers the following specifications for the worknets project:

- Foregrounds distinguishable qualities of an academic article: words, sources, authorship, and surrounding moment,
- The four phases build up into an analysis of the focal article that frames it in terms of its audience and purpose, noting, as well, other applicable rhetorical concepts,
- Worknets greatly slow down the reader's relationship to the text, thereby fostering more comprehensive understanding of the article and the work it does,
- Worknets are also richly multimodal for alternating between images and text through each phase, amounting to a mixed text complete with captions and elaborated academic prose that explains what the images are doing and why. (English 1105 Curriculum Map)

Like the literacy narrative, this analysis begins with the blueprint, then articulates applicable adaptations and suggestions to further embrace critical pedagogy.

Connecting the Themes

Figure 5 represents the document portrait of the worknets project, similarly generated to the document portrait of the literacy narrative assignment. Figure 6 represents the frequency of each code's appearance, with critical consciousness (yellow) first, then critical pedagogy as method (green), then student agency (blue) and finally instructor as accomplice (pink). Notably, this order is nearly the same as the literacy narrative blueprint, aside from the switch in positions of critical pedagogy as method and student agency. In this particular case, the swap makes sense because of the conventions of the genre: worknets is, in its own distinct framework, a very clear method (Mueller et al., 2018) that pairs well with critical pedagogy as a method. This is not to

say that student agency is any less prominent or important in the language of the worknets blueprint, but because the rhetorical analysis project is so methods-forward, so to speak, the connection is natural.

Figure 5: Worknets Document Portrait and Theme Map

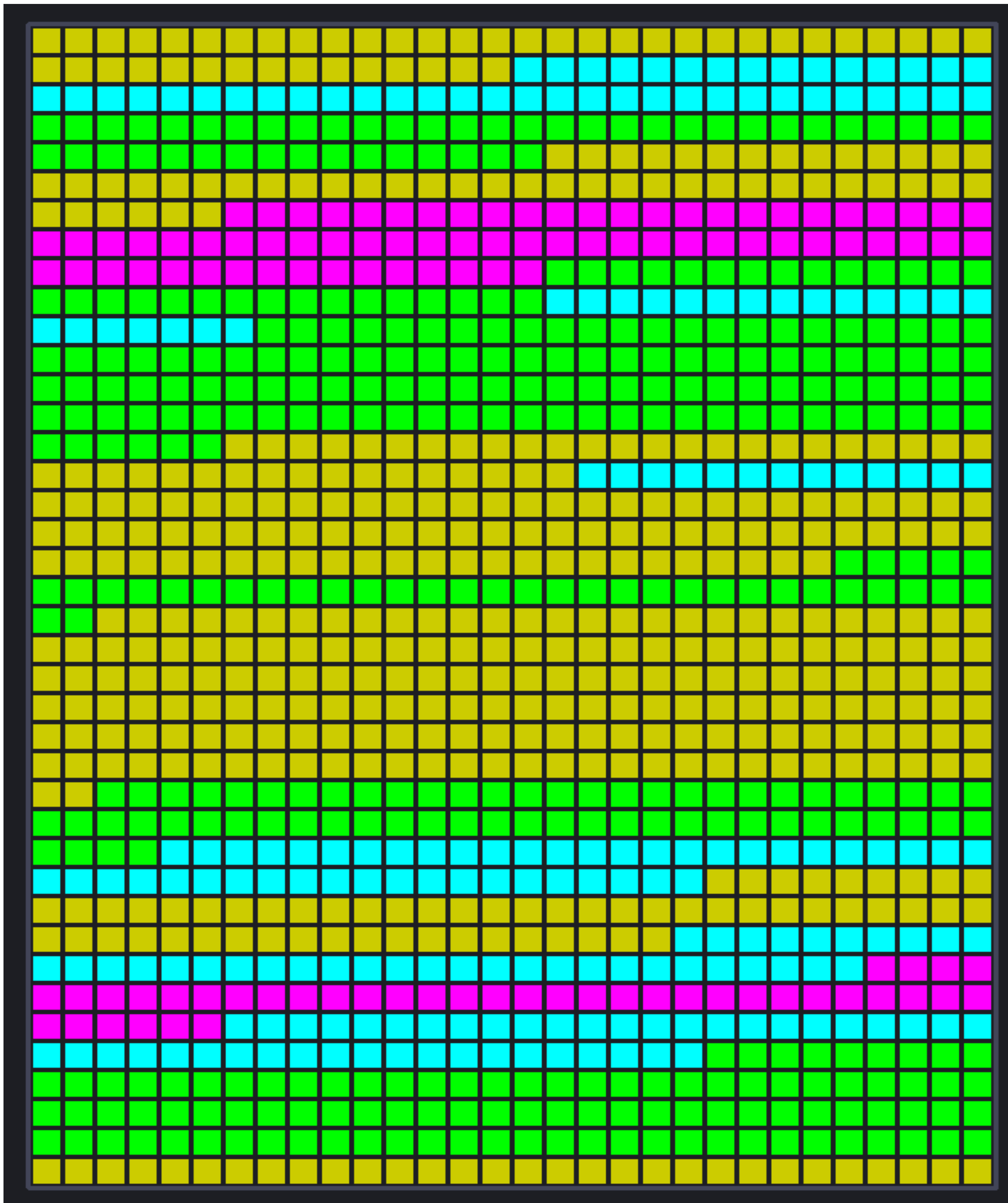


Fig 5: Created in MAXQDA, this thematic mapping shows the appearance of each code within the document. As with the literacy narrative, the blocks *do not* correspond to singular words as a unit, rather just a convenience of visual organization to show placement and frequency. This method also does not account for uncoded text, showing the portrait as a congruent unit, rather than with the gaps of uncoded text as present in the later annotated figures.

Figure 6: Worknets Code Occurrence Clustering

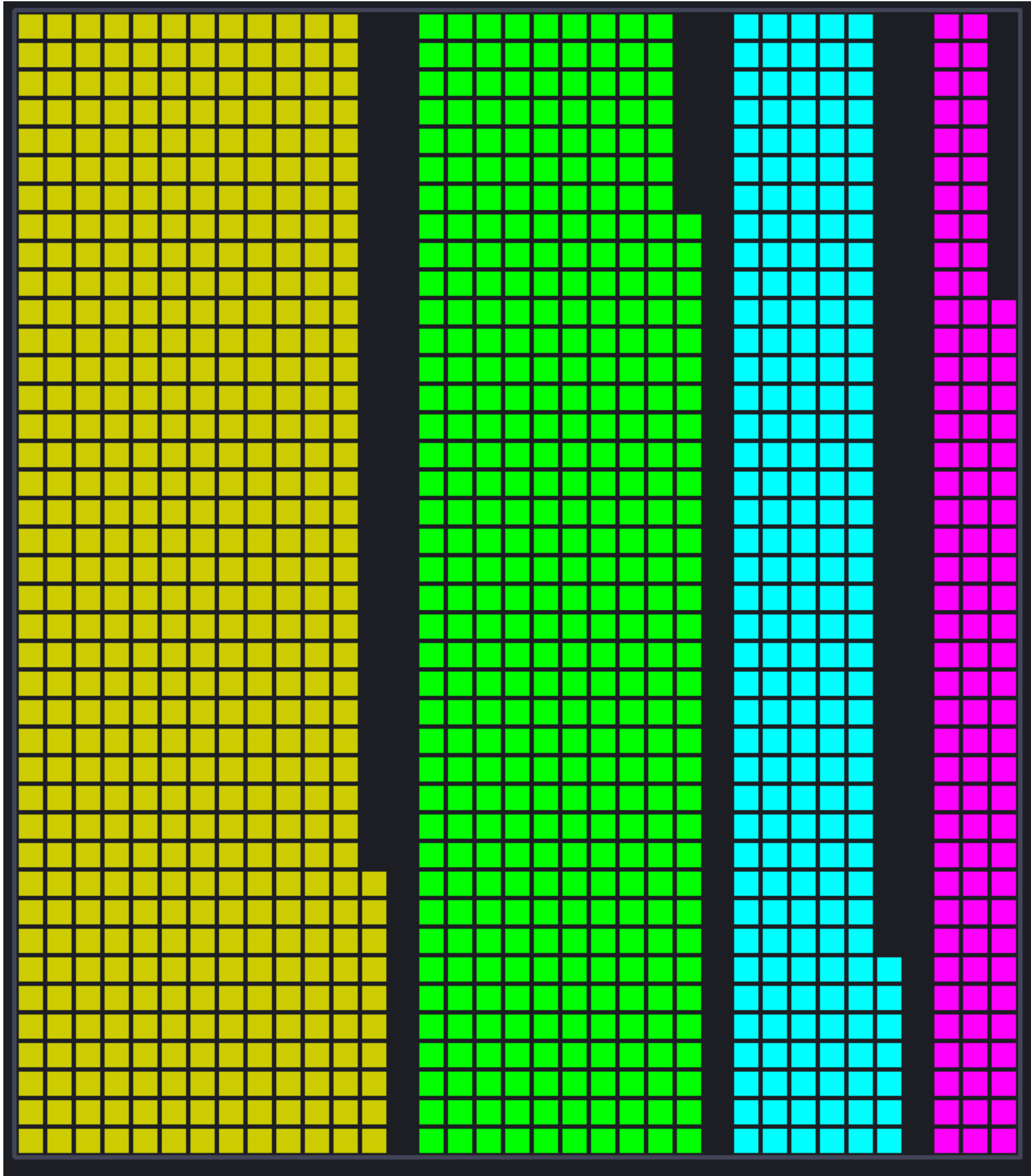
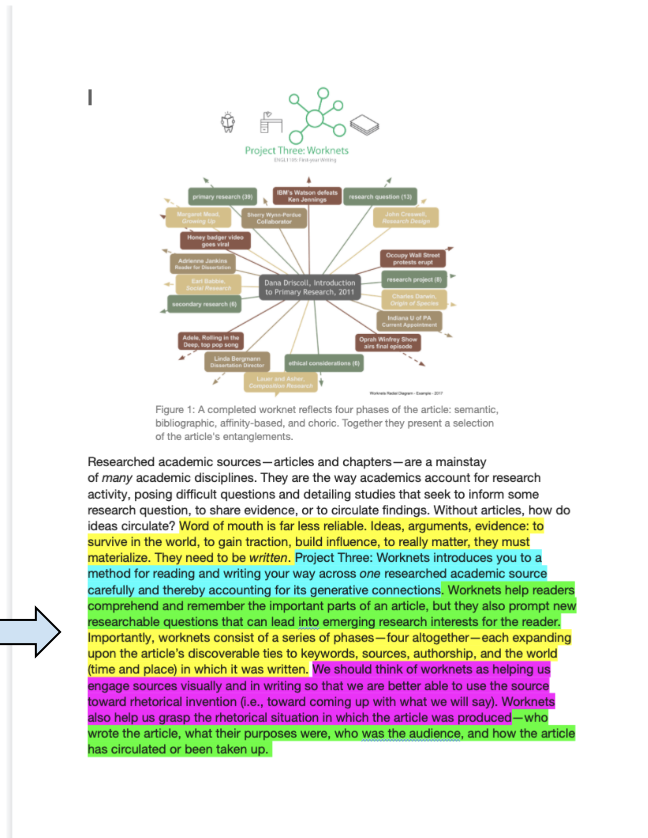


Fig 6: Created in MAXQDA, this clustering shows the frequency of the codes as they appear throughout the assignment, with critical consciousness (yellow) most frequently, followed by critical pedagogy as method (green), then student agency (blue), followed by instructor as accomplice (pink).

Figure 7 shows the coding process of the worknets, which opens in its language with a nod to critical consciousness. In this instance, critical consciousness appearing first corresponds well to the sequence of the course—if an instructor is teaching through a method of critical pedagogy in English 1105, by the time the course is encountering project three, it is not unreasonable to suggest that not only should students be comfortable and familiar with rhetorical contexts, but critical consciousness contexts as well.

The language of the worknets blueprint holds the same tonality as the literacy narrative blueprint: hopeful, investigative, inquiry-based, and most importantly, student-centered. The first coded passage articulates the context for worknets as method: "Without articles, how do ideas circulate? Word of mouth is far less reliable. Ideas, arguments, evidence: to survive in the world, to gain traction, build influence, to really matter, they must materialize. They need to be written" (Worknets Blueprint). This passage aligns with critical consciousness by furthering the definition of rhetorical analysis, and analysis of secondary sources, by asking students to consider why this work matters. By extension, the sub-questions students could be asked to consider are: *to whom* does this work matter? What structures of power perpetuate and attest to the necessity of articles? How do "scholarly" articles go against alternative methods? How do they align with or divert from indigenous methods? How does the student's role and position factor into the audience of these articles?

Figure 7: Annotated, Raw Coded Worknets Blueprint

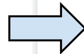


Project Three: Worknets

Figure 1: A completed worknet reflects four phases of the article: semantic, bibliographic, affinity-based, and choric. Together they present a selection of the article's entanglements.

Researched academic sources—articles and chapters—are a mainstay of *many* academic disciplines. They are the way academics account for research activity, posing difficult questions and detailing studies that seek to inform some research question, to share evidence, or to circulate findings. Without articles, how do ideas circulate? Word of mouth is far less reliable. Ideas, arguments, evidence: to survive in the world, to gain traction, build influence, to really matter, they must materialize. They need to be *written*. Project Three: Worknets introduces you to a method for reading and writing your way across *one* researched academic source carefully and thereby accounting for its generative connections. Worknets help readers comprehend and remember the important parts of an article, but they also prompt new researchable questions that can lead into emerging research interests for the reader. Importantly, worknets consist of a series of phases—four altogether—each expanding upon the article's discoverable ties to keywords, sources, authorship, and the world (time and place) in which it was written. We should think of worknets as helping us engage sources visually and in writing so that we are better able to use the source toward rhetorical invention (i.e., toward coming up with what we will say). Worknets also help us grasp the rhetorical situation in which the article was produced—who wrote the article, what their purposes were, who was the audience, and how the article has circulated or been taken up.

Like the literacy narrative, all four codes appear on page 1

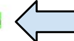


How To Make A Worknet

Creating a worknet consists of three steps.

1. Choose a researched academic article *relevant* to your area of inquiry published since 1980. I highly recommend that you work with one of the following titles, which you can access online:

2. Next, open Google Drawing. It might take some time to get familiar with the drawing tools. We will spend time going over this in class. Important: Be sure to save a version of the model *after* each phase so you can easily show its build-up. Using a hub and spoke model, draw links from the central node (the article author, title, and year of publication) to a series of surrounding nodes. Create 3-5 nodes for each of the following four phases: ***semantic***, ***bibliographic***, ***affinity-based***, and ***choric***. The drawings should be done with care. Exceptional drawings will reflect precision insofar as legibility, spacing, color choices, and neatness. These phases are each explained below.



Code splitting within the steps

1. ***Semantic***: concerns vocabulary—words and phrases that appear in the article itself and whose reference and meaning can be traced to peripheral ideas suited to further exploration. Whether you seek individual words or two-word phrases, include the total count in parentheses. There are online tools to help with this, such as Tagcrowd.com (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. and the Online NGram Analyzer at http://guidetodatamining.com/ngramAnalyzer/ (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.. In the written account that goes with the semantic phase, discuss what the terms mean, generally and in the context of the article. Why are these terms important? How do they advance the rhetorical goals of the piece? That is, how do the keywords favor a particular audience, showing that audience regard for forms of knowledge that is important to them?

2. ***Bibliographic***: traces specific sources cited in the original. For this phase, turn to the works cited or references list at the end of the article. Choose 3-5 sources. Are they available in Newman Library? What are the dates

Particular emphasis on critical consciousness in the semantic phase

Fig 7: As with the modeling of the literacy narrative, figure 7 is representative of the raw coding process using the first four codes. Arrowed annotations on both pages indicate particular points of interest: code splitting, paragraph occurrence, etc. Also illustrated in this image are instances of blank text, or text that does not fit into this particular coding schema.

A key theme throughout the worknets blueprint is the furthering of student agency: the four subsections of the assignment heuristic—the semantic phase, the bibliographic phase, the affinity phase, and the choric phase—all offer the opportunity for *the student* to decide what is important to acknowledge and offer. A traditional rhetorical analysis might loosely suggest this, but typically, the expectation is for students to use a narrow rhetorical framework to interpret a predetermined (though often not explicitly stated) set of conclusions surrounding the article or artifact. For example, a traditional rhetorical analysis might ask the student to interact with the choices of the rhetor, or the article's author. Worknets allows, in some regard, for the *student* to step into the position of the rhetor to determine relevant connections, throughlines, and the article author's logos, in addition to how, and whether, this particular article situates itself in the student's own developing scholarly ethos.

Worknets furthers the potential for critical pedagogy in English 1105 because it invites the instructor to implement readings that attune to a specifically designed theme—for example, an instructor interested in critical consciousness might include articles to analyze that focus on critical consciousness. But most importantly, should the instructor choose to, the student has the option of selecting their own article. In this way, the instructor fully releases that boundary of control to the student, placing trust in them to select an article that is relevant to the subject and approachable for the level of the student. The instructor might provide certain guidelines to help the student succeed, like asking them to find an article with at least three bibliographic sources in order to effectively complete the bibliographic phase, but there is a crucial opportunity within this assignment to give agency back to the student. For example, allowing a student to choose an article within their area of curiosity and inquiry might place the student as the expert, and the instructor as the learner. Worknets works particularly well for this reversal of roles because the

rhetorical analysis is so clearly structured: the instructor should, logically, be able to understand the semantic, bibliographic, affinity and choric phases of even the most disciplinary-specific article.

This opportunity to release authority further translates to the built-in signals for instructor invitation within the blueprint (figure 8). If an instructor chooses to go the route of giving students the option to choose their own article, for example, topics in class might align with transferable skills for selecting an article, discovery of curiosity when it comes to academic scholarship, and discussion of the tensions between curiosity and scholarly genre conventions.

Instructor invitation is particularly important in the final two phases of the worknets project, the affinity phase and the choric phase. The affinity phase aligns directly with critical pedagogy because of the opportunity to analyze, interpret, and interact with a scholarly article's author in terms of power, privilege, and positionality. While the instructor should of course heed the tenet of critical pedagogy that discourages assumptive thinking, giving students a breadth of articles from diverse perspectives and identities and then asking them to trace that author's scholarly development is a strong way to further encourage critical consciousness. Similarly, the choric phase—asking students to see what was happening in the world broadly in the context of the publication timeline of the article—invites students to consider crucial context and influencing factors that complicate how an article is situated within a field, a conversation, or a methodology more broadly.

Figure 8: Raw Coded, Worknets Blueprint (Instructor Accompliceship)

discuss what the terms mean, generally and in the context of the article. Why are these terms important? How do they advance the rhetorical goals of the piece? That is, how do the keywords favor a particular audience, showing that audience regard for forms of knowledge that is important to them?

2. ***Bibliographic***: traces specific sources cited in the original. For this phase, turn to the works cited or references list at the end of the article. Choose 3-5 sources. Are they available in Newman Library? What are the dates of publication? How do the sources appear in the article? That is, how are they being used? How might tracking down any one source expand your knowledge about the article and its rhetorical context? In what ways do specific sources advance the rhetorical goals of the piece?

3. ***Affinity-based***: attends to functions of authorship, such as graduate training, collaborations, current position, career arc for publishing activity, and relationship to other specializations. For the affinity-based phase, look up the author. What else has the author written? Do they publish by themselves or with others? What other work have they done? Does it seem to you related to the focus of this article? How so? Where does the author work? How long has she worked there? How does this knowledge give you a deeper sense of the author's credibility, qualifications, or *ethos*?

4. ***Choric***: This phase examines the world in which the article was written, collecting a handful of popular culture references from the time and place it came from. Like the affinity worknet above, a choric worknet is not explicitly identifiable *in* the text of the article. It sets you up to explore coincident materials and events from popular culture (movies, songs, happenings, local and world news) in the interest of enlarging context and striking juxtaposition. What else, specifically, was happening when the article was written? What was going on in the place where it was written? How do a sample of these time-place associations open up new possibilities for exploring the article or an idea it introduces?

3. A written account (approximately 350 words) accompanies each visual phase. That's four phases, four accounts. Each account addresses the choices, responds to questions noted in association with each phase, and brings to light relevant noticings at that phase. Your completed project will also include an opening paragraph that introduces the article, and a concluding paragraph that discusses the article's purpose, audience, and context using rhetorical terms and concepts we have discussed this semester (e.g., *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*; *kairos*; rhetorical situation; audience, exigence, constraints).

Like Projects One and Two, your third project should be highly focused. All throughout, it will adhere to a single researched article. The project forecasts some of the work you will be doing in ENGL1106 next semester—selecting sources, reading them well, drawing upon them to reinforce your writing.

Deadlines and Specifications

- A half-draft of at least 800 words is due in your Google Folder (as a Google Doc) by the start of class on **Monday, November 5**.
- Project Three and Invention Portfolio are due in your Google Folder by the start of class on **Wednesday, November 14**.
- At least six pages, typed and double-spaced (i.e., 1600 words)

Fig 8: Figure 8 is representative of the raw coding process using the second code, for instructor accompliceship. The high presence of accompliceship in each step of the assignment illustrates consistent, tacit signaling to the instructor.

Classroom Implementation

Like the literacy narrative, an instructor interested in critical pedagogy has a variety of options to build this blueprint out further. In this section, as I did with the literacy narrative, I offer 1) language that synthesizes critical pedagogy within the same structure of the blueprint, 2) give students further options to explore rhetorical analysis through a critical pedagogy lens and 3) scaffold symbiotic activities to fully embrace this approach.

Language Edits

As shown by the blueprint analysis, the worknets blueprint already—like the literacy narrative—aligns in rhetorical tonality with the language of hope pedagogy, of student agency, of good-will. Again, using personal language ("you" instead of "the student"), and offering generative questions within each phase rather than a specific list of criteria, already establishes an undertone of critical pedagogy.

If an instructor would like to give students the opportunity to enter into the scholarly-wilds to select their own article, language could be built into the assignment that reflects this. For example:

> *For this assignment, I encourage you — and trust you — to select an article, published since 1980, relevant to your area of inquiry. You may consider selecting an article that aligns with your area of study, or alternatively, a hobby, field, or activity that interests you. Alternatively, you might think about selecting an author that speaks to a part of your identity, or has a trajectory in their career you would like to mirror.*

In addition to language like this, the instructor should also provide a list of articles that the student can choose from if they would prefer not to select their own article—and, doing so further gives students who would like to try to choose their own article a fallback option, should

they need it. The option to select their own article, or an article from the list, scaffolds agency further because students have to make a choice, one way or the other. This language should also be made clear within the assignment itself, for example:

> *If you are interested in choosing your own article, I fully support you in doing so. However, if you find that the process becomes overwhelming or detrimental to completing the project, I have provided this list of articles that you may return to should you get stuck.*

Again, allowing students to make their own decisions, and trusting them to do so, while providing a gentle, guiding hand further perpetuates the thematic climate of critical pedagogy.

Classroom Activities

Like the literacy narrative, the instructor must consider aligning relevant readings to include in the process of introducing the worknets assignment. These sources might include perspectives on rhetorical analysis, including its biases and problematic elements as a method, as well as alternative approaches to analytic work, including indigenous, diverse, and minoritized methods.[10]

Worknets as a project further solidifies the possibility of generative in-class freewrites and discussions, particularly surrounding prior experiences with rhetorical analysis. For example, the instructor might consider the following prompts for students as they scaffold the project:

- What are your prior experiences with rhetorical analysis? How did you feel about the process at the time? If you don't have prior experience with rhetorical analysis, what are your first impressions of this genre?

[10] Further sources for a worknets bibliography are included in Appendix I.

- Often in prior education, rhetorical analysis is introduced through a text given by a rhetor with power and privilege (like a United States president, for example). Why do you think this is such a common trope within the genre?

Alternatively to freewrites and discussions, the instructor might give students micro-narratives in class, or other mini rhetorical artifacts—particularly those from a range of rhetorical positionalities and identities—and ask them in pairs or groups to conduct an abridged analysis of the semantic, bibliographic, affinity and choric phases. To further the development of critical consciousness, the instructor might ask students to specifically analyze the affinity or choric phases within the micro-narratives—which introduces the possibility of analyzing institutional power structures beyond their own, or relevant world events with a specifically international context.

Assignments: Who's in the Room with You and Rhetorical Website Analysis

For an instructor who wishes for a more structured approach to teaching rhetorical analysis, I propose two assignments that can be performed in class or outside of class as a complement to the worknets project. Both these possibilities accord to the theoretical basis of critical pedagogy as well as the genre conventions of rhetorical analysis.

Similar to the Letter to a Literacy Sponsor assignment, one way to personalize rhetorical devices—in this case ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos—is to connect these devices to people within the students' life. See the following example instructions:

> *First, I want you to think about what you do on a normal day. Where you go, the paths you walk, the places you spend your down time, where you work, etc. Then, I want you to consider who, in your life, you either actively or passively "bring" with you throughout that daily routine. In other words, when you're in class, who's in the room with you?*

Who is that invisible presence, that silent support? And, what role do they play? I would like for you to come up with at least four (4) different people. Then, I'd like for you to write a short (100 word or so) description for each person. Tell me who they are, how you know them, what they mean to you, and what rhetorical term they represent in your life. As in, who is your voice of ethos, your voice of logos, your voice of pathos, and your voice of kairos?

Not only does this assignment continue the throughline of the literacy sponsor, it places the rhetorical devices into the hands of the student, and allows them to draw their own interpretive conclusions of 1) how rhetoric works in their daily life and 2) how their community, and the people that surround them, represent these rhetorical devices that might seem obscure, intangible, or otherwise unreachable. Further language to increase student agency might include a stipulation for students who cannot identify a person for each device:

I recognize that we all have different relationships to the people in our lives, and (I hope) that you all realize I want this class to be a safe space, a place of growth and positivity, etc. So, if you do not want to write about people, I am okay with that if you can provide me with four other notable objects that have rhetorical significance to you. In return, I ask that you put as much thought into your objects as I'm describing above. Alternatively, you may present one or two people who are a source of negative rhetoric in your life, though I'd prefer that you do not exclusively do negative representations. In addition, you may not have an individual ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos. You might have more than one logos, or all ethos, etc. I am also okay with this, if you can explain in different words how each person fulfills the role. In other words, I do not want to read the same

description for four different people. If you're using a rhetorical term more than once, you must show nuance and understanding of that term accordingly.

This language releases control, giving students the option to approach rhetoric and rhetorical analysis as feels most true to their experience and identity.

Another possibility for a scaffolding assignment that specifically speaks to critical consciousness is a mini-analysis of an institutional website, with an introduced lens of how the power of that institution works in a digital context. Example language to frame this assignment might read like:

> *'By diversity, we specifically mean working across and valuing differences in social identities including but not limited to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. Diversity work also means recognizing that these differences are embedded in multiple structural inequities such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. Inclusion means creating welcoming campus environments for students, faculty, and staff from different backgrounds.' - Lucy LePeau et al.*
>
> *Throughout this semester, we've discussed what diversity, equity, and inclusion look like in both the writing classroom and the university landscape. While many institutions promise an inclusive landscape, how do their digital platforms actually measure up? What does it mean to be inclusive in practice, versus in policy? This assignment asks you to delve into a university website of your choice, and rhetorically evaluate how the platform is, or is not, inclusive.*

What this assignment asks students to do is consider a university website of their choice, including their own as an option, with specific examples of webpages provided should they need them. Using a given list of rhetorical devices, the assignment combines observations as method

and rhetorical analysis to give students an opportunity to interrogate how the institution positions their inclusive practices:

> *Look up a university webpage of your choosing. You may reference the list of suggestions on this assignment, or explore further, and you may select a private, public, or community institution. As you investigate your source, pay attention to the theoretical devices you see. What are the design choices? Are there accessibility options? What do you notice about the language (is it plain text, or embellished academic text?) What do you notice about any images or students in photos?*

Then, using their observations, students are asked to document their findings. Doing an activity like this, particularly in a low-stakes context like in class, gives students the opportunity to approach rhetorical analysis from a very different perspective, and encourages them to think critically—and specifically—about how power and dominance factor into their experience as students within an institutional landscape.

Conclusions

The analyses in this chapter are intended to provide tangible structure for instructors interested in implementing critical pedagogy within a first-year writing classroom, with a specific venue of Virginia Tech and English 1105. Importantly, the data and evidence presented in this chapter represents just a single approach, and there are many more theory-informed options that an instructor might consider. In the next chapter, I connect the evidence drawn from this analysis to further implications for critical pedagogy in the context of first-year writing more broadly, as well as articulate some of the remaining challenges, unknowns, and other model-building approaches.

Chapter 5: Implications and Discussion

A difficulty in pedagogical models and projects is finding an end-point—a place to leave the reader that draws the curtain closed on a model's particular context, but leaves the door ajar for others to take up the work. In my mind, a model of pedagogy is less a stagnant orchestration of theory, and more a living ecological creation. By this, I mean that there are many more aspects within this presented framework that could grow, and others that are still a bit messy, a bit unfinished.

Wicked and Messy

To take a brief digression, a central tenet of other approaches to teaching—such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL)—and even industry-based design problem solving is embracing the intensity, complexity, and intersectional nature of the given issues at hand, and thus assigning those difficult issues a moniker of "wicked" or even "super-wicked" (Alford & Head, 2017; Fergusson, 2019). Wickedness of a particular problem is also characterized by a lack of possibility for risk-free experimentation; in other words there is no way to design a possible solution without honest, and sometimes messy, attempts. In this reflective chapter, and in contextualizing this project more broadly, I have taken up the design framing of "wicked and messy" (Frame, 2008; Hancock, 2010; Norton, 2012) to consider not only where this study sits in the context of the literature on critical pedagogy, but what its design and implementation might mean for students.

Critical pedagogy is certainly a real-world scenario that is both wicked and messy. Even the very nature of *pedagogy* as a whole is wicked and messy. The question of how to best support undergraduate and graduate students, let alone the instructors, faculty, and WPAs, is wicked and messy. The direction, and future, of higher education as a whole is wicked and

messy. Critical pedagogy, by definition of its subversion and flipping of traditional power structures, has a baseline wickedness all its own. And while messiness might intimidate some instructors, scholarship documents carefully approached messiness as correlating well to fieldwork practices of all kinds (Thorpe, 2012), as well as *eros*, known for its messy ambiguousness as a theory and feeling (Blevins, 2007), and finally love more widely, both in emotional condition and pedagogy (Smith, 2008).

The characterization of wicked and messy does not mean unsolvable, unapproachable, or untenable. Rather, the characterization can instead be viewed as a generative allowance—yes, these questions are difficult to answer, but that difficulty means we can take approaches to solving the questions that are unconventional, or a bit untidy, or courageously against the grain. This project, in many ways, represents an approach to asking the question of how critical pedagogy might exist in the classroom that is unconventional, against the grain, and certainly embracing a level of risk. By extension, calling this project wicked and messy means that it also carries a living alacrity. Arguably, the entire model is a living structure all its own: fluid, adjustable, "breathing" in its sense of contracting and expanding according to its multiple applicable scenarios. Its metaphorical lungs could grow to encompass other curricular set-ups, at Virginia Tech or beyond; or hone in focus to fill a specific unit or project (like the approach to the literacy narrative, for example).

Because succinctly distilling takeaways from any pedagogical project is a challenging task, I want to take a moment to specifically outline in this introductory section of the final chapter how, and why, I have formulated the further implications of this study. First, I reflect on the significance of positing critical pedagogy as a method rather than a methodology. Then, I elaborate on how this modeling works in the context of greater pedagogical conversation and

theories of practice. I theorize what subsequent work might be done with this particular model of study, and beyond—and what that future work might mean for students, both at Virginia Tech and larger contexts. Finally, I discuss what models like this study could signify for instructors and graduate students interested in alternative modes of teaching. Though not the only possible discussion points of this project, these avenues surmise the kairotic moment of this study while angling towards the future.

Method vs. Methodology

Considering critical pedagogy as a method, rather than a methodology, is far more than just an important semantic distinction. Bryman (2008) succinctly posited methods as tools and methodology as the study of those tools, and noted in the conclusion of his theorization that methodology "is concerned with revealing in a systematic manner the practices of researchers and the ideas and presuppositions that lie behind those practices. It is not a springboard for converting non-believers to a cherished method" (p. 167). This is a particularly salient summarization because critical pedagogy, particularly in the eyes of its critics—calling back to the review of scholarship in chapter two—could *easily* be categorized as an indoctrinating methodology to convert instructors to a certain method that is fundamentally flawed at best and doomed to fail at worst.

Yet, what I am asserting in this project is that critical pedagogy, in a gloss of scholarship, is a methodology that *does not* have a specific method to convert so-called "non-believers" (Bryman, 2008). In fact, at a fundamental morphological level, it is challenging to call critical pedagogy a methodology at all, because it has very little observable method to study. This is not to say that no instructor has ever enacted critical pedagogy before—rather that much like Bryman's definition, critical pedagogy exists as an atmospheric heuristic primarily concerned

with ideas and presuppositions behind theoretical practices. Critical pedagogy as a theory, as shown by the survey of scholarship, is concerned less with tangible takeaways or repeatable, imitation-ready steps and far more with the positionality and philosophy that drives its ideals. Sweet (1998) in those four aforementioned characteristics of radical instructorship, represents this dichotomy perfectly. The four characteristics are succinctly summarized, but what does it mean to "surrender considerable power to students"? (Sweet, 1998, p. 101). Or rather, the question I hope to further by the work in this project is what *might* it mean to surrender this power?

As with other pedagogies, even all pedagogies, and more broadly qualitative research in general, the line between critical pedagogy as a method versus a methodology is nebulous. An entire further project could be dedicated to evaluating the slippery binaries between critical pedagogy methodology and method. What is paramount to this study is that while they share similarities, and even exist in a Venn diagram of sorts, theory of critical pedagogy (methodology) and practice of critical pedagogy (method) should not be conflated or fully eclipsed for classroom implementation. A set of theory-based boundaries are not enough for graduate students and instructors to draw from to invent a new method of practice from scratch, particularly because of the significant labor involved. It is critical to have a theory-informed approach that is actually replicable or, at minimum, interpretable, to replicate or begin from.

This, too, is an element I find particularly generative about the method of model-building in this study. In the context of model-building, I illustrate *one* possible method, with take-uppable instances of interpretation that others might adjust, adapt, or otherwise reinvent. This model for English 1105 exists as one piece of a larger puzzle of methods. By calling this model a

method, I do not equate it to *the* method. And, because this model carries its own ecology, it still holds the potential to change and shift.

Signaling the autonomous singularity of this model is important too, as it answers one potential critique of this study: that models like this oversimplify or reduce a complex heuristic to a set of boxes to tick. I see and acknowledge the risk of an instructor taking up this model without care of effort to/in understanding the greater contexts, and thus creating an environment that does not hold up the understood parameters, possibly causing more harm than good. I also understand the reluctance to place a first-year instructor, and a graduate student, in the position of building a model of pedagogy. I recognize it is easy, and valid, to challenge my level of experience, as well as my ability to evaluate the nuances of classroom practice.

However, I counter these points by first, reiterating that this model represents just one humbly and honestly researched option, with low-stakes implementation options, and second, asking the question in return—what is the option to further pedagogical practice, if not through modeling? And if a graduate student—particularly one who falls into a minority identity—cannot design a well-researched model based in concrete theory, then who can? Even more importantly, in this case, who makes the decision of who can and cannot design pedagogical models?

In essence, if we leave critical pedagogy as a methodology and not a method, if we don't attempt to translate theory to practice—and practice in the literal sense, not in the speculative sense—then critical pedagogy and its positives will only become more unreachable, and more unattainable. More and more frequently, the conversation in higher education surrounds how students are unmotivated (McFarlane, 2010), off-task on their computers (Flanigan & Kiewra, 2018), or more generally, just don't seem to care, particularly in a post-pandemic world. But scholarship also shows how students—both millennial and Generation Z—value instructors who

show care, who are approachable, and who prioritize relatability (Miller & Mills, 2019). Miller and Mills (2019) go on to note that the care shown by instructors directly impacted students' willingness to learn, as well as their engagement. The question that rises for me, then—and it is one that undoubtedly causes a ripple of discomfort across all academic contexts—is when do we stop blaming students for their lack of engagement in our courses, and instead turn the reflection onto ourselves to evaluate what we are doing, or are not doing, to cultivate the engagement we desire?

By asking this difficult question, I'm not asserting that critical pedagogy is the ultimate answer. There are students who will be disengaged no matter what, there are students who carry burdens and traumas into the room that we as instructors cannot imagine, and there are plenty of profoundly unmagical days of teaching even in the most magical of classes. I'm aware of this firsthand. But how long do we, as instructors, continue doing the same things, teaching the same way, and echoing the same complaints about students without change? Why do so few concrete documented attempts at changing up pedagogical practices with actual recommendations exist? If higher education is still to uphold its ideals, and more kairotically, if it is to withstand the assault against diversity and freedom in academic expression[11]—why do we continue to be so skeptical of reinventing our practices of teaching?

Critical pedagogy has its failings, its imperfections, and its problems. I believe this study does the due diligence of recognizing these complicating factors. But to the counterpoints that fixate on the problems, rather than the possibilities, I wonder, in return, what the preferable options are. If we discount model building, particularly in the context of the fear of turning

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[11] See recent legislation in Florida under Governor Ron DeSantis, as documented by *Inside Higher Ed* (Moody, 2023).

pedagogy into something cookie-cutter or box-checking, is the alternative to let critical pedagogy exist just as a methodology or theory, and abandon enactment?

If the alternative is not to enact critical pedagogy at all, is that a sounder resolution? One that we as pedagogues feel comfortable to accept? If the alternative to trying and failing or trying with someone else's model is not to try at all, how can we grow in our teaching and continue to prioritize our students? And what is the lesser of two evils—to try with someone else's model, or to try to invent a model at the cost of great personal risk and possible failure?

These questions are wicked and messy. Clearly, as I've illustrated in this subsection, there are also many of them that remain unanswered and existent in the atmosphere. I certainly do not know the answers, and I would argue that the possible answers should vary greatly depending on the context. But I think that their appearance and uprising as a result of this model is a worthy takeaway on its own, and these questions represent a tactile and debatable discourse that furthers the theory of critical pedagogy in administrative contexts, particularly for WPAs.

If, for example, a WPA was to suggest—not mandate, but suggest—this method of implementing the curriculum, how would the reception from faculty and graduate students differ compared to suggesting critical pedagogy as a methodology? Would there be a greater sense of security because the particulars are more clearly established, or does the very nature of suggesting a curricular approach as a body of power violate the oppressed/oppressor structure?

Further curiosities, too, on the administrative or WPA level include what a model like this might mean for WPA labor and the role of hidden writing curricula, institutional policy and the effect on instructional design, and even instructor and GTA training. For example, an interesting underlife (Brooke, 1987) to a model like this is how the method would be taught: not to undergraduates, but to graduate students in a venue like practicum or a pedagogy course.

Pedagogy courses, of course, hold a strong foundation in methodology—but a possible avenue of further study is to examine how model-based methods are taught, both in the context of pedagogy courses and methods courses.

This model raises another interesting complication from a WPA perspective—a modeling of not just curriculum, but of pedagogical recommendation, has the automatic effect of centering a cluster of teachers into one metaphorical body, or a singular teacher. As I stated in chapter one, the WPA or the administrative stakeholder charged with designing a centralized curriculum already needs to think about how to leave enough room for individual instructor expression while also ensuring that the instructor has enough support. As Bastian (2019) describes, much of the role of WPAing is defined by small failures or failings, and yet the pressure on the WPA *not* to fail from an institutional standpoint, a department perspective, or in the eyes of their colleagues is almost crippling. This fear of conceding failure only furthers the pressure on curricular design. Thus, a possibility created by this model is an additional layer of support for instructors that the WPA could provide: as in, here is a curricular map, and here is a series of steps—a method—to teach this curriculum.

Wooten (2020) described—at least cheekily, from the perspective of being a "bad" WPA—one recommendation for lowering pressure and labor as being more deliberate and collaborative in practice. Because a consistent issue raised among graduate teaching assistants (Park, 2004) and instructors (Kahn & Holody, 2012) is a lack of support, having methods and models of pedagogies readily available, even beyond critical pedagogy, might be one way to provide further structure while also protecting the WPA's time, as they may have to invest fewer hours in handling one-off concerns on how to teach a particular project. A risk of this, of course, is that taking the individual teacher out of the curriculum design picture in exchange for a

singular body of teacher actively goes against the tenets of critical pedagogy. But the intention of this model is not to eliminate the teacher completely, nor is it to discount teacher identity—in fact, my hope is it facilitates the opposite effect. Giving concrete steps or replicable approaches only opens more possibilities to foster instructor identity within this heuristic.

I have not fully explored the tensions between methodology and method in this subsection, but I bring them forward as an offering for further research exploration, as well as an example of the wicked and messy nature of this chapter, and the project as a whole. The questions posed in this section may not have answers today or in this immediate moment, but holding them lightly in the implementation of critical pedagogical design is essential.

On (Weak) Theory and (Unfinished) Practice

One of the hidden guides, so to speak, of this project as a whole is Kathleen Stewart's (2008) article "Weak Theory in an Unfinished World" —a personal favorite of mine. Based upon Sedgwick's (1997) concepts of weak theory and reparative theory, Stewart elaborated on weak theory as:

> Theory that comes unstuck from its own line of thought to follow the objects it encounters, or becomes undone by its attention to things that don't just *add up* but take on a life of their own as problems for thought. She [Sedgwick] calls this 'reparative' theory — a good thing — in contrast to a 'paranoid' or 'strong' theory that defends itself against the puncturing of its dream of a perfect parallelism between the analytic subject, her concept, and the world — a kind of razed earth for academic conversation. (p. 72, emphasis in original)

What I find productive about Stewart's theory in this context is it elaborates upon the idea of a method of critical pedagogy as a living ecology, as well as introduces the possibility of critical

pedagogy as an extension of reparative theory. Essentially, critical pedagogy, especially as a model or method, embodies this idea of fertile soil over razed earth.

I have attempted, throughout this project, to present solution-forward thinking rather than an argumentative defense of critical pedagogy. It is not my intention to posit this project as romanticizing a method or arguing for total indoctrination of programs across the country. I have asserted objective honesty, and refrained from proclaiming that critical pedagogy is the best of all pedagogical approaches, because I cannot argue that it is. I certainly don't theorize that critical pedagogy is a representation of paranoid theory or strong theory. Rather, I think it is a living example of reparative theory, carrying Sedgwick's concept of naturally pleasurable, moldable, positive, and possibility-seeking (Love, 2010). Further, what I believe this model illustrates is Stewart's (2008) idea of a theory (or in this case, a method) that is spectral enough, and transparent enough, to encounter possible "objects" as Stewart says, or even problems, and adapt to them. Stewart (2008) continues, on the topic of an "unfinished" world, that "[m]atter in an unfinished world is itself indefinite - a *not yet* that fringes every determinate context or normativity with a margin of something deferred or something that failed to arrive, or has been lost, or is waiting in the wings, nascent, perhaps pressing" (p. 80, emphasis in original).

Essentially, this model—by embracing a weak theory approach, and an unfinished approach—is stable enough to be usable but fluid enough to adjust as it needs to. It is difficult to predict what the future of critical pedagogy, and higher education more broadly, holds: and I do not intend to paint this final chapter with too heavy a brush, but given the aforementioned trends in legislation and governing interference in institutional policy, I argue that the consideration of how to build a culture of empathy, inclusivity, and protection of student voice and identity—perhaps in more subtle ways than obvious ways—is more important than ever.

This study has illustrated critical pedagogy's chameleonic tendencies: in semantics, in theory, in iterations of design, even in its critiques. Critical pedagogy is often declared as dated or dead, or "post" (Wortmann, 2020), or "impossible" (Biesta, 1998b)—and yet, it rises time and time again, in a new disguise, a new body, a new spirit. It remains a topic of conversation, whether called by another name, or centered as the subject of criticism, or even in teacher-centered spaces where it is not enacted. Just by its existence alone, by acting as an alternative beyond teacher-centered pedagogy, it requires instructors to choose an avenue of practice.

In this chameleonic sense, critical pedagogy walks through—and between—many worlds of education. It exists in an unfinished world all its own. It "waits in the wings," as Stewart (2008) wrote, and it is, wholly and in and of itself, indeterminate in many ways. One interpretation of this assertion is that it remains, regardless of even the most sincere model, slippery or flighty. But in the context of this implication and discussion chapter, I suggest that this indetermination also points towards a sense of hope. Critical pedagogy has survived for over fifty years, no small feat in the landscape of education, and its scrappiness, its ability to hide and appear, and its courageous adaptability, to me, indicates its continued validity.

I conjure Stewart's piece because, in the spirit of unfinished worlds, it is difficult, and perhaps beyond the bounds of possibility, to predict what the long-term implications and effects of a model like this might be on students at Virginia Tech, in English 1105, first-year writing more broadly, or disciplines beyond. It is impossible to know at this point, particularly without concrete student data, what the qualitative effectiveness is of this modeling compared to teacher-centered methods. Yet, there is something exciting about this unknowing, this unfinished business. First, I believe this model is promising in its own right because it exists as *something* to implement. It shows a workable, testable model that could generate data to compare to other

approaches. Second, the loose ends, the possibilities this model leaves roughed in rather than immaculately finished, might lead to a creation of a more evolved model, or a more promising model, or a later generation of this model that takes these outlines and improves upon them.

I believe, too, that for other writing programs, or even programs beyond the discipline of rhetoric and composition, across colleges, that models like this one show what is attainable in an often unattainably characterized theory. I hope that by doing the work of drawing concrete connections between a set curriculum and critical pedagogy, others might be similarly inspired to build this type of approach, regardless of what they teach. For example, even if one of these codes presented in chapters three and four can apply to other assignments in rhetoric and writing studies or beyond, that is a cleared path to making critical pedagogy more accessible.

If I learned nothing as I found my own shaky sea-legs in my first year of teaching, it is that students—profoundly—value care and empathy. Will that care and empathy change the life of every student? No. Will it make every student that passes over the threshold enraptured with the idea of learning conventions of college composition? Obviously not. But doing the labor of caring critically, of actively decentering myself, of letting students be agents of their own writing, I felt enough sparks, and enough magic, to pursue designing a model that would make it possible for other instructors to do this work.

As Meyers (2009) wrote, "[s]upportive relationships in the classroom can encourage students to become more invested in learning, enable them to extend beyond their current abilities, and form a bridge for mentorship" (p. 209). This is exactly what I believe this model enables instructors to do—it is a way to build bridges for students and instructors alike, to open doors for support that may feel otherwise illusive.

Particularly in an evolving-pandemic world, I saw instances time and time again where—because I was interested in pursuing the labor and risk of critical pedagogy—students felt safe to take risks. To try new things—whether those things were to try a genre they were uncomfortable with, or to write about a topic they wanted to write about but didn't know how yet, or even to vocalize that they were homesick or lonely or struggling. To be clear, I did not have this model fully formulated before I began teaching, and reflecting upon my experience of teaching English 1105 for the first time in retrospect, there are many aspects of this model that would've made my experience more seamless, less laborious, and easier to critically analyze. I share these snippets of student engagement not to assert that I have tried and tested this model to the maximum capacity, but to illustrate that the model's spirit carries enough power to make a strong impression on students, even in a very limited sample size.

With Virginia Tech's ambitious goals in cultural competence as well as diversity and inclusion, particularly with its continual expansion, demand similarly ambitious and courageous conversation on how to not only enact those goals in policy and motto, but build—and retain—those goals in holistic practice. This model, again, is just a step—but that step could evolve into a scaffolded design of pedagogical practices university-wide. Thus, the future of this model is still unfinished, but that unfinished world is one that could align to a tangible, changed future for students at Virginia Tech and beyond.

Courageous Hope, Hopeful Courage

A rhetorical throughline of this study is hope—my graduate education began with hope, critical pedagogy adopted (and continues to adopt) hope, model-building as a method fosters hope in its possibilities that continues through those unfinished edges and potentialities unexplored. But a mentionable subtext of this hope throughline that this project touches upon,

but doesn't fully explore, is active courage. Courage in teaching, and having the courage to teach, is not a new area of study—Parker Palmer (1998) is one of the most highly revered scholars in his work of documenting the complex concept of teacher bravery. As Cruz et al. (2020) described, Palmer emphasizes across his scholarship a practice of teacher humility, of openness to new ways of thinking, new ways of teaching, even new methods of describing our teaching practices.

Naturally, Palmer's emphasis on humility accords beautifully with the synthesized themes of critical pedagogy explored in chapter two, but I also want to underscore the importance of model building and method making as a further act of both humility and courage. It is difficult, and vulnerable, to answer the reflective questions posed in chapter three as an instructor. It is also incredibly difficult to acknowledge our own failings, our own biases, and our own fears in the context of a group of first-year writing students. It is even more difficult, I would argue, to try something new or against the grain of mainstream pedagogy. What I mean by this statement is not only is it a challenge for a new instructor to find their footing in the context of critical pedagogy, particularly when it exists mostly in theory, but it is equally challenging, and maybe moreso, for an instructor who is mature in their ways of practice to shift to new methods.

This study was designed specifically with new instructors in mind, with graduate students in mind, with those who are willing to think about the classroom differently right from the start in mind—but I do not want to discount, ignore, or discredit the possibilities and complexities of models like this for seasoned instructors and faculty. Just as it takes a tremendous act of bravery for a new instructor or graduate student to enter the classroom for the first time, there is an equal amount of dauntlessness required for an experienced instructor to change their approach. This

shift requires a vulnerable acknowledgement and assessment of why they're called to (or possibly required to) change their practices, as well as a shift in identity from a pedagogy they might be very comfortable with to a pedagogy that is totally new. I suspect, based on the research in this study, that these two qualifications are part of the resistance to critical pedagogy. I realize that by positing a model like this, or if a program were to sponsor a model like this, it might cause a significant rocking of the boat.

But no matter how severe the storm or strong the waves might be, the tides settle again, equal out, and return to calm. And what I hope this model does is act as an artifact that does not so much bridge a gap between old and new, but illustrates a forging of something fresh and neoteric. In an ideal vision, I see this model as a tentative advancing of how we teach first-year writing, but more importantly, how we *write* about first-year writing. This, too, takes courage. It takes courage to try and articulate pedagogy as a method, and it certainly takes a healthy dose of bravery—and even a marked brazenness—to try it out in practice. But in the spirit of hope, and embracing possibility over doom, I argue that there is no moment more important than the present to consider how we can support our students, honor their identities, and provide at least an inkling of light in an increasingly dark world.

So, while some theorize critical pedagogy as having an impossible future, I conclude this project with a bold—but hopeful and courageous—assertion: it is not critical pedagogy that has an impossible future. It is higher education that has an impossible future *without* critical pedagogy. And while this model is just one small star in an enormous, fraught, and complicated galaxy of scholarship, it represents one further act towards making an impossible future less impossible.

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Appendix I

This brief appendix includes two worksheets for instructors to assist in pre-work implementation of this method, as well as two salient reading lists for use in class, one for anti-literacy narratives, and one for varied Worknets options.

Contents

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Summarized Pre-Work Questions for Instructors

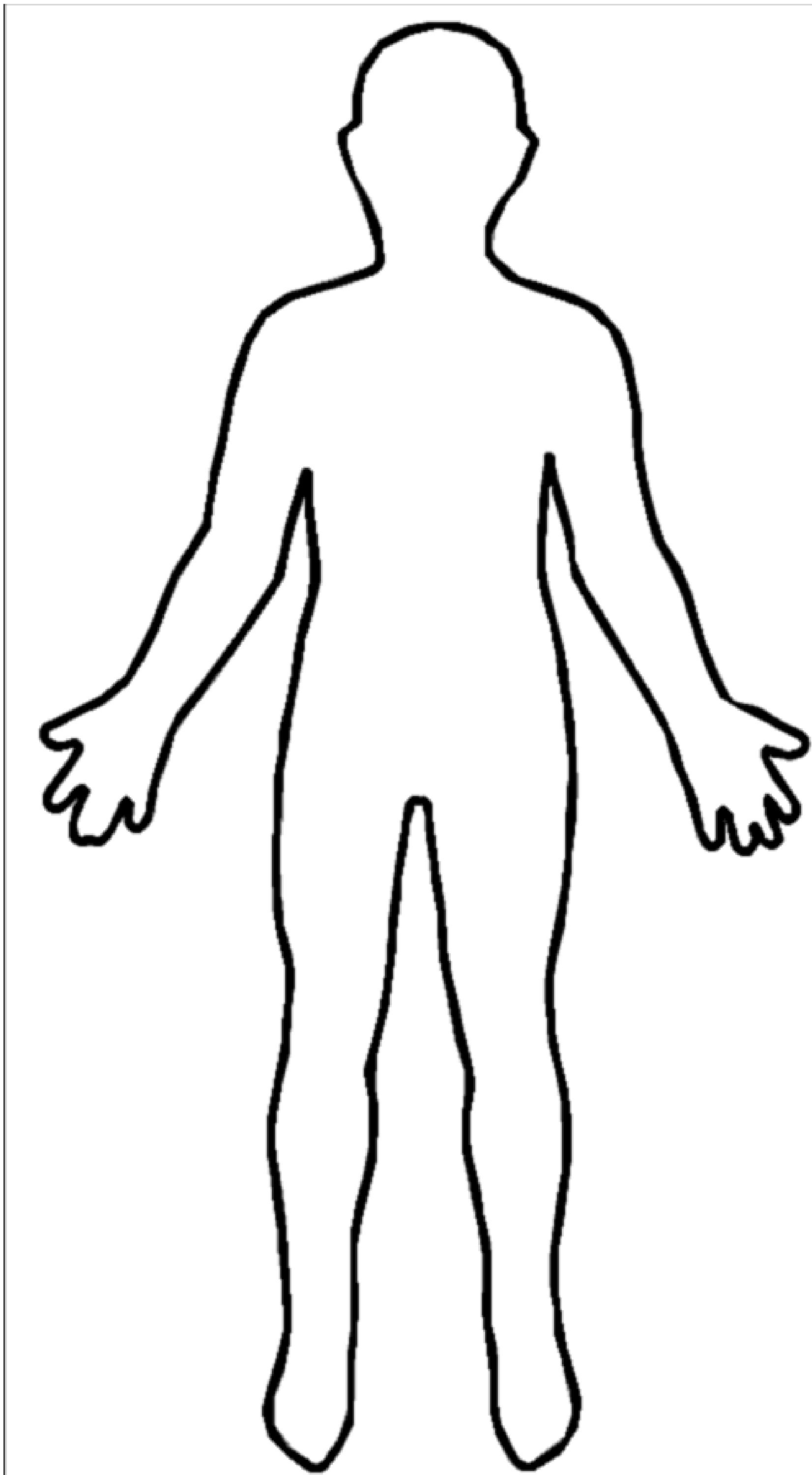
Question Topic	Explored Values
University Demographic ● What are the privileges and power structures within my university that work in my favor? ● Where do my own statuses, identities, and prior experiences place me within the web of these power structures? ● What is the demographic profile of my university? Where does my personal identity fall within this profile?	
University Branding ● What does it mean for me, in consideration of my own positionality, to be an instructor at Virginia Tech (or other university)? How do my own values and experiences align or divert from the university mission? ● Does my teaching philosophy align with the university branding? How so, and where are potential gaps or divergences? ● What are potential oppressed/oppressor structures furthered (even inadvertently or unintentionally) by my university's branding? Who is the intended audience of this messaging?	

<table>
<tr><td>Who is this branding designed to support, and who does it actually support?
● How does my curriculum align with the university mission and brand? How does it divert?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Strategic Plan and Curriculum
● How does my writing classroom fit into the picture of the strategic plan and the general curriculum, from the university's perspective?
● How does my writing classroom fit into the picture of the strategic plan and general curriculum from my perspective?
● Where are the blurred lines, inconsistencies, or other vagaries present in the language of the university strategic plan or general curriculum program? What is left unsaid or unclear?
● Who is articulated as the audience and proponent of these programs? Is the onus placed on the faculty, administration, or the university more broadly? In other words, who's responsible for upholding the listed objectives and goals?</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Writing Program Structure</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

• What are the power structures present within my writing program? Who are the major stakeholders with influence upon the writing program? • What is the main mission or goal of the program? • How do my prior experiences with English courses or other departments impact my day-to-day interactions with my current department or program? • How do my personal values around teaching writing align or divert from my program?	
Course Curriculum • What is the overlying spirit or lifeblood of the curriculum? What opportunities for fostering student curiosity exist within its bounds? • How does the curriculum set respect for student work as a precedent? If it doesn't, how can the language of a syllabus or course map be adapted to reflect this? • Do the course outcomes leave room for instructor interpretation? • What does this course value based on the basic description? What does the course value based on a more nuanced interpretation of that basic description?	

Instructor Intersectionality Worksheet

Use this diagram to draw, describe, or otherwise explore intersections of your personal identity. Then, on the following page, articulate where your identities intersect and divert over the oppressed/oppressor binary.



Oppressed/Oppressor Binary

Oppressed	Oppressor

Anti-Literacy Reading List

Abud, J. (2020, March 18). Why I hate reading. And you should, too. *National Network of State Teachers of the Year,* https://www.nnstoy.org/stoyblog/why-i-hate-reading-and-you-should-too/

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Corcoran, J. (2018, April 15). I was a teacher for 17 years, but I couldn't read or write. *BBC News.* https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-43700153

L., C. (2019, January 2). The worst English teacher in the world. *The Writing Cooperative.* https://writingcooperative.com/the-worst-english-teacher-in-the-world-75f4c50dd966

Olaizola, E. (2020, January 19) I used to love reading. Then I stopped. *Medium.* https://medium.com/@ericolaizola/i-used-to-love-reading-then-i-stopped-f2cf7e8a68cd

Preston, T. (2018, January 9). *The joy of hate reading.* Bookriot. https://bookriot.com/hate-reading/

Rosales, J. (2019, January 17). On being a writer that hates to write. *The Writing Cooperative.* https://writingcooperative.com/on-being-a-writer-that-hates-to-write-29b6d71ba08e

Worknets Reading List

Brandt, D. (1998). Sponsors of Literacy. *College Composition and Communication*, *49*(2), 165–185. https://doi.org/10.2307/358929

Fogarty, M., & Arnold, G. (2021). Are you ready for it? Re-evaluating Taylor Swift. *Contemporary music review*, *40*(1), 1-10.

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