

CHAPTER TWO

An ESL Writer and Her Discipline-based Professor: Making Progress Even When Goals Don't Match

To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce.

Paulo Freire (1970/1997, p. 32)

In this chapter, we present the story of Neha Shah, a 23-year-old senior math major and recent immigrant from India. As we describe Neha's experiences in a writing intensive Introduction to Philosophy class, we attend not only to her reading and writing but also to her goals for the course. Given that Neha's goals diverge in significant ways from those of her teacher, Steve Fishman, we also explore the relationship that develops between this ESL student and her teacher. Although researchers are well aware that the quality of interpersonal relationships between non-mainstream students and their teachers is crucial to these pupils' success (see Cummins, 1986; Gonsalves, 2002; McLeod, 1997), this affective dimension of learning has been little studied at the college level, perhaps because attention to relationships is viewed at the university as women's work (Grego & Thompson, 1996; Rodby, 1996). As we attend to the interactions between Neha Shah and Steve Fishman, we take seriously the idea that if student and teacher are unable to develop common objectives and, as a result, work at cross-purposes, the student's performance often suffers (see Durst, 1999; Nelson, 1990; Smith, 1997).

As we investigate Neha Shah's efforts to acquire philosophic literacy, and as we describe the contradictions between her goals and

Fishman's, we also explore Steve's pedagogy: a dialogic approach rooted in the educational philosophies of Dewey (1916/1967), Gramsci (1971), and Freire (1970/1997). This approach encourages students to be active, to alternate teacher and learner roles, and to develop solidarity through cooperative, problem-posing inquiry. We found that despite Neha Shah's and Steve Fishman's lack of common purpose, and despite what Fishman took to be this ESL student's underpreparedness for his course, his approach facilitated her progress in Intro to Philosophy.

By "progress in Intro to Philosophy," we mean Neha Shah's ability to achieve at least some of her professor's objectives for his students. These included, as Fishman explains in more detail below, the ability to effectively read and write Standard American English within the context of philosophy. Of course we realize that the notion of progress in the classroom has been the subject of considerable debate (see Cummins, 1986; Dean, 1986/1999; Horner & Lu, 1999; Leki, 1992; Nieto, 1996; Villanueva, 1993). We also realize that Fishman's teacher-centered definition—his emphasis on exploring what he considers "cultural knowledge"—exposes him to the charge that Neha was driven toward assimilation in his class, that his course created unnecessary tensions for her between her loyalties to her home and adopted cultures. Although we ourselves, as co-researchers, clashed at times about this issue, McCarthy, in this chapter, sets aside her own viewpoint until the coda as she works to capture her teacher-informant's perspective.

We divide this chapter into three sections. In the first, Steve Fishman relates his classroom goals to the educational theories of Dewey, Gramsci, and Freire. He also presents his initial response to this novice writer. In the second part, Lucille McCarthy reports our collaborative study of Fishman's classroom, describing the experiences and texts of our ESL focus student, Neha Shah, as well as the instructional supports Neha found most helpful. In the final section of this chapter, the coda, we engage in a dialogue in which we reveal McCarthy's concerns about Fishman's pedagogical approach to Neha Shah.



Part One

A Discipline-based Professor's Overall Classroom Goal: Exploring Cultural Knowledge

STEVE FISHMAN

When I consider the four categories of school goals that we name in our introductory chapter—student career preparation, exploration of cultural knowledge, promotion of social reform, and student personal growth—I take the second of these, exploration of cultural knowledge, as my primary classroom objective. As an instructor of philosophy, I aspire, above all else, to promote cooperative student consideration of canonic texts, discussion of ethical, social, and epistemological issues, and practice of philosophic ways of thinking. However, I do not see my primary classroom goal as incompatible with the other three educational aims we have described as historically significant. This is because I urge my students to find connections between my course subject matter and their non-school concerns: professional, social, and personal. This compatibility of my main classroom objective—exploration of cultural knowledge—with other school goals—student career preparation, promotion of social reform, and student personal growth—is important to me because it widens my chance of finding mutual ground or overlap between my own educational aims and the aspirations of my students.

BEING SPECIFIC ABOUT OBJECTIVES FOR UNDERGRADUATE PHILOSOPHIC THINKING AND WRITING

My overall goal of developing a classroom in which students cooperatively explore cultural knowledge undergirds the five more specific objectives I have for student writing and thinking. I now list these, relating them to alternate typologies proposed by several

composition and feminist researchers. In class discussion and student writing, I expect to see the following:

1. *Argument Extraction.* The ability to read a philosophic article and demonstrate an understanding of it. By this I mean recognizing the major points of an author's argument and how the author defends them. Argument extraction also requires that students use at least some of their own language to show that they have made the author's argument their own. This sort of reading and writing is related to Sternglass's (1993, 1997) notion of writing-to-recall-facts, Rose's (1989) summarizing, Smitherman's (1977) summarizing and explaining, and Belenky and her colleagues' (1986) notions of received and connected knowing. Argument extraction, as I see it, not only facilitates the exploration of cultural ideas, it can also forward students' career preparation by helping them read critically.
2. *Argument Evaluation.* The ability to listen and read carefully in order to evaluate an argument or position. Such evaluation may include not only appraising an argument in and of itself but comparing it to other positions as well. This sort of thinking and writing recalls Sternglass's (1993, 1997) writing-to-analyze, Shaughnessy's (1977) comparing and interpreting, Rose's (1989) classifying and analyzing, and Belenky and her co-researchers' (1986) notion of critical or separate knowing. My stress on argument evaluation forwards exploration of cultural ideas and may also promote social reform by increasing students' ability to critique the status quo.
3. *Intellectual Reconstruction and Contextualization of One's Own Position.* The ability to see that behind alternative positions on ethical issues, and behind certain key terms (like freedom, knowledge, and morality), lie differing assumptions about the constitution of the good life, the physical world, and human nature. I want students to be able to step into various positions—and step back from their own—in order to reconstruct the fundamental assumptions undergirding these positions. This sort of thinking and writing is related to Smitherman's (1977) questioning and

answering and Shaughnessy's (1977) hypothesizing and contextualizing. It is also an amalgam of what Belenky and her co-researchers (1986) call connected and critical knowing. This third objective is important not only for exploration of cultural knowledge but also for personal growth as students learn more about the sources of their own beliefs.

4. *Application of Philosophy for the Purpose of Critique.* The ability to find connections between one's own life and course subject matter. In other words, I want students to apply philosophic concepts and methods to personal experience in order to organize and challenge that experience in new ways. In turn, I want them to honor their own experiences by using them to critique both the positions presented by class texts, the teacher, and their classmates as well as the social structures in which they live. This sort of work resembles Sternglass's (1993, 1997) writing-to-create-new-knowledge and Belenky and her colleagues' (1986) constructed knowing. These transactions between philosophy and students' understanding of their life trajectories can facilitate exploration of cultural knowledge, social reform, and personal growth.
5. *Coherence in Student Texts.* The ability to develop and organize one's paper around a central theme or thesis. In other words, I want students to be able to write coherently. By this I mean sticking to the topic, being deliberate about arguments, explaining key terms, and offering appropriate transitions so that readers can follow a student author's line of thinking. My desire echoes Larson's (1991) finding that faculty across the curriculum want student writing to have a clear subject, make a specific point about that subject, and exhibit logical organization (p. 145). I also want students to write in Standard American English. Coherent pupil writing and increased mastery of the dominant code are, as I see it, important for all four historically significant school goals.

With regard to Neha Shah, it was the lack of coherence and clarity in her early homework papers that first led me to doubt her preparedness for my course. However, before providing details about

my initial response to Neha's early written assignments, I further explicate my pedagogical goals and aspirations by relating them to the theories of three influential philosophers of education.

USING DEWEY, GRAMSCI, AND FREIRE TO EXPLICATE THE ROOTS OF MY CLASSROOM GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS

In explicating the roots of my classroom goals and aspirations, the work of three well-known educational theorists, Dewey (1916/1967), Gramsci (1971), and Freire (1970/1997), is helpful, although their influences on me are in unequal proportions. Because of my commitments to student exploration of cultural knowledge, social reform, and student personal growth, Deweyan pedagogical principles predominate over those of Gramsci and Freire. This is because Dewey's educational goals—ones which are shaped by his political stance as a gradualist reformer—seem closer to mine than Gramsci's or Freire's. For example, whereas Dewey (1916/1967) asks progressive teachers to focus on the quality of student experience, cooperative pupil projects, and transmission of society's ideas and practices, Freire's (1994) political radicalism leads him to see the task of liberatory teachers in more explicitly class-conscious terms. He tells teachers that regardless of their subject matter their goals should include raising student consciousness about bourgeois-worker conflict. Specifically, humanizing teachers should help their students unveil the realities behind the distortions perpetrated by the dominant class so that they may, one day, change the social order (p. 78).

Dewey's Politics and Pedagogy As Closer To My Own Than Gramsci's or Freire's

Regarding the politics behind their pedagogies, I read Dewey and Freire as wanting the same social end: the further extension of democracy into economic and civic spheres. However, I view Dewey's means to this end as contrasting with Freire's since Dewey

(1935/1991), unlike Freire, vigorously denies that the key to achieving this political goal rests with proletarian victory (pp. 54–55). Dewey doubts that such a victory is possible, and even if it were, he argues, we would be no better off unless we changed the way we think about our social problems. Rather, Dewey wants us to apply to the social world the step-by-step, experimental, and gradualist methods of science that have been so successfully applied to the natural world. He (1930/1988c) writes, “The general adoption of the scientific attitude in human affairs would mean nothing less than a revolutionary change in morals, religion, politics, and industry” (p. 115; see also Dewey 1921/1983, pp. 433–435).

Because Dewey (1935/1991) so respects the scientific method, or what he calls “organized intelligence” (p. 61), and because this method has arisen within capitalism, Dewey views capitalism in less negative ways than Freire (1994, pp. 94–96). Dewey (1930/1988c) believes, for example, that it would be “in accord with the spirit of American life” for a council of capitalist owners, labor representatives, and public officials to coordinate and plan the regulation of US industrial activity (p. 98). He (1939/1988d) also advocates that economic reforms be designed by members of “freely functioning occupational groups” like medical professionals. However, no matter the source of proposals for reform, the bottom line for Dewey is always that these proposals be judged by their ability to increase “free choice . . . on the part of individuals” (p. 96, 94). That is, while acknowledging serious problems with the way wealth gets distributed within capitalism, Dewey argues that this system does have positive features, most notably its liberal tradition, which emphasizes the individuality and liberty that allow for collaborative, experimental inquiry to flourish. It is the further development of this sort of collaborative inquiry—not the victory of the working class—that Dewey claims will lead to more equitable social arrangements. (For a similar reading of Dewey’s aims as radical and his means as non-radical, see Westbrook, 1991, p. 179. For an alternative view, see Hook, 1939/1995, chapter 8.)

These progressive features of capitalism are what Dewey urges teachers to build upon in their classrooms. He (1935/1991) believes that educators need to encourage students to develop their

individuality while, at the same time, engaging in the sort of cooperative inquiry “which has won triumphs . . . in the field of physical nature” (p. 51). His hope is that pupils will, ultimately, use the collaborative methods they have practiced in the classroom to reform repressive institutional relations and personal attitudes outside of school.

Not only is Dewey’s reformist approach closer to my own than the more radical ones of Freire and Gramsci, Dewey is also more optimistic than either Freire or Gramsci about the possibility of actually being a progressive teacher within the school establishment. For instance, whereas Dewey (1916/1967) believes schools are our “chief agency” for establishing a “better” future society (p. 20, 316–319), Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) doubts that schools can play more than a limited role in social reform since they are under capitalist control. In fact, he tells us, liberatory teachers are always swimming against the current and can expect “constantly to be punished” (p. 37; see also Freire, 1976, p. 70).

It is hardly surprising that I would find Dewey’s pedagogy and politics more useful than Gramsci’s and Freire’s given the fact that Dewey developed his philosophy under classroom and social conditions more closely resembling my own. Whereas the pedagogies of Gramsci and Freire are significantly influenced by their work with urban poor and rural peasants in informal instructional settings, Dewey generated many of his insights by studying middle-class children at the University of Chicago Laboratory School. With regard to his politics, Dewey had many more spaces than Gramsci or Freire in which he could democratically oppose the status quo. Put differently, the class distinctions that Gramsci witnessed in Sardinia and Freire observed in Northeast Brazil were more pervasive, socially oppressive, and dangerous to oppose than anything Dewey encountered in Burlington VT, Chicago, or New York. (For more on the different contexts in which Dewey and Freire worked, see Betz, 1992.)

Dewey’s influence on my classroom practice is most noticeable in the way I try to establish the conditions for collaborative student inquiry into cultural knowledge. Specifically, I organize my classroom around Dewey’s (1916/1967) idea of desirable social groups

and their modes of communication. This means I seek to increase exchanges among class members so that we may engage in open give and take about philosophic subject matter and our different points of view. My intention is to develop common purpose around commitment to our mutual learning, to an exploration of ideas which is honest and genuine enough that, at least at times, we forget who is teacher and who is student. My hope is that this expanded communication will not only generate collaborative cultural inquiry but will also lead to a type of social reform. That is, following Dewey (1916/1967), I hope this reconstruction of the usual teacher-pupil relationship will democratize the classroom by breaking down some of the racial, class, and cultural barriers which often separate students from one another and from their teacher (p. 87, 160, 289; see also 1927/1988a).

In addition to exploration of cultural knowledge and promotion of social reform, Dewey helps me encourage student personal growth as I try to follow his advice to integrate pupil interests and my course subject matter. Put in Deweyan (1902/1990a) terms, I want pupils to connect to philosophy by using their own objectives (or “for-whats”) to determine which aspects of my subject-matter deserve their primary attention (their “to-whats”). I also want pupils to use what they already know as bridges (or “with-whichs”) to explore that which they find unfamiliar in my curriculum (pp. 272–76).

As I have said, in striving for student exploration of philosophy, social reform, and personal growth through a Deweyan form of cooperative inquiry, my approach does not fully coincide with the more class conscious orientations of Freire and Gramsci. Unlike Freire (1970/1997), I neither see my classroom as divided between the oppressive banking teacher and oppressed student vessels, nor do I see my principal objective as preparing my students to struggle against and disempower the dominant elite (pp. 38, 55–58, 124–25). Unlike Gramsci (1971), I do not view my course as part of the “formative,” “disinterested” education of the underclass, one designed to develop the “organic intellectuals,” the “permanent persuaders,” needed to create the cultural climate for a worker/peasant revolution (pp. 27, 6, 10).

Gramsci's and Freire's Impact on My Pedagogy

The fact that I do not put unveiling class antagonism at the top of my agenda does not mean I am indifferent to students' complacency about the negative consequences of American economic inequalities, racism, and sexism. That is, Dewey's strong influence on me does not reduce my appreciation of important aspects of Freire's and Gramsci's approaches to education. For instance, these latter two theorists, like Dewey, want students to be active, to teach as well as learn in the classroom (Dewey, 1916/1967, p. 160; Freire 1970/1997, pp. 53, 61; 1970/2000, p. 27; Gramsci, 1971, p. 350). In addition, it is Freire (1970/1997), not Dewey, who shows me the difficulty of achieving this sort of democratized space. Freire underlines the chasms separating instructors and pupils when he warns about the supposed "generosity" of members of the middle-class, alerting me that instructors who seek to be "helpful" to the oppressed, to move to solidarity with the exploited, may "bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations" (p. 42).

I also learn from both Freire and Gramsci about the difficulty of getting students to use philosophy to reconstruct their own experiences and the dominant class's values and practices. That is, although Dewey wants students to be critical and aware of social inequities, Freire and Gramsci teach me how hard it is to get a critical angle on the exploitive relations in capitalism that have become so familiar as to be almost invisible. In particular, I profit from Gramsci's (1971, pp. 12–13) discussion of hegemony. Gramsci, a leader of the Italian communist party in the 1920s, rejects the classical Marxist idea that analysis of the forces of production can, by itself, enable us to predict the social future. Instead, Gramsci moves beyond this positivistic Marxism to recognize the role of civil society and personal experience in the development of hegemony (pp. 184, 410–412). He explains that the controlling industrial class governs by assent, successfully shaping the national culture and, thereby, tacitly influencing the thinking of the proletariat so that it aligns itself with the goals and aspirations of the bourgeoisie (see also Freire, 1970/1997, p. 59; 1970/2000, p. 25; 1994, p. 56).

Although Gramsci emphasizes the difficulty of examining our fundamental presuppositions, he does share with Dewey (1925/1989, p. 35) the hope that philosophy can be helpful in this regard. According to Gramsci (1971), one way of deconstructing the bourgeois grip on national culture is through philosophic reflection. He praises philosophers for their ability to “inventory” their thoughts, to understand and make explicit the ways in which their ideas have been shaped by various intellectual currents and systems. Such self-consciousness, Gramsci says, leads to lives that are less the result of a “fragmentary collection of ideas and opinions” and more the product of a consciously chosen and coherent direction. Philosophy, he concludes, helps people order “in a systematic, coherent and critical fashion, [their] own intuitions of life and the world” (pp. 324, 327; see also Dewey, 1916/1967, p. 161).

Freire (1970/2000), although primarily concerned with literacy programs for agrarian peasants as opposed to Gramsci’s cultural programs for industrial workers, faces a similar challenge: how to develop critical understanding, specifically, how to help peasants “problematize” their social and political situation (p. 27). Getting his adult students to “objectify” the dominator’s practices is not an easy task, as Freire points out, since they have “internalized” the oppressor’s views (1970/2000, p. 24; 1970/1997, pp. 29–30). He writes, “The dominated consciousness does not have sufficient distance from reality to objectify it in order to know it in a critical way” (1970/2000, p. 48). This explains why Freire’s literacy programs are designed to teach language not as politically neutral but as a potent shaper of behavior and social structure. His use of slides or pictures, what he calls “codifications,” is intended to bring about the sort of objectification he describes, helping peasants to “problem-pose,” to critically examine the oppressor ideology by viewing their work, family, and living situations from new angles (1970/2000, p. 27).

My own classroom efforts to achieve the ideological self-consciousness that Gramsci and Freire rightly describe as elusive rests, as I have said, on collaborative inquiry. My faith is that, as students work together, they will hear other points of view that force them to critically examine and clarify their own. I also try to make the familiar

seem unfamiliar by using what I hope will be provocative readings: selections from political activists like Fanon (1965/1995), Carmichael—later called Kwame Toure—(1966/1995), and Russell (1929/1970) as well as from feminists like Daly (1973/1995), Starhawk (1979/1995), and hooks (1981/1995). My intention is to use these texts to help us view from fresh perspectives the language and values of such familiar, and often exploitive, institutions and practices as the patriarchal family, personal and cultural racism, private property, and capitalist competition and acquisitiveness.

I now turn from the theory that underlies my teaching goals to describe my efforts to enact it in my classroom practice. I begin McCarthy's and my report on Neha Shah's experiences in my Intro to Philosophy course by describing my responses to her early homework papers and class participation.

MY CLASSROOM GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS AND AN ESL WRITER

On the first day of my writing intensive Introduction to Philosophy class in fall 1998, I asked students to freewrite about their home cultures and the values they took from them. My 25 students and I sat in a circle, and, after ten minutes, I looked up and asked everyone to read over what they had written or, if they had not finished, to move their work toward closure. After I made a few changes on my own three paragraphs, I put down my pencil and scanned the classroom, wondering which student to call on to get us started. As I have already explained, to promote exploration of cultural knowledge and the practice of philosophic ways of thinking, I want open give and take as we explore different points of view. On that first day, Neha Shah, the 23-year-old senior math major and focus of this chapter, was sitting immediately to my right. I called on her first, thinking she might say something about her home culture which would challenge my students' (and my own) values and beliefs. By giving a prominent place in our first discussion to a woman of color, I also intended to show that I favor an inclusive class community, one in which minority or unorthodox positions are valued and explicated with care.

Although Neha spoke very quietly in accented English, I could follow her responses to my questions about her freewrite. That is, her contribution during that first class period raised no warning flags in me. However, what did get my attention were her first homework assignments (for course assignments, see appendices B and C). They totally defied my expectations for student writing since they were so different from papers I had typically received during my 31 years of teaching. Although I gave Neha passing grades on these early papers—not wanting to discourage her and hoping she would somehow improve—concern was building for me in three areas.

First, Neha’s surface errors and mismanagements were serious and frequent. For example, on her homework response to an essay by Lin Yutang (1937/1995), she wrote, “On the day of his mother funeral, he felt himself by selfish. This defines his not arrogant. And by Confucian colleague experienced, he felt like he cut off his tie with Christianity. Like this, he calling by himself a ‘pagan.’”

Although in the above example, I could figure out what Neha wanted to say, there were times I could not. So my second area of worry was one Shaughnessy (1977, p. 121) noted long ago. Discipline-based teachers, Shaughnessy rightly observes, are generally more interested in *what* students say than *how* they say it, and thus they ignore errors when they can. I typically do that. However, when Neha’s writing mismanagements made it impossible for me to follow her thinking, I started to realize she presented me with an unusual problem. In other words, the level of Neha’s papers seemed significantly below that of most of the other 24 students in my Intro class, all of whom were native speakers. For instance, I was mystified when, in her homework response to hooks’s (1981/1995) claim that women are unaware of the extent to which their psyches have been warped by racism and classism, Neha wrote, “I agree with her because I am a girl. I know how is woman’s nature. Woman has a jealous characteristic than man.” I was equally confused when Neha attempted, two assignments later, to summarize Holmes’s (1929/1973) arguments for immortality. She concluded, “Therefore, for believing in immortality or for being ready to believe in immortality, is the primarily interesting fact that there is no reason for not

believing in immortality.” (For more on faculty perceptions of ESL students’ errors, see Johns, 2001; Leki, 1991, 1992, 1995; Santos, 1988. See also Harrington & Adler-Kassner, 1998.).

My third concern about Neha’s writing focused on those occasions when I realized she did not understand the assigned text. That is, I began to suspect Neha not only had a writing problem but a reading one as well. For example, in response to an essay by Carmichael (1966/1995), she wrote:

On the behalf of nonviolence and integration, Carmichael used political and economic power term. . . . In this article, he gave one example and compare to the real life. When he was a boy, he used to see movie of Tarzan. He saw in movies, White Tarzan used to beat up the black natives because they were black in skin. By this he explained that White Tarzan beat black native in movies, same way it happens in real life that White people hate and ignore black people, not because black are ignorant, or not because they are stupid, only because they are black.

Regarding Neha’s first sentence, it seemed to me that she had misunderstood Carmichael’s point. Whereas she describes Carmichael as working on “behalf” of nonviolence and integration, in fact he argues against it. Regarding her response to Carmichael’s example, she again seems to miss his point. He is less concerned with the fact that Tarzan is beating up Black natives than he is with the fact that he, as a young African American, was rooting for Tarzan.

In pointing out my concerns about Neha’s writing—my worries about her surface errors, her inability at times to make herself clear, and her misunderstanding of assigned texts—I do not mean that I blamed Neha. Nor did I take these writing problems as a sign she was not highly intelligent, diligent in her work, and serious about her education. However, as sympathetic as I was to Neha’s situation, I could not just ignore her reading and writing difficulties. To the contrary, very much in my mind was the fact that my class was designated “writing intensive” and it was my job to certify that students who passed it were reading and writing Standard American English at the college level. I simply had no idea how, in a matter of 14 weeks, I could bring Neha’s reading and writing in English up to

the level of her better prepared classmates. As a discipline-based teacher with only one ESL student, I felt I could not adopt the sort of pedagogy recommended for ESL and “basic” composition classes in which students devote much of the semester to studying, celebrating, and building upon their home languages and cultures (see, for example, Campbell, 1997; Dean, 1986/1999; Kutz, Groden, & Zamel, 1995). That is, I did not think it was appropriate for me to simply jettison my philosophic curriculum, a diverse and fairly challenging set of texts and issues that I believed it was my responsibility to teach and for which the majority of my students were prepared.

In sum, as I reflected on Neha’s early papers, I felt handcuffed. If Neha was unprepared for my course, I, as a teacher, was equally unprepared for her.

The Ghost of Louis Heller: Whose Errors? Whose Expectations?

In being taken aback by Neha’s writing, I believe my reactions may have resembled those of Louis G. Heller, the CCNY classics professor alarmed by the way CUNY implemented its open-admissions policy in the fall of 1970 (Heller, 1973; Lu, 1992/1999a; Traub, 1994). Although my university situation nearly three decades later was far, far different from Heller’s, my knee-jerk response to Neha was the same as his to the new CUNY students: I viewed her as not belonging in my classroom. My first thought was, “Golly, her work wouldn’t get a passing grade from my old high school English teacher, Mrs. Wachs.” My second thought was, “With everything else the university is asking me to do, teaching this student to read and write is a particularly difficult burden to add.”

However, I could not dismiss Neha, as I have said, because of her underpreparedness, nor, in contrast to Heller (1973) and many of his CUNY colleagues, could I blame outside militants and misguided politicians for her presence in my classroom (chapters 3, 14, 19). Thus, I was, I have to admit, a little embarrassed by my reactions to Neha’s work. Obviously, it was people at my own university who had decided that she belonged in my Intro course. So I began to doubt myself. Perhaps the important errors were not on Neha’s pages but in my responses to her. Perhaps the unreasonable expectations were

not hers but mine. This admission put me in a painful moral vise, trying to honestly evaluate Neha's writing while, at the same time, being sensitive to her special situation. On the one hand, her work deserved low grades because it reflected not only poor command of Standard American English but also limited understanding of the assigned philosophic texts. On the other hand, I knew Neha faced unusual hardships, ones which might justify more lenient or atypical evaluation. But this did not seem right either because I suspected my other students also shouldered hardships, ones that were just less apparent. If this were true, how in the world could I construct a fair evaluation system which would take into account all the apparently relevant factors?

Further compounding my dilemma was Neha's unhappiness—as McCarthy describes below—with my responses to her writing. My saying anything negative about her work seemed to open a wound, as if I were a customs official turning her away at the Ellis Island gate. Her passing grade in freshman composition at my own university was a passport I was now questioning. When I first spoke with Neha about her writing, she seemed surprised and offended. She told me that her instructor in composition the previous summer had given her an "A" because, as Neha put it, "she understood I have been in your country only a short time." I do not know exactly what I expected, but I thought, "Even if Neha cannot be grateful to me for pointing out her writing difficulties—for not lowering my standards—I wish she would at least acknowledge the importance of improved writing for her future."

Counterbalancing these early, negative conversations with myself about Neha, my sense she was out of place in my Intro classroom, were recollections which I could not put aside of my grandfather, Moishe Gluck. Had this unschooled Hungarian peasant come to America to improve his life so his privileged grandson could, two generations later, prevent other immigrants from improving theirs? If I knew nothing else, I was sure he was not dreaming that dream as he headed steerage toward the lamp beside Lazarus's golden door.

These were my initial thoughts and concerns about Neha. In the sections which follow, Lucille McCarthy offers Neha Shah's

perspective as the only non-native speaker among my 25 philosophy students. Lucille will describe Neha's goals and aspirations for the course and further detail the ways they differed from mine. She will also try to account for the fact that despite the mismatch of Neha's and my aims, and despite our mutual unpreparedness for one another, Neha was able, in significant ways, to reach some of my course goals.



Part Two

Student-Teacher Relations: a Mismatch of Goals and Expectations

LUCILLE McCARTHY

Neha Shah's goals in Introduction to Philosophy bore little resemblance to those Steve Fishman has outlined above. Whereas Steve wants exploration of cultural knowledge and attention to philosophical ways of making meaning, Neha simply wanted to pass the course so she could graduate at the end of the semester. She could, then, she told me, get back on track with her life plans, a trajectory that had been seriously disrupted by her immigration to the U.S. two years earlier. That students' and teachers' goals and aspirations may differ significantly is, of course, well known. For example, Durst (1999), in his book-length study, *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition*, describes the conflicts between a "critical literacy teacher" at the University of Cincinnati and her "pragmatic" students. Whereas the instructor wanted students to engage in self-reflection, understanding the ideologies or masked values behind various uses of language, her pupils wanted only to learn writing skills that would enhance their workplace success. At UCLA, Smith (1997) describes a similar incongruity between teachers' humanist, social change agendas and the careerist goals of their composition students (see also Shor & Freire, 1994, p. 69).

Like the students Durst and Smith describe, Fishman's pupils are also marketplace-oriented. Although Fishman is well aware that virtually none of his pupils will major in philosophy or become a professional philosopher, he nevertheless sees exploration of cultural knowledge as practical for them. That is, he believes his course is relevant no matter what his students' career objectives. Whether they become engineers, scientists, or accountants, they need to be intellectually and socially aware, attending to the connections between their professional lives and the philosophic and moral issues they encounter in his class. These issues—for example, race, class, and gender discrimination—will provide the context for their work lives. As Dewey (1897/1964a, pp. 118–119) tells us, advanced math students, for example, should know the “business realities,” and the social relationships behind the realities, in which their skills will be used (see also Du Bois, 1930/1973, pp. 72–82). Intellectually and socially aware accountants, thus, focus not only on math. They also ask about the purpose of their work: whom is it serving, and what are its consequences?

Stepping into the Student's Shoes: Impediments to Achieving Common Goals

Throughout the semester, Steve Fishman and Neha Shah retained their divergent goals. Steve never succeeded in showing Neha the possible significance of philosophy for her professional and personal concerns, and Neha never succeeded in convincing Steve that the workload he imposed on her was unreasonable. Although limited English proficiency partially explains Neha's alienation from Steve's course, two other factors also played a powerful role. These impediments to her wholehearted participation were, first, that she believed she had been unfairly required to take the class. Second, she found its curriculum irrelevant. Both of these impediments were based on the particular sort of “bicultural ambivalence” that Neha experienced in this setting, her particular conflicts as a recent immigrant to this country (Cummins, 1986, p. 22).

An Unexpected Detour through “Unfair” Requirements

Neha believed from the start that it was “unfair” she had to take Intro to Philosophy. In my first interview with her, in mid-September, Neha described a distressing interruption in her schooling, one that challenged the self-image of this serious and ambitious student. Neha and her parents, both professionals, had come to the U.S. two years earlier because they knew it was an “advanced country” where they could learn about “new technologies [that were] invented day by day.” Before arriving, she had completed her BS degree in mathematics at a university in India and thus came to the U.S. at age 21 seeing herself as already “educated,” that is, fully trained in math at the undergraduate level and ready to begin her graduate work. Starting her masters degree immediately was important, she explained, because this was the “traditional” path in her family and culture. Young people complete the masters degree right after the bachelors and are, then, able to secure a good job and get married.

However, to Neha’s understandable consternation, this timetable for achieving her aspirations was disrupted when, as she put it, “the American system did not accept the value of my degree.” That is, before granting her a BA degree from the University of North Carolina Charlotte (UNCC), the dean required another year of general distribution courses: humanities and social sciences classes, a composition course, and one course designated “writing intensive.” (Two of the latter are generally required for graduation at UNCC.) This was painful for Neha. Not only were American educational authorities contradicting Indian ones who said she was already “educated,” the Americans were also putting her in a difficult situation personally. It was embarrassing, Neha told me, to be 23 years old and still living at home, her marriage yet unarranged. However, despite being “mad” at the dean for this setback—one Neha viewed as a kind of insult—she knew she needed the U.S. degree and had little choice but to comply with his requirements. Neha described her distress, as well as her uncertainty about which educational authorities to trust, in her end-of-semester, multi-draft essay which she titled “Confuse to choose the best way for a good life.” She explains that the disruption in her plans caused by this conflict

between American and Indian systems made her feel “sad and sorry” for herself. “[I am like] a traveler [who] does not know which way is correct road to get his or her place.”

A Course Serving Only One Instrumental Goal: Getting a Degree

Neha Shah was, then, in the unenviable position of being a successful student in her home country who is, nevertheless, deemed “uneducated,” as she put it, by the university system in her adopted homeland. Yet the sting of the dean’s insult might have wounded Neha less had she been able to view these extra required courses as serving some functions for her. Although Neha ultimately admitted to having benefitted from taking philosophy, she was never able to develop personally meaningful objectives or “for-whats,” to borrow Dewey’s term (1902/1990a, pp. 272–74). And Fishman was unable to help her in this regard. This distressed him because he knows, again following Dewey, that when teachers cannot help students develop their own reasons for doing course work—reasons other than just getting a passing grade—pupils have trouble finding foci of interest (“to-whats”) and building bridges (“with-whichs”) to connect prior and new knowledge (1902/1990a, pp. 272–76). Such students often remain passive, their class participation perfunctory.

Writing Improvement Was Not a Goal. A “for-what” or goal that students in Fishman’s “writing intensive” course frequently identify for themselves is writing improvement. Although they may care little about cultural knowledge, and be little inclined to self-reflection, most acknowledge that, because they need to know how to write, Steve’s “writing intensive” philosophy course can be vocationally useful. Neha, by contrast, believed that, for a mathematician, she already wrote well enough. Mathematicians don’t need to write much anyway, she told me, because “they work with numbers, not [like philosophers who] ask what’s that mean.” Given Neha’s sense that Fishman’s course would not help her career preparation, and given the fact she did not enjoy composing even in her native language (Gujarati), it is hardly surprising that she was upset about the amount and difficulty of the writing in philosophy. At the end of the course, in her Class Reflection Log (CRL), a non-graded journal

in which Fishman asks students to reflect on their learning, Neha complained,

The homework assignments for this class is really hard and consume too much time to do it (especially if you don't have typing skills). And philosophy is totally new for me, a subject I never learned.

Although she worked diligently on Fishman's assignments, ultimately improving her writing, as I will show, writing betterment was not a "for-what" that Neha believed worth the many hours she spent on it.

And, in fact, she may have been right. When Neha and I spoke a year and a half after Fishman's course concluded, she told me she was now only a semester away from her masters degree at UNCC and had taught two sections of undergraduate algebra as a teaching assistant. In all this time she had no need to write anything except her course syllabi and a few notes on student papers. However, that would change, she said. The following semester she had to write a masters thesis.

Learning Philosophic Curriculum Was Not a Goal. A second "for-what" or instrumental end that Steve's students may identify—often at the end rather than the beginning of the semester—is course subject matter. In this regard, Neha, as a recent immigrant, was at a serious disadvantage because Steve designs his course with American students in mind. That is, he selects readings that deal with issues he assumes American college students will find provocative: for example, racism, sexual morality, patriarchy and the role of women, and the existence of God. Even resistant students often connect to course content because they find these issues relevant to their lives and a source of personal growth.

By contrast, Neha, as a "traveler" between two cultures, a newcomer to this one, entered Steve's class with different interests and background knowledge—different cultural capital—than her American classmates (Bourdieu, 1982). As a result, she found herself, once again, experiencing bicultural tension, saying that course content was confusing to her, sometimes even upsetting. For example, she was puzzled about her classmates' emotional involvement

in discussions of racism after they read Fanon (1965/1995), Carmichael (1966/1995), and hooks (1981/1995). She had been unaware, she said, that Blacks and Whites in America were in conflict. Trying to bridge to her new world, she found a “with-which” in her own culture that helped her relate to the American racial situation: the Indian caste system. But then, as if unwilling to bring her two cultures together, reluctant, perhaps, to objectify or critique her home culture, Neha dismissed the connection. “But castes were 200 years ago,” she said. “Now everything is okay.”

Similarly, several weeks later, when the class discussed Bertrand Russell’s *Marriage and Morals* (1929/1970), Fishman once again failed to get Neha’s goals and his to coincide. He missed a chance to show that his course could promote her personal growth when he was unable to help her see the relevance of Russell’s critique of patriarchy and its underlying assumptions about sexual morality and women and children as property. Neha told me that during class discussion, she just laughed inside, so far was this topic from anything that would be discussed among Indians. In her Class Reflection Log she elaborated, focusing on the very different conventions in the two cultures regarding open discussion of sex:

In class I learned about sex education, which is general topic and most common in this country. I was shocked when I became aware of the fact that sex education is taught in American high school.

In a mid-October interview, Neha again found a parallel in her own culture with Russell’s analysis of the oppression of women. Her marriage, she told me, would be arranged by her father with no input from her. However, after making this connection, she said no more, unable or unwilling to push the analysis further.

Whatever the causes of Neha’s unwillingness or inability to think critically about patriarchy—for example, arranged marriages and lack of sex education in her home culture—Neha’s reluctance illustrates Gramsci’s (1971) point about the difficulty of gaining critical perspective on the conventions or values of the dominant class. Neha mentions the ways oppression works in her culture, and she

herself is, as a woman, oppressed—or so it seems from the outside. Yet these conventions seem “natural” to Neha, non-challengeable ways of living life. Her reactions not only reinforce Gramsci’s claim that hegemonic ideologies are hard to see but also that oppressor and oppressed alike espouse them as the way of the world. That is why, Gramsci argues, philosophy is important for helping people contextualize—and thus render visible—their most fundamental beliefs.

By semester’s end, however, and to Neha’s great credit, she was able and willing to try this sort of philosophic work, to engage, in her final exam, in some limited “objectification,” to use Freire’s term (1970/2000, p. 24), and contextualization of her situation. As I will show, she was able by December to extract Bertrand Russell’s argument and apply philosophy, offering an analysis of the “pluses and minusues” [sic] of patriarchal structures in her own life. Given the place Neha started, it was, in Steve Fishman’s view, a significant achievement.

Stepping Into the Student’s Shoes: Neha Shah’s Expectations

In examining the mismatch between Neha and Steve, I found not only divergent goals but also divergent expectations about the nature and amount of writing that would be required. This sort of mismatch between ESL students and their discipline-based teachers is not unusual and has been noted by other researchers (see Johns, 2001). Neha initially expected, she told me, that Intro to Philosophy would be “really easy, and I would pass with an A.” She apparently also believed she could do this without expending much effort because, in addition to taking two other courses, she was working 45 hours a week at two jobs. When I asked Neha in early October why she expected Intro to Philosophy to be easy, she mentioned her composition course the previous summer. She received an A in that class, she explained, writing three papers about personal experience and one about an interview with a family member. She assumed philosophy would be the same. She told me,

I thought I would just write something on the paper and turn it in.

In composition, I could write whatever I wanted. When I was writing about my family story, I know how to do that. I just tell what I watch. And I can make up things.

By contrast, in philosophy, Neha now realized,

Dr. Fishman wants us to understand the reading But philosophers use big words, different words. I'm looking in the dictionary all the time. And it is totally new for me, a subject that I never learned. . . . I have to work very hard.

Neha's experience in her composition course, then, led her to expect she would write personal essays in philosophy. It also caused her to undervalue the importance in the academy of error-free prose. Steve, as he has already noted, is like many teachers in the disciplines who are willing to overlook a certain number of surface errors. However, when it comes to major mechanical mismanagements, ones that present time-consuming obstacles to his deciphering the student's meaning, his tolerance is limited. By contrast, Neha's composition teacher was, apparently, more forgiving. Neha told me, "She was sympathetic. . . . She understood I was new in this country and said grammar wasn't important. She cared about my content." (For a possible explanation of this teacher's emphasis on substance to the exclusion of form, see Mutnick, 2000, pp. 77–78).

Neha's expectation that Steve would value content over form was, as I have indicated, not altogether wrong. But there were limits. Moreover, the content required in philosophy papers was, as Neha quickly recognized, less familiar to her than that in composition and, therefore, more demanding. That is, instead of multi-draft personal essays drawing on her narrative skills, Fishman asked students to write about assigned readings: frequent, single-draft pieces analyzing and evaluating primary source material. Thus, not only was the content of Neha's philosophy writing not what she expected, but the frequent, shorter assignments also meant she had little time to visit the University Writing Center, something that had helped her with drafts of her essays for composition. The tutors at the Writing Center, Neha told me, "changed my papers and gave me suggestions."

In sum, Neha's expectations for writing in philosophy were unrealistic because they were, in large part, based on her experiences in a composition course that did not require writing about sophisticated texts. Neha realized this and became alarmed, she said, when, three weeks into the course, Fishman wrote on her homework paper: "Fail. It is a struggle for me to follow your writing. I cannot understand what you are trying to say. Please get help at the Writing Center."

When Steve wrote this note in early September, he was, he told me, as alarmed as Neha. He was trying to be honest, he said, warning her that, in terms of his expectations, her writing was below what he considered "college level." In this situation, neither student nor teacher could relate to one another very well. That is, neither could get into the other's shoes and begin the community building that Dewey finds (1916/1967) essential for learning (pp. 4, 20–21, 80–84; see also 1929/1988b, pp. 148–50). For Steve's part, he had little idea about how to respond to Neha, as he has said. Given what he saw as her underpreparedness, he was not sure how to provoke her interest in his curriculum or engage her in philosophic exploration. Neither did he know how to respond to a student's writing that, in addition to displaying significant surface errors, indicated she was having trouble understanding the reading.

For Neha's part, she was a frightened outsider for whom the rules had "unfairly" changed, a confused pupil in a do-or-die situation, having to do labor which was not of her choosing. Yet when she received Steve's "Fail," she decided, after speaking with her advisor, that she would remain in the class. "I have to graduate in December," she told me. "So I have to pass this course. I have no choice."

AN ESL WRITER'S PROGRESS: ACHIEVING SOME OF HER PROFESSOR'S OBJECTIVES

Steve Fishman and Neha Shah were, thus, poles apart both in terms of their goals for the course and their expectations concerning student preparation and effort. To show the consequences of this mismatch, I begin my analysis of Neha's writing in philosophy with

her fourth homework assignment, the piece that Steve failed. What characterizes the writing in this paper? What led Steve to fail it? By contrast, what caused Neha to believe it was perfectly acceptable—perhaps even A—work? Following my examination of this early-September homework paper, I jump to the end of the semester, to Neha's final exam, to show the way she was able to achieve some of Fishman's objectives despite his and her mismatch.

An Early Piece: Clashing Expectations Made Manifest

Across the semester Fishman asks his Intro students to respond to their reading in 20, short, written homework assignments in various genres. He also requires a multi-draft, end-of-semester essay. In addition to these assignments, which he responds to and grades, Fishman also requires frequent, informal writing, both in and outside class, that he does not grade. (Graded assignments are listed in appendix B, ungraded Class Reflection Log assignments in appendix C.)

The fourth homework assignment was due September 8th and took the form of a letter to a fellow student, one of four such assignments in which students actually correspond with a randomly paired classmate. Fishman assigned two Platonic dialogues (1993), the *Apology* and *Crito*, and asked students to describe their questions or confusions about these texts in a letter to their partner that solicits his or her help. The class period following students' exchange of these letters, they bring in their responses to one another, letters attempting to answer the questions their partners have posed.

In this assignment, Steve is offering students an opportunity to write to each other about unfamiliar texts in a genre that is known to all. In addressing questions to their classmates, philosophic novices like themselves, instead of to the teacher, he is inviting students to use ordinary language and to display their uncertainties, admitting what they do not understand in ways they seldom do when writing for him. Although pupils realize Fishman will read a copy of their letter and grade it, they generally see their paired classmate as their primary audience. And this peer audience is a powerful one, Fishman has found, providing pupils with a motivation, or

“for-what,” for completing the work. Students tell him that although they may consider skipping homework written solely for him, they are reluctant to do that with the letter assignment because it would leave their partner in the lurch. (For more on the letter exchange technique, see Fishman & McCarthy, 1998, chapter 9).

The assignment sheet that Fishman handed out for the fourth homework paper reads as follows:

Assignment #4 - Letter Exchange

All homework is to be typed. Hand-written letters are not acceptable. Two copies of your letter are required. One copy is to be given to me and the other copy is to be exchanged with your letter-partner at the start of class on Tuesday, September 8.

Reflect on your reading of Plato’s *Apology* and *Crito*, and then write a 200-300 word letter to your partner in which you describe some aspect of the dialogues that you are having trouble understanding—a specific area you are having difficulty interpreting or fully comprehending.

You should make distinctions where you can—that is, describe what you understand and what you do not understand. You should refer to one or more particular passages in the dialogues where you are experiencing difficulty. Don’t just say, “I don’t understand the passage beginning at line 10 of page 64.” In other words, you should provide a context for what you do not understand so your reader can see your difficulties and thereby give you some assistance.

I hope this assignment will help you clarify your thinking about the *Apology* and *Crito* dialogues as well as describe a particular problem or problems to a classmate that you really want to know more about.

Teacher Expectations Clarified

In conversations with me as we prepared this chapter, Steve articulated his expectations for this assignment. First, he assumes that students will have little trouble reading Plato’s account of Socrates’ trial and Crito’s discussion with Socrates following the trial. The text is, as Fishman sees it, a narrative with several vivid conflicts and lots of details. So when he asks students to explain their questions about it to a classmate, he expects they will focus on substantive issues, for example, challenging Socrates’ line of thinking or asking for

clarification. Put differently, Fishman wants argument extraction and argument evaluation, the first two on his list of five goals for student thinking and writing.

And generally students are able to do this. For example, although they do not use these terms, pupils often spotlight moral conflicts in these dialogues between responsibility to family versus responsibility to one's principles, between living according to one's beliefs versus living expediently, between valuing material existence versus valuing spiritual life. Typical student questions are of the following sort: Wouldn't Socrates be better off escaping from prison rather than accepting the death verdict? (This way he could both care for his family—he has two young sons—and continue to fight for his principles.) Why was Socrates contentious during his trial rather than apologetic? Who is the oracle of Delphi, and why did Socrates take him so seriously?

When Steve read Neha's paper, his expectations were severely undercut. In her letter to her partner, Robert Bullerdick, a 30-year-old, Euroamerican student, Neha asked Robert not about substantive issues but about the meaning of words. It was, Fishman recalls, a complete surprise. He had never before had a student ask lexical questions. Although Neha was obviously comfortable with the letter genre—she adopts an appropriately informal tone with Robert, by whom she sometimes sat—her questions confirmed for Fishman something he had begun to suspect: Neha was not comprehending the reading. Apparently she understood so little of Socrates' argument that she was neither able to summarize nor evaluate it but was, rather, limited to word-level concerns. Neha writes:

Dear Robert,

Hi, how are you? I didn't get your letter for long time and not even talk by phone. I know you are busy with study and work. I have same situation here; school give me lot of work. In this semester I am taking three classes and going to graduate in December. I am so happy, how about you? How many semesters you left for graduate?

Here, I need your help in my philosophy class. I know you are real good and excellent in philosophy. . . . Last night I read "The last day of Socrates" book written by Plato. In this book I read the Apology and Crito's conversation with Socrates.

In the Apology I understand everything. In the Crito's I understand pretty much, except Crito's arguments and believe that Socrates should escape.

. . . In the first argument [Crito] said Socrates should escape, because he is endangering the good reputation of his friends and he need not worry about and risks these friends may be running. . . . Actually, I do not understand what endangering mean. So, could you please explain me what Crito trying to say?

. . . At the last, Socrates said, he only wish that ordinary people had an unlimited capacity for doing harm and power for doing well. In this sentence I do not understand what kind of unlimited capacity he was talking about. Because he said only ordinary people has unlimited capacity. I am wondering what about other people.

I hope you can understand my question. Please explain me in brief, So I can go straight. I am really waiting for your explanation letter about my question.

I know it will make you busy, but you are my friend so please help me out. Take a time and write me back.

Your friend,

Neha shah [sic]

In retrospect, Steve recalls that “what put [him] under” was Neha’s having trouble with a word like “endangered.” This indicated to him that she was even less prepared to do the work in his course than her early papers had led him to believe. He explained,

Although I did not see Neha’s reading and writing problems as her fault, I do expect students to come with a certain proficiency. Furthermore, I knew the Plato text was simple compared to what was coming, and I wanted to alert her to this sooner rather than later.

That Neha was extremely upset by Fishman’s grade of “fail”—she cried as she told me about it—is understandable. Her previous three grades in philosophy—a “pass” and two “low passes”—apparently had not signalled the seriousness of her situation. And, as I have shown, nothing in her composition course prepared Neha to expect either the sorts of assignments or the sorts of difficulties she was now encountering. Neither had her other courses at UNCC helped

her anticipate these challenges. In her English as a Foreign Language course the previous semester, as in Composition, she received an A, and her courses in religion and theatre were “easy,” she said. No writing was required in either, only multiple choice tests, and she made Bs in both. However, in Intro to Sociology, a 100-level course she also took the previous semester, her experience was different. Required to write essay exams about extensive reading, she received a D. Despite this possible warning flag, Neha was as unprepared as Fishman for the distress both were feeling in early September.

A Late Piece: Visible Successes by Semester’s End

Despite the distress generated by failing the first letter assignment, Neha, as I have noted, decided to stick with philosophy because of her strong desire to graduate in December. Although this grade did nothing to change her goals for the course, it did transform her expectations. No longer did she believe Intro to Philosophy was an “easy A.” In fact, she said, she realized that she would have to “work hard” just to pass. To this end, by mid-September, she had cut back her job hours on Monday and Wednesday so she could devote these days to preparing for philosophy’s Tuesday-Thursday class sessions. On these preparation days, she spent as much as six hours reading and writing, and, in addition, she visited the Writing Center for an hour once a week.

Neha’s effort paid off, according to both student and teacher. By the end of the semester, Steve observed, Neha had succeeded in doing two of the five sorts of thinking and writing he expects. Although he deemed the quality of Neha’s papers still far below that of his other students, and below college writing in general, he believed she had learned something about “reading tough texts.” He also believed she was more realistic about her skills and what college writing may sometimes require.

When Neha and I spoke in December, she agreed. “I improved my writing skills, and I learned new philosophical words.” In addition, she had been exposed to American culture, she said, discussing “new topics such as racism, sexism, feminism, family values, and moral

values.” And now, at semester’s end, she found the teacher and class more “friendly.” When I questioned her about why this was, she said, “Because now I think I will pass.”

Neha’s improved ability to read and write in philosophy can be seen in her final exam when she focuses on Bertrand Russell’s *Marriage and Morals* (1929/1970). In comparing her writing on an exam to that in her letter to a classmate three months earlier, I realize I am studying genres that differ in form, audience, and writer persona. However, because both require argument extraction and evaluation or critique, and because students had the exam questions in advance, as I explain below, these assignments serve my comparative purposes.

Marriage and Morals is a book, as I have indicated, that the class read, discussed, and wrote about (in another letter-exchange) in mid-October. Now, in this early December exam, Neha shows she can do, in limited ways, what she could or would not do two months earlier. She summarizes some of Russell’s points and applies them to her own life (numbers 1 and 4 on Fishman’s list of five specific goals). Because I want to avoid painting an overly rosy picture of Neha’s progress, I note that Neha’s discussion of Russell is, in Fishman’s view, the best part of her exam. Her other responses are less coherent and accurate, perhaps because they focus on more difficult (less narrative) texts by Daly (1973/1995), Mill (1843/1973), and hooks (1981/1995). In what follows, then, I present the strongest section of Neha’s exam. The test question about *Marriage and Morals* reads,

- a) What are some of the events and beliefs that Bertrand Russell says provided the foundation for our patriarchal society?
- b) In your opinion, what are the pluses and minuses of patriarchy?

Neha responds,

- a) ‘Marriage and Morals’ by Russel is viewed as a great and famous book. In this book he talked about different cultural, traditions, society and marriages. He mainly talked about patriarchal society, which means the male is the head of the family and female always considered below than male. About his talked it seems to me like all

civilized modern societies are based upon the patriarchal family, and the whole conception based of female virtue which has been built up in order to make the patriarchal family. I believe that in patriarchal society mother and father have different expression and behaviour for their child. The relation of father and son in a patrilineal society is more closer than any relation between male which exists in other society, and man inherits from his father. I also believe this society is one kind of "primitive" society. Because in this society a father (man) has everything means power, property, affection and the patriarchal family is more closely. The main provided thing for patriarchal system is that man came to desire virginity in their brides. Men has strongly feelings for this virginity. A father has strong power over his children and wife, child could not marry without their father's consent, and it was usual for the father to decide whom they should marry. In sort, a woman has not period in her life for any independent existence because being above situation first to her father and then to her husband. At last, patriarchal society provided as the DOMINION of the father.

b) About my opinion, our society is patriarchal society. Woman always consider below than man that means male is head of the family. About my family my mom and dad are modern (new generation) but we still have to follow our society. I think there are all points and which is all minus. Woman and man both have to have equal rights, power and opportunity. If father is head in the family why should mother not? The main minus point is about marriage. Why only father decide to whom child should marry. If men desire for virginity then what about woman. All this should be subtract (minuses) in patriarchy. There is only one plus in it, and it is about respect. Means woman has to give a respect to her mother-in-law, father-in-law and her husband, and stay with her husband with all equal opportunity. These all are the pluses and minuses points about my opinion.

When Fishman reread Neha's exam a year and a half later as we prepared this chapter, he worried that someone might accuse him, in awarding Neha a C- on this test and a C in the course, of lowering his standards. Recalling the work of Delpit (1995) and Ladson-Billings (1994), he worried he might be accused of doing this student a disservice, of "winking" at her underpreparedness and passing her in a social promotion rather than taking her writing problems seriously and holding her back. He mused,

I'd be embarrassed if someone saw Neha's writing without knowing the context—if they thought I'd certified this student as a competent college writer without confronting her. It is obvious that she doesn't understand many of the issues, and her application of Russell's concepts is somewhat garbled. Yet I believe she does step back and think about things a little differently, and that pleases me. . . . As I see it, the University accepted Neha, and it put her in my barrier class. What good would it have done for me to prevent her getting a college degree? She really tried, and she made modest progress, so I let the barrier down. In the end, I was proud of her.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS THAT HELP AN ESL STUDENT: COMBINING WRITING-TO-LEARN WITH DIALOGIC PEDAGOGY

Although Neha Shah and her teacher had very different goals and aspirations, she nevertheless made progress in his eyes. In fact, Fishman says that in the end he was proud of her. How did this come about? Answering calls for pedagogies that help ESL students in mainstream courses, I describe those aspects of Steve's teaching which facilitated Neha's development (see Belcher & Braine, 1995; Hirvela, 1999; Leki, 1992; Zamel, 1995).

The instructional supports Neha mentioned as being particularly helpful all reflect key principles of Steve's three core theorists: Dewey, Freire, and Gramsci. That is, these instructional supports require (1) that students be active, (2) that they switch roles, alternately playing teacher and student to one another, and (3) that they enter into "dialogue" with one another, to use Freire's (1970/1997) term, or engage in "cooperative inquiry," to use Dewey's (1916/1967). Her interactions with classmates led Neha, at some moments at least, to experience what Freire terms "solidarity [through] communication" (p. 58), thus giving her a social motive or "for-what" for doing course assignments.

In Neha's comments about the instructional supports that most helped her, it is clear that writing-to-learn was not as effective for her when done by itself as it was when combined with peer interaction. And this is understandable for an ESL student who was less

comfortable writing English than speaking it with her classmates. In a December interview, Neha remarked that being required to write about every assigned text was good for her because it made her read actively: “not just like normal. . . [but] deeply so I understand everything.” However, she quickly added that despite spending as much as six hours on her assignments, she still frequently came to class unclear about the text’s meaning. But once there, she said, she knew she would get help. That is, she would get to talk about her own homework and hear her classmates describe theirs, and this was key to her understanding. In Neha’s description of Steve’s pedagogy, there are echoes of Freire’s (1970/1997) dialogic, problem-posing approach. She explained,

We had already done the assignment, right, and after assignment he will talk what the assignment about. Then, [in pairs or small groups or class discussion], I hear what my ideas are and what other people’s ideas are, and I finally understand the material better. My mind clicks on. . . and I clear up some of my confusions.

I turn now to three types of assignment that Neha identified as most helpful to her: first, the letter exchanges with classmates; second, student-generated exams; and, finally, student-generated questions for class discussion.

The Letter Exchange: Helping Students Teach One Another

I have already analyzed Neha’s early-September letter to Robert Bullerick about two Platonic dialogues, the first of four such exchanges across the semester. Three months later, in December, Neha and I spoke about her fourth letter, one focusing on a chapter in Dewey’s (1920/1962) *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Neha was paired with 36-year-old Ellen Williams, a classmate whom she knew and liked from their prior classroom interactions, and for whom, Neha told me, she had tried hard to write clearly so Ellen could respond. When I mentioned that I had just spoken to Ellen, another of my research informants and a student I will report on in the next chapter, Neha asked, “Did she understand my question?” (Ellen and

I had not discussed this.) The fact that Neha felt responsible to a classmate, not just the teacher, invested the assignment with social meaning and provided her, in addition to her usual worry about her grade, with an additional “for-what.” Neha genuinely wanted to communicate with Ellen. However, in order to achieve this goal, Neha had to adopt one of Fishman’s. She had to engage with Ellen in collaborative exploration of cultural knowledge, precisely the outcome Steve hoped for from this assignment.

In addition, these two students were teaching and learning from one another, and, in the process, they were developing the sort of solidarity that Dewey, Freire, and Gramsci all want. That is, Neha identified with and cared about Ellen, and she was committed to working with Ellen in ways she was not with Steve. Neha described her letter writing process:

I have to read [Dewey’s chapter] twice because when I read first time I don’t understand. I’m lost. After the second time my mind is clearer. I highlight, and I put in the margin what I’m going to ask Ellen. . . . My question is I’m not sure if [Dewey] believe in science or he just believe in philosophy. . . . I mean does he believe philosophy is related to science or not? Because I’m not sure. At first he said philosophy’s just imagination, but later he said philosophy is a science experience, and then he says philosophy is also like a social tradition. I was lost, so I just asked her what Dewey believes. . . .

Steve was pleased at what he saw as Neha’s progress since asking Robert Bullerick three months earlier what “endangering” means. Instead of being limited to word-level concerns, she was now doing textual interpretation, trying to extract Dewey’s argument and shape a good question for Ellen. In her letter, she describes what she understands of Dewey’s argument before asking, “Does Dewey believe philosophy is relevant with science and the practical experience?” Here, Neha is playing both student and teacher, the sort of role-changing that Freire, Gramsci, and Dewey recommend. As a student, Neha is confused, she tells Ellen, and really needs help. However, to make it possible for Ellen to mentor her, Neha must put herself in the teacher’s position. In order to ask intelligible questions, teachers must make clear to students where they are coming from. Put

differently, teachers must provide their students with a context for their questions. Neha strove to do this and was eager, she told me, to read Ellen's response at the next class meeting. She also knew that Steve would provide an opportunity to discuss these letters, calling on pairs in class to report on their exchanges and what they had learned from one another as they corresponded about the Dewey text.

Student Generated Exams: Promoting Dialogue and Cooperative Inquiry

In addition to the letter exchanges, Neha named a second instructional support as particularly helpful: Steve's student generated exams. He structures both mid-term and final in ways that invite students to study together and, more than that, to feel ownership of the test itself. To achieve this he asks students to generate the actual questions that will appear on the test. Allowing them to set the agenda in this way is reminiscent of Freire's (1970/2000) insistence that his adult literacy students choose their own "codifications" or objects of study (p. 27). That is, in order for his adult learners to be able to objectify and critically examine their situation, Freire argues, they have to participate in choosing the images upon which they will focus. Similarly, by writing the test questions, students are involved in shaping the foci of their concentration as they prepare for and write the exams.

In this pedagogy, Fishman is, once again, asking students to engage in active intellectual exploration as they become teachers to one another. He assigns each of them a text that might be covered on the exam and requires, for a homework assignment, that they construct a possible test question about that reading. Students hand these in, and Fishman chooses six, which he gives to students a week before the test. From these six questions he chooses three on exam day that students must write about. As they study for and write the test, then, pupils are focusing on questions posed not by Fishman but by themselves and their classmates.

In addition to wanting students to feel ownership of the test, to be involved in shaping their own codifications, Fishman also intends to

promote collaborative inquiry outside class. Since pupils have the exam questions in advance, he encourages them to exchange phone numbers in hopes that they will get together outside class hours. In fact, this often happens. Some students tell me they arrange to go to dinner together or to meet in groups on campus to jointly construct answers. Others tell me they converse on the phone. This assignment thus provides additional opportunities for students to practice philosophic exploration and break down social barriers, to build upon their individual strengths as they contribute to group projects (see Dewey 1916/1967, p. 84).

The exam structure worked well for Neha. She was on her own during the exams, of course, but she indicated that these tests were less frightening and isolating for her than the typical exam. Although she did not plan to meet with other students to prepare for the test, she did discuss the questions in a chance encounter with a classmate. Neha ran into Tonya McInnis, a 30-year-old African American pre-nursing student, in the cafeteria about three hours before the exam. Neha told me that she asked Tonya about the test question with which she was having most difficulty, and, after moving to a nearby student lounge, Tonya explained her interpretation of it. Neha remarked that she was grateful to Tonya for her kindness that morning, and she believed their conversation helped her.

Student Generated Questions for Class Discussion: Integrating Individual and Group

A final effective instructional support Neha identified involved, once again, dialogue among students which Steve orchestrated but in which he did not directly participate. Four times during the semester he asks students to bring in a question about an assigned reading that might serve as the basis for small group discussion. Once again, Fishman avoids the banking model by asking students to pose their own problems, to join together in cooperative exploration of ideas and become “critical co-investigators” (Freire, 1970/1997, p. 62).

When students arrive in class with their questions, Fishman puts them in groups of four or five. Here, they discuss their questions

about the reading and choose the one they think is best, the one most clearly about a key issue or passage. They then pass it to a neighboring group for an answer. This second group discusses it, and, in order to insure that all students stay active and no one pupil becomes too dominant, Fishman has all members of that group write the answer that they have constructed together. Fishman's concern about one student dominating the others echoes Freire's (1970/1997) worry about hierarchies within any human association (chapter 4). It also echoes Dewey's (1916/1967) warning against "machine-like" relations among people working on common projects, that is, relations in which powerful members of the group use less powerful ones "without reference to the emotional and intellectual disposition and consent of those used" (p. 5).

When the small group members have agreed upon their common answer and each student has recorded it, Fishman calls the class back together. But instead of playing teacher, he takes the role of student, asking real-information questions, that is, queries to which he does not have answers. He wants to hear from each group about the question it received and the answer it constructed. After each group reports its answer, Fishman turns to the group in which that question originated and asks those students to evaluate the answer. Thus, working collaboratively and speaking for their groups, students inform Fishman and their classmates about their interpretations of the text and their evaluations of each others' questions and answers. In addition, throughout this activity students comment on their group's interactions, describing their dialogue, their conflicts and compromises, and their decision-making processes.

How did these small group conversations serve Neha? First, she told me, she had been excited when, on one occasion in early November, her group chose her question as its best. "I told everybody [in the next group,] 'That's my question.' I was proud." Her satisfaction is understandable. She had been able to join with her classmates in conjoint activity, and she had understood the requirements for group participation well enough that her question had been judged the best. In a course where she felt very much at risk as a student, Neha had been picked by her group to represent it, to play

teacher, in essence, to pupils in the adjoining group. Her pleasure at having her question chosen corroborates Dewey's (1897/1964a) contention that students have a desire "to give out . . . and serve" (p. 119).

Not surprisingly, this social "for what" or goal of contributing to collaborative exploration worked better for Neha in the small group interactions than in whole-class discussions. In the small groups, she said, she could forget about her grade and just converse with her classmates, whereas in the whole group she remained "nervous" about speaking. It also helped her in these small groups, she commented, when she realized that other students also struggled at times to understand the assigned texts.

In sum, then, Steve Fishman's dialogic pedagogy facilitated Neha Shah's reading and writing progress in *Intro to Philosophy*. It gave her an opportunity to practice philosophic exploration, often by becoming teacher or student to her peers, and this helped her understand course material. Equally important, Steve's dialogic pedagogy gave Neha a new social goal or "for-what" for doing the work. At moments when she contributed to joint inquiry and became part of the group, she told me, the hours she spent on her homework seemed more worthwhile.

FREIRIAN, GRAMSCIAN, AND DEWEYAN EVALUATIONS

At the end of the semester, as I have noted, Steve said he was proud of Neha's effort, satisfied that she had a good experience in his class. In particular, he mentioned Neha's hard work, which he clearly respected, and the fact that she left his class knowing what it is to wrestle with challenging reading and writing. Put differently, she had met, at least in some measure, two of his five expectations for philosophy students: argument extraction (objective 1) and application of philosophy for the purpose of critique (objective 4). As for Neha herself, as I have also noted, she felt her writing skills and vocabulary had improved and she had been exposed to tensions in American culture about which she had previously been unaware.

To extend my evaluation of Neha's experience in Steve's class, I also ask, What would the three theorists at the heart of Fishman's pedagogy say? How would Freire, Gramsci, and Dewey evaluate Neha's learning? How would they evaluate Steve's teaching?

Freirian Evaluation

Freire, I believe, would be disappointed in some ways and pleased in others. On the one hand, Neha and Steve do not achieve the dialogic, problem-posing ideal he proposes. Teacher and student never shape questions and goals together, as Freire wants, nor do they trade ideas in ways that help Neha (re)name the world. In fact, Fishman remembers his and Neha's exchanges in class as being very limited. When he called on her, he told me, she would offer her viewpoint, but she generally avoided eye contact, apparently hoping he would pass her over, and when she did contribute, she spoke so quietly it was difficult to hear her. During some class periods, he recalls, she even sat outside the class circle. On the other hand, as I have shown, Neha experienced something of the "solidarity" Freire (1970/1997, p. 58) hopes for in small group interactions, contributing her opinion as readily as other students to conjoint inquiry.

Steve's classroom is, thus, far from Freire's educational nightmare: an oppressive lecture-banking situation in which students are totally silenced. Nevertheless, Neha hardly became the person, as Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) wants, whose "critical consciousness" had been raised about the work she was going to perform as a mathematician/computer scientist and the class-divided society in which she would carry out her vocation (p. 69). Freire (1970/2000) might well argue that this was Steve's fault. The "codifications," the texts, that Steve presented Neha, Freire might say, were inappropriate for Neha and thus mitigated against her successfully "problematizing" her social and political situation (p. 27).

Gramscian Evaluation

In a Gramscian evaluation, Neha and Steve fare somewhat better. By contrast with Freire, Gramsci (1971) would commend Steve on

his assignments because it is important, in Gramsci's view, to expose students to the history of ideas, to show them something about how systems of thought develop. This provides a context for students' own ideas and helps them articulate and reflect on their views, a practice that is crucial if they are to align their beliefs with their actions in responsible ways. Thus, Gramsci would be less concerned than Freire that Steve imposed texts on Neha in which she had little interest. For Gramsci, being challenged by difficult and unfamiliar subject matter (such as Greek and Latin) helps students learn self-discipline, and he would applaud the work habits Neha employed in Steve's class. Her ability to sit at her desk for hours on end and her strong desire for academic credentials were useful forces of academic production she brought with her from India. Although Gramsci's ultimate objective for students—critiquing the values and practices of their own culture in light of those of others—was elusive for Neha, she did open the door a crack to such thinking by semester's end, as I have shown. Neha's consideration of patriarchy and the roles of women did not result in reconstruction of her views during Steve's course, but it may one day provide a basis for thinking more deeply about these issues.

Deweyan Evaluation

Finally, an evaluation of Neha's experience through Deweyan lenses also provides a mixed report. On the negative side, Dewey would notice that Neha achieved little of one of his primary goals for students: personal growth or expanded interests. For the most part, she did not see her beliefs in new ways, nor did she leave Fishman's class wanting to read or write more philosophy. This failure is rooted, Dewey (1902/1990c) would say, in Steve's inability to help Neha achieve another of his ideals: student-curriculum integration. Agreeing with Gramsci, Dewey would find the assigned texts appropriate, but he would lament that despite Neha's occasionally connecting with philosophic subject matter, she seemed more often to keep it at bay. Put differently, Steve failed to help Neha see learning philosophy as a personally meaningful "for-what," and she developed

no additional objectives of her own, although, as I have shown, Steve's pedagogy at times provided her with a social motive for doing the work. Instead, the one goal Neha started with—passing the course—kept her almost always focused on grades, her labor alienated, her work commodified for its exchange value rather than its intrinsic value. Neha's concern for grades is an understandable "to-what" given her fear of failing, but it is one Dewey would abhor. This focus, along with other conditions I have described, meant that Neha seldom, if ever, experienced the sort of "wholeheartedness" Dewey (1916/1967) values, the "intellectual integrity" which allows students to see their school work as reflecting their genuine interests and self-expressions (pp. 173–79; see also 1933/1960, pp. 30–33).

However negatively Dewey might evaluate Neha's experience, he would also find things to celebrate. This is because Dewey (1938/1963a, chapter 2) insists that student progress must be measured not against across-the-board standards but according to an individual's particular trajectory. That is, teachers must compare the place where the pupil began with the place where he or she finishes. In this regard, Dewey would find Neha's story praiseworthy. This is because she developed as a reader and writer, as I have shown, and because, in the process, she had an experience that challenged her in ways unique among her college courses. Most important, she joined in cooperative inquiry with her classmates—and appreciated the benefits of doing so—in ways Dewey would certainly applaud.

Finally, for Dewey, a significant test of an educative experience is the residue students carry forward to future experiences. In terms of this test as well, Dewey would have some grounds for optimism. In an interview a year and a half after the course concluded, Neha told me that her work in philosophy had been sufficiently valuable to cause her to recommend the course to her sister, now a freshman at UNCC.



Conclusion

STEVE FISHMAN AND LUCILLE McCARTHY

What do we learn from this account of an ESL writer and her discipline-based professor, their mismatch of goals and aspirations, their struggles and eventual satisfaction?

This study shows the importance of giving ESL students in discipline-based courses frequent opportunities, and various types of opportunities, to engage with classmates, sharing and discussing their work. As Neha Shah explained, her difficulties reading philosophic texts and her difficulties writing about them meant that even after six hours on a homework assignment, she was still confused. But given the way Steve structured his classroom—offering students chances to explore ideas with one another, share their questions about assigned texts, and read each other’s homework—Neha said that in class, frequently, things “clicked.” We believe this is significant because it shows that writing-to-learn by itself may not be enough for students whose English reading and writing skills are weak. However, when set in the context of student give and take with peers, writing-to-learn pays off.

Although we cannot generalize from a single case, we believe our study is illuminative since Neha’s so-called “instrumental” approach to her philosophy class is fairly typical of undergraduates. Further, her unhappiness at having to take the course in the first place and her expectations that it would require no time yet be an “easy A” meant that she and her instructor shared few goals and experienced little likemindedness. In this way, Neha presented a difficult challenge for Steve’s pedagogy. Yet despite having very different aspirations from those of her teacher, Neha achieved two of Fishman’s specific classroom objectives and made progress toward a third. She was able to do argument extraction as she read and wrote about philosophic texts, and she was able to apply philosophy to her own life, critiquing, if only in modest ways, the power structures in which

she lives. She also developed increased sensitivity to some of the tensions within American culture, sowing seeds that may, one day, help her contextualize the social dilemmas she encounters in her newly adopted country.



Coda

The Researchers Continue to Converse

STEVE FISHMAN AND LUCILLE McCARTHY

We choose in this coda to complexify our research story, to reveal some of the conflicts between the two of us that are not evident in the report we have just presented. Although we have necessarily neatened our report for the sake of clarity and the development of a narrative line, in this section we describe some of the rough-edged disagreements that actually punctuated our conversations as we conducted this study.

Whereas both of us thought Neha made progress and found aspects of Fishman's pedagogy helpful, in the end McCarthy believed that Fishman had not done enough for Neha. Reflecting McCarthy's familiarity with the research on ESL and "basic" writing, she believed that it was Fishman's failure to draw upon and celebrate Neha's home language and culture that was a key factor in Neha's troubles. As Cummins (1986) says, students like Neha will not realize their potential unless they are helped to feel good about their own language and perspectives as well as those of the dominant group. In addition, McCarthy thought that despite Fishman's apparent recognition, on the first day of class, of the value of Neha's borderland perspective, he still missed numerous opportunities to learn from her.

For example, whereas Fishman gave Neha an F on her letter to a classmate about Plato's *Apology* and *Crito*, McCarthy believed he should have seen it as one of the most valuable papers he got. She argued that both its rhetorical style and content could be interpreted

as challenging the Eurocentric, male, academic tradition, especially that tradition's overemphasis on rationality and mind. With regard to the form of Neha's writing, McCarthy thought that if Fishman had been more sympathetic, he might have seen Neha's unconventional style as a protest against the sterility of academic discourse. He might have recognized in her unique locutions a resistance that should be celebrated rather than criticized, her innovations echoing those of writers like Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Theodore Dreiser (1981), and Gertrude Stein (1933). (See Lu, 1994/1999b; Leki, 1992.) With regard to Neha's content, McCarthy thought that, in asking about the word "endangered," Neha was, perhaps, just following Fishman's and Socrates' lead in making a fetish of clarity about particular words and concepts. And later, when Neha focused on Socrates's argument about ordinary people's limited capacity to harm his most important part, his soul, McCarthy thought Neha may have been questioning western philosophy's elevation of mind over body.

In McCarthy's conversations with Fishman across the semester, she chided him not only for failing to excavate ideas that may have been beneath the surface of Neha's writing but also for giving up on her too easily in class. Apart from the first day, he called on her only six times during the semester, on one occasion asking her to describe her own Hindu views of the afterlife, an experience she recalled proudly a year and a half after the course concluded. Had Fishman moved more actively into Neha's culture, McCarthy argued, rather than expecting her to do all the moving into his, Neha could have built upon the cultural capital she brought with her rather than having to leave it at his classroom door. In short, McCarthy believed that Fishman missed chances to do what Cummins (1986) advises, namely be Neha's advocate rather than her assessor and gatekeeper.

Behind McCarthy's unhappiness with Fishman's response to Neha was not just her familiarity with ESL and composition research. McCarthy's disagreements with him were also the result of ideological differences, her commitment to Freirian (1970/1997) and Gramscian (1971) principles of social transformation that she believed Fishman underappreciated. In his failure to let Neha develop

her own codifications or alterations of his curriculum, and in his failure to listen carefully to Neha or to engage in authentic dialogue with her, McCarthy thought him deaf to Freire's call to teachers to truly learn from their students and renounce their class identity to develop solidarity with them. This meant for McCarthy, to borrow Freirian language, that Fishman overlooked valuable chances to help Neha transform herself from an "object" of dehumanizing oppression in his classroom into a "subject" who was becoming humanized and liberated (1970/1997, chapters 1, 2). These were the same negligences, according to McCarthy, that prevented Fishman from being the sort of "organic intellectual" to Neha that Gramsci would have wanted. In the end, McCarthy felt that Fishman was too much influenced by Dewey's assimilationist pedagogy, an approach she sees as serving the interests of the professional middle class, one that ignores the negative effects of mainstream teachers upon students who differ in culture, race, and gender (see also Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Fishman, for his part, replied that he found it difficult to see ways to modify his pedagogy to take advantage of Neha's unique cultural knowledge, and he invoked some of the same theorists to defend his approach that McCarthy used to criticize it. He kept insisting that to adopt McCarthy's stance, to read into Neha's writing ideas that he thought were not there, was to hinder the balance he was trying to achieve between what Dewey (1930/1990b) calls "construction and criticism." That is, he thought such a stance would tip his classroom discourse too much toward student expression and not enough toward student taking in. He feared it might be an example of what Gramsci (1971) terms an exaggeration of "libertarian" ideology in education (p. 32), an overemphasis on students' self-assertion to the neglect of students' critical thinking.

In addition, Fishman kept invoking Gramsci's idea that to effectively resist the dominant culture, students must also master it. They have to understand its history, command its language, and learn its logic. Although he admired the determination and self-discipline Neha displayed after he warned her she might fail his course—in fact, he often wished outloud that more of his students would come

to his class with the sort of academic capital or know-how Neha possessed—he continued to lament that because he could not help her find the relevance of his curriculum to her personal growth and career preparation she acquired only a minimal understanding of philosophy.

Thus, the many suggestions that McCarthy presented to Fishman from the composition research—for example, ideas about having students audiotape narratives in order to compare oral and written forms of expression, assignments in which students might compare home and school languages or dominant and minority cultures—did not strike a responsive chord in Fishman. For example, he worried that to go along with McCarthy and present Neha’s Plato letter to his philosophy class as a superior paper, one that could be seen as challenging the Western tradition and its emphasis on what Habermas (1972) labels “technical rationality,” would support an “anything goes” attitude, what Gramsci (1971) might call a relaxation of standards (pp. 37–38). Put differently, Fishman feared that to follow McCarthy’s interpretations would be to lead his students down a path of radical relativism where all responses to a written work are seen as equally valuable, with no way to distinguish ones that are more responsible to the text and coherent from those that are less.

Despite Fishman’s unwillingness to adopt McCarthy’s suggestions, he remained conflicted. Referring to the Freirian epigraph with which we began this chapter, he had to admit that it was precisely students like Neha for whom he wanted to provide “tangible” help, and he feared McCarthy was correct when she said he was narrowminded in the ways he approached the issues and opportunities Neha’s appearance in his classroom presented. He was particularly stung when, at one point, McCarthy—referring to a well known account of a Mexican American’s assimilation—accused him of having “Rodriguezed” Neha (see Rodriguez, 1982). Still, Fishman continued to try to justify his stance to McCarthy. He was stuck with the idea that, although it was important for his students to be innovative and to critique his discipline’s practices, they needed to get to know something of the philosophic tradition in order to intelligently challenge it. He could not give up the thought that it was self-defeating

to encourage his students to resist the authors and the works he selected for his syllabus before they had a reasonable grasp of what these authors had to say.