

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion: Sorting Conflict, Weaving Hope

[P]hilosophy is . . . a kind of intellectual disrobing. We cannot permanently divest ourselves of the intellectual habits we take on and wear when we assimilate the culture of our own time and place. But intelligent furthering of culture demands that we take some of them off, that we inspect them critically to see what they are made of and what wearing them does to us.

John Dewey (1925/1989, p. 35)

When Fishman asked McCarthy to observe his classroom so he could improve his instruction of underprepared writers, he expected her to help him understand students' composing processes and ways he might bring student papers in line with Standard American English. As we have shown, things did not turn out to be that simple. Instead, our study of three novice writers led us into debates about the proper function of public education in a democratic society, controversies that have at least a 150-year history in America. As we discussed these controversies, we were forced to consider our own answers to our title questions: Whose goals? Whose aspirations? To our discomfort, we discovered we had diverse responses. The area that caused the most conflict for us was social reform, the school goal about which our answers were more different than similar.

Regarding our similarity, we both found ourselves to the left of center in terms of a reformed social order. Neither of us is conservative or reactionary. Rather, we both want to extend democracy beyond due process, freedom of speech, and popularly elected government to other civic, economic, and cultural areas of our

society. In other words, although we both worry about the dangers of large state bureaucracies, we favor more worker and democratic control of industry, more equitable incomes, and a less hierarchical social structure.

Where we clashed was over the proper role of individual teachers in helping promote our vision of social reform. For example, in Fishman's class, where McCarthy saw ways to increase cultural and ethnic parity, Fishman saw potential Balkanization. And where Fishman saw possibilities for reform resulting from conversation across class and ethnic lines, McCarthy saw continued hegemony of the dominant elite. This clash between McCarthy's Freirian radicalism and Fishman's Deweyan gradualism gave each of our chapters a distinct hue and focus.

In chapter 2, our conflict was about how multiculturally sensitive Fishman and his curriculum should be in *Intro to Philosophy*. In chapter 3, we argued over the significance of color-consciousness for Fishman's class, especially his grading criteria. Lastly, in chapter 4, we debated Fishman's level of class consciousness and whether it was appropriate for his course in *Philosophy of Education*. Before Fishman offers specific advice to discipline-based teachers about instructing novice writers across the curriculum, we summarize the conflicts between us and look back on Fishman's interactions with three inexperienced writers.

MULTICULTURALISM IN INTRO TO PHILOSOPHY: HOW MUCH? HOW LITTLE?

As we studied Neha Shah, our focus student in chapter 2, it quickly became clear that we had diverse views about the appropriateness of Steve's curriculum for a recent immigrant like Neha. McCarthy, sounding very much like a 1990s advocate of multicultural education, argued that Steve failed to appreciate and make use of the borderland perspective Neha brought to his class and her papers. McCarthy saw Steve's syllabus as provincially Eurocentric in its orientation, sending the hidden message that white Euroamerican culture is somehow superior to all others, including Neha's.

Underlying the difference between us was our conflict about the appropriate way to promote social reform in *Intro to Philosophy*. For McCarthy, it meant using Steve's classroom to celebrate and support Neha's native culture—its practices, language, and literature. However, Fishman resisted McCarthy's suggestions for redesigning his reading list, saying he was not sure he should or could do this. Not only did he not have time to modify his curriculum to meet particular students' special needs, there was also the matter of his limited expertise. He felt he knew too little, for example, about Neha's culture and the Indian philosophic tradition to construct a set of assignments built around her home community's literacy. That is, if equitable instruction for Neha meant a redesigned curriculum, Steve claimed it was out of his reach. Instead, he thought the best he could do was use his expertise to familiarize her with some of the philosophic texts, social and moral issues, and ways of constructing knowledge that were an important part of the warp and woof of her newly adopted country.

Thus, although McCarthy characterized Fishman's actions toward Neha as those of an assimilationist—going so far as to accuse him of having “Rodriguezed” Neha—Steve did not agree (Rodriguez, 1982). He protested that his ideal was not, as McCarthy implied, a homogeneous America, one built around an alleged Anglo Saxon tradition of initiative, industriousness, and thrift. Instead, he simply did not see it as his responsibility in *Intro to Philosophy* to be an advocate for or informant about Neha's home traditions. This did not mean he believed the preservation of minority ethnicities was solely a family or private organization affair as did the “cultural pluralists” in the 1920s (see Kallen, 1924). Nor did it mean he wanted to be insensitive to Neha's special challenges as a recent immigrant. However, given that he took his main teaching goal as the exploration of Western philosophic literature and the introduction of its distinctive ways of thinking and writing, he thought it unwise to make major adjustments in his classroom objectives for and requirements of Neha. As a result, and contrary to McCarthy's suggestions, Fishman asked Neha to do the same reading and writing he assigned all his *Intro* students, and he defended his position by arguing that

to do otherwise was both impracticable and a disservice to Neha and his discipline.

Making Progress Even When Goals Don't Match

Although we disagreed about how best to promote social reform in Intro to Philosophy, we agreed that Neha made progress toward Fishman's classroom objectives. To Steve's surprise, McCarthy discovered that the key to Neha's achievement was not the many situations that he provided for students to use writing to explore his curriculum. Rather, these writing-to-learn exercises were effective only when accompanied by chances for Neha to discuss them with classmates in small groups and pairs. In these contexts, she could practice philosophic discourse in ways that were less threatening to her than whole class discussions and more helpful to her than Fishman's marginal notes on her papers.

A Social Motive: The Importance of Talking With Classmates about Writing-To-Learn Homework

Not only did Neha's small group and one-on-one exchanges with classmates help her understand course material, they also gave her what we have called a "social motive" for doing Steve's assignments. When she was writing for her classmates as well as the teacher, Neha was no longer just an instrumentalist completing her classwork to get a passing grade. She was also doing it because she was motivated to serve and please her peers. From Fishman's standpoint, one significant result of Neha's being socially motivated was that his and Neha's goals overlapped, even if only modestly and by default. That is, although exploration of cultural knowledge was never an end in itself for Neha, it did become an important means for achieving her genuine desire to please her small group and letter-exchange partners. This was, in Steve's view, a gratifying result of his effort to nurture a Deweyan form of cooperative student inquiry. Although Fishman could make little headway softening the contradictions that separated him and Neha, the fact that his pedagogy gave Neha chances to bridge some of the gaps between herself and her classmates was crucial for sustaining her motivation to do the assigned

work and helping her achieve, in limited measure, his goal of exploration of cultural knowledge.

COLOR-CONSCIOUSNESS IN INTRO TO PHILOSOPHY:
HOW MUCH? HOW LITTLE?

Our second focus student, Ellen Williams, was Neha Shah's classmate. Like Neha, Ellen was an underprepared writer who saw philosophy as nothing more than an annoying and irrelevant requirement for graduation. In contrast to Neha, however, Ellen, as a native born African American, was a member of a minority group that has long been victimized by American race prejudice. Thus, McCarthy's criticisms of Fishman's instruction of Ellen focused less on his Eurocentric curriculum and more on what McCarthy saw as the unfair way Fishman evaluated the progress of this working class, returning student.

McCarthy claimed that for Fishman to be effective with non-mainstream pupils like Ellen, he needed to expand his evaluation criteria to include not just their academic development but their moral and social growth as well. Furthermore, McCarthy insisted, when Fishman did evaluate Ellen's academic progress, as opposed to her moral and social growth, he was doing so too narrowly, paying too little attention to her particular circumstances, the great barriers she had to leap just to gain entry to his university and attend his class. In addition, McCarthy felt Fishman overvalued the importance of Ellen's written work in philosophy, failing to offer her other ways—such as oral presentations—to display her progress in his course.

The larger issue behind our debate regarding Fishman's instruction of Ellen was the same one that underlay our conflicts about Neha: our ongoing disagreement about the school goal of social reform, specifically, what constituted justice in Steve's class. McCarthy, reflecting a major turn in the national conversation about race discrimination in the 1970s, claimed that promoting justice in Intro to Philosophy meant Steve's giving up his color-blindness and becoming color-conscious. That is, he needed to do more to make up for the terrible imbalance between the greater social, cultural, and

economic opportunities afforded most American Whites as compared to those available to most American Blacks. That is, McCarthy thought that what at the surface looked like a level field of competition in Steve's class was really heavily weighted against someone like Ellen. The greater public funds expended on her White classmates' primary and secondary schools—as well as these students' family financial resources and, thus, the time they could devote to their education—were all the result of White privilege. As McCarthy viewed it, because such privilege gave Ellen's White classmates enormous advantages over Ellen, Steve should evaluate her differently.

In response, Fishman said he was embarrassed to discover he had been color and power evasive, insensitive to the ways in which Whiteness was a hidden but valuable property in his classroom. However, he disagreed with McCarthy about the best way to deracialize his teaching space. Although he was sympathetic with McCarthy's stance regarding evaluation of Ellen, Fishman worried about the consequences of the identity politics McCarthy was advocating, specifically, its potentially negative effect upon the collaborative form of student inquiry he wanted to nurture in philosophy. He was not sure how he could handicap the grades of his pupils without destroying students' trust that he was treating each of them fairly.

Although Fishman saw no easy strategy for using his course to compensate for past and continuing race inequities, he thought his best hope for justice for Ellen rested on an approach that combined color-blindness and color-consciousness. In other words, Steve believed that a fair and race-cognizant pupil evaluation required measuring student performance against both the student's personal situation (color-conscious) and against an across-the-board (color-blind) standard. This meant that he sought, first, to weigh each student's academic progress against an individual measure, namely, how far each had come toward his classroom objectives from his or her initial starting point. Second, he tried to blend this individual evaluation with another that measured each student's performance against a broader criterion, namely, the average work of other under-

graduates he had taught during his 30-year career in philosophy. Applied to Ellen, he thought that to evaluate her performance solely against an individual standard risked misleading her about how her work compared to that of her peers. As much as he was gratified by Ellen's individual progress in his Intro class, he insisted to McCarthy that Ellen's grade needed to reflect not just the substantial obstacles Ellen had to overcome once she got inside his classroom but also how well she had actually mastered the skills needed to read and write perceptively about philosophy.

When Storytelling Is Not Enough: The Importance of Contextualizing Student Narratives

Our study of Ellen Williams supports the claim of Critical Race Theorists that storytelling is an important means of helping long-silenced minorities gain a voice. Ellen told McCarthy in their interviews that the instructional supports in Fishman's class that most enabled her to open to philosophic questioning were ones that gave her chances to tell her stories. However, we also found that for Ellen's narratives to generate mutual understanding and critical reflection, they had to be contextualized. In other words, as hooks (1989) and Giroux (1992) note, storytelling by itself is not enough to establish fruitful dialogue. To be effective, student stories must be connected to broader political, social, and economic issues. As Gramsci (1971) describes this process, the philosopher's task is to help people analyze their narratives, creating an "inventory" of the intellectual ideas and movements which have left their deposit in these stories but have done so without their authors' awareness (p. 324).

Unfortunately, as McCarthy's accounts of Steve's Intro class show, Fishman was not always able to contextualize Ellen's narratives. For example, on the day his class focused on an article by hooks (1981/1995), Steve had too little historical and theoretical understanding of our country's debates about race to help students inventory their accounts and place them in a larger framework. As a result, student positions hardened, and their differences remained personal

instead of reflecting broader philosophic and political points of view.

By contrast, when Steve was able to help students explore the ideas behind their diverse perspectives, students could re-examine their different positions and revisit their experiences wearing new conceptual lenses. As an illustration, McCarthy described the day Steve's Intro class discussed a text by Clarence Darrow (1932/1973) who argues against the existence of God. Because Fishman was familiar with the controversy surrounding this issue, he was able to help his class find the philosophic significance in Ellen's charge that studying views like Darrow's was a waste of time. As a result, as the class discussed Ellen's thesis—"If it ain't broke, don't fix it"—it was no longer just Ellen's view they were considering but the substantial history of challenges to philosophic questioning that began with the trial of Socrates.

A Social Motive: The Importance of Nurturing A Community of Student Inquiry

As McCarthy has reported, the effect on Ellen of successful contextualization of student narratives was noteworthy. She became a valued member of a group that she herself began to enjoy, one she saw as a source of personal growth, a class she said did not want to miss. She discovered that she needed her classmates and they needed her, and, as they worked together, their initial stereotypes started to fall away. As Ellen's classmate, Tonya McLinnis, also a returning African American woman, told McCarthy: "I have to admit I was wrong about Ellen. She is not a closedminded person who only wants to fight. Ellen is really listening now."

Successful class discussion not only gave Ellen a new social and non-instrumentalist motive for attending philosophy, it also helped her experience some of the rewards of philosophic questioning. Alternatively put, as she was bridging the gap between herself and her classmates, she was also reducing the distance between herself and Fishman, forging a relationship between herself and her teacher and his discipline that never developed between Neha and Steve. As McCarthy has reported, Ellen was establishing new "for-whats" or goals in philosophy, ones that overlapped with Steve's. Whereas Ellen initially told McCarthy that the chasm between Fishman and herself

was so great she thought Fishman was “from another planet,” by the time Ellen began work on her final essay for his course she told McCarthy she was now asking questions like Fishman and trying to emulate his “tactfulness.”

Although Fishman never directly helped Ellen with the surface features of her writing while she was a student in his course, the success of his pedagogy in enabling her to become part of a community of inquiry meant that this underprepared writer took significant residue from his class. She left with an appreciation of the value of philosophic questioning and was starting to open, more generally, to the possible rewards of book learning. Put differently, Ellen achieved something of Fishman’s overall goals for students, exploration of cultural knowledge and, most notably, personal growth.

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS IN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION: HOW MUCH? HOW LITTLE?

Our original research question focused on how Fishman could become a more effective teacher of underprepared writers who enroll in his philosophy classes. We learned that making progress with the surface features of the work of novice writers is extremely difficult in the short span of a single semester. As a result, instead of seeing improved mechanics as a discipline-based teacher’s first objective, we discovered that a more realistic aspiration is helping inexperienced writers become interested in course content and setting conditions so that they and their classmates learn from and teach one another. If such a classroom community can be nurtured, it is possible, as our studies of Neha Shah and Ellen Williams show, for novice writers to develop increased motivation and enthusiasm for their work.

Although we learned that moving novice writers’ compositions closer to Standard American English is difficult, especially in courses like philosophy which focus on demanding texts, we also discovered that progress, albeit modest, can be made if teacher and student manage to establish writing improvement as a common goal. This is our major finding from our study of Andre Steadman, our third focus student. As a consequence of Steve’s and Andre’s tutorial work

together, Andre developed new understanding of his writing process. In post-semester conversations with McCarthy, Andre said he applied what he learned about writing in philosophy to assignments in subsequent semesters. In particular, he began his papers earlier so he would have time to rewrite, shared his drafts with peers for reader feedback, and edited more carefully to make sure that what he put down on paper was what he really wanted to say.

Andre's new writing process was stimulated, at least in part, by the dialogic think-aloud protocols he shared with Fishman in their one-on-one weekly sessions. These helped him develop a co-investigator stance with Steve as he explored his compositions, a perspective from which he could "see [his] writing [problems] better." Of course, tutorials like the ones Andre and Steve shared are time consuming and hardly practical for large numbers of students given most instructors' course and pupil loads. Further, it is not easy to initiate tutorials, as we have seen in the cases of Neha and Ellen, because many students have neither the time for nor the interest in improving their writing. Yet, when teacher and student do share this goal, our study of Andre suggests that dialogic think-alouds are an effective way of making progress, not only with novice writers' composing processes but also with their mastery of course subject matter.

Reform Through Activism and Identity Politics Versus Reform Through Conversation and Common Purpose

Although Fishman and McCarthy agreed about the benefits for Andre Steadman of the dialogic think-alouds and his tutorials with Steve, we discovered further disagreements between us as we studied this third novice writer. McCarthy's unhappiness with Fishman's teaching of Andre was with Steve's lack of political activism, his failure to encourage students to confront injustices in the communities in which they lived. She argued that Fishman's reluctance to do this had the effect of perpetuating our society's hierarchical and inequitable status quo. The 10% of Americans who own 86% of our nation's wealth, she maintained, are not going to surrender their power and

influence voluntarily. In her view, without well organized civil disobedience, or even more aggressive forms of worker protest, any hope for increased democracy in America is a pipe dream. By contrast, Steve, following Dewey, pinned his hopes for social reform on intelligent inquiry and expanded give and take across class and ethnic lines.

However, our disagreement was not just about how politically active Fishman should be or how aggressive teachers in general should be in getting their students' political views into alignment with their own. Our disagreement was also about how someone like Fishman—a White, middle-class, Euroamerican male—should go about becoming an effective instructor of students like Neha Shah, Ellen Williams, and Andre Steadman who are, to borrow from Lisa Delpit (1995), “other people’s children.” In keeping with McCarthy’s identity politics, she argued that if Steve were to become a culturally sensitive teacher, he needed to do what Ladson-Billings (1994) and Freire (1970/1997) suggest: immerse himself in and incorporate into his curriculum the practices, values, and ways of knowing of his students. That is, just as McCarthy thought Fishman needed to work harder to understand Neha’s home community, so McCarthy believed Fishman needed to surrender his White, middle-class identity if he were to successfully instruct Ellen and Andre. This was the only way, as McCarthy saw it, that Fishman could avoid making Neha feel that Euroamerican traditions were superior to her native Indian ones and making Ellen and Andre feel that White, middle-class language and values—and existing social injustices—were legitimately the American norm.

In the end, we had to accept that at times the two of us simply interpreted our data differently. For his part, Fishman ultimately judged his work with Neha, Ellen, and Andre as largely successful. Especially with regard to Ellen and Andre, Fishman thought our study showed Dewey to be correct: people can honor their differences while developing a substantial degree of likemindedness. Drawing once again on his Deweyan orientation, specifically Dewey’s distrust of binary distinctions, Fishman thought McCarthy’s NonEuropean/European, Black/White, lower-class/middle-class distinctions were

too hard and fast. Steve saw lots of variation within these categories, saw places where the identities of people from apparently distinct groups overlapped, places where their practices coincided and their interests merged. To imply, as McCarthy did, that only if Fishman became Indian could he truly be fair to Neha, and only if he “died” and were reborn Black and working class could he effectively teach Ellen and Andre was, in Steve’s view, to exaggerate the ways he differed from his students and underestimate their chances of forging common goals and aspirations.

ADVICE FOR DISCIPLINE-BASED TEACHERS OF UNDERPREPARED WRITERS

Steve Fishman

Emphasize Content Over Form

If I am correct that Neha Shah, Ellen Williams, and Andre Steadman are representative of students I am calling underprepared, then the idea that should be first and foremost in the minds of discipline-based teachers is that such students are intelligent and, when properly motivated, hardworking. However, these instructors should also know that, for a variety of reasons, these students’ acquisition of academic literacy presents significant hurdles for them, and there is no quick fix. In other words, when teachers explain in marginal comments or face to face that these pupils’ writing is outside the standard code, these students are often unable or unwilling to immediately follow their instructors’ suggestions for writing in the target language.

Therefore, I urge teachers—and this is hardly new advice—to direct most of their attention to the content rather than the form of their underprepared students’ papers. I believe this is a way of showing them that a teacher is taking their work seriously and also a way of increasing their motivation. When I have adopted this approach, and when pupils have gotten excited about course subject matter, I have discovered that novice writers can do quite wonderful things. I am thinking of Ellen Williams’s paper on capital punishment and

Andre Steadman's written analysis of Hansen's (1995) book, *The Call to Teach*.

Establish Cooperative Relationships With and Among Students

In addition to urging teachers in the disciplines to attend primarily to the substance rather than the form of their underprepared students' work, I also suggest they try to establish cooperative relationships between themselves and these pupils and among these pupils and their classmates. My recommendation about the first step in this process is based on my experience that underprepared writers are often defensive about their work. As a result, I advise instructors to be cautious and gentle with any offers of help for fear these students will see such offers as criticisms, as signs that the teacher believes they are somehow inferior, unable to do the coursework. After the initial teacher-student encounter, however, a multitude of factors shape the teacher-student and student-student relationships that ensue.

In Ellen's case, the most important factor was that she felt encouraged to speak her mind and bring her personal experiences into class discussions. In Andre's case, I attribute our good teacher-student relationship, at least in part, to the dialogic think-alouds and co-investigator stance we developed in our tutorial sessions. Regarding Neha, although my own relationship with her remained more distant, her success in my class was, as we have shown, the consequence of her rewarding interactions with classmates. In short, underprepared writers' feelings about their teacher and their classmates—the degree to which these students sense they are valued participants in a shared inquiry—is central to the effort they put forward and, ultimately, to their academic success.

Provide Opportunities for Students to Bridge from Familiar Literacies to the Target Literacy

The instructional supports we have shown to be helpful for our three focus students all involve opportunities to use their familiar literacies to bridge to my academic one. Some involved writing,

some involved speaking, but nearly all allowed students to mix familiar discourses with the philosophic one I was urging them to master. In Neha's case, she said she profited from the letter exchanges with classmates, the small group sharing of homework, and student-generated exams. For Ellen, the opportunities to practice philosophic thinking she found most helpful were whole class discussion and various types of ungraded writing, including her entries in her Class Reflection Log and her in-class freewrites. Andre also mentioned the significance of his participation in whole class discussion, but most of all, he said, he valued his chances to talk about his papers in one-on-one sessions with me.

Expand What Counts as Academic Progress

Finally, perhaps the most important piece of advice I can offer discipline-based teachers is that they expand their view of what counts as academic progress in their classes. I say this because it can be depressing for teachers as well as students if instructors define novice writers' progress solely in terms of improved writing mechanics. Rather, in determining the value of their course for their underprepared students—the residue their novice writers take from it—a much more encouraging picture emerges if teachers consider other signs of increased academic literacy as well. I have in mind Neha Shah's modest gains in critiquing patriarchy, Ellen Williams's increasing ability to consider alternative positions, and Andre Steadman's emerging skill in seeing his own educational experiences in a larger and more philosophic context.

Notes

CHAPTER THREE

(p. 68)

1. Neha's and Ellen's off-campus work hours were not that unusual among UNCC students who, according to the University's Provost, work an average of 30 hours per week. However, we do not know how many students are, like Neha, working for non-necessities and, therefore, able to reduce their hours and how many are, like Ellen, unable to cut back. We suspect that more UNCC students fall into the former category than the latter.

CHAPTER FOUR

(p. 119)

1. I acknowledge that the term community is often used honorifically or, to quote Williams (1976), as a god-word. I am also cognizant of the potential problems with conceptions that present communities as organic but hierarchical wholes, different parts performing different functions in the service of a higher good. Such conceptions can lead to idealizations of societies—like the Athenian polis of ancient Greece, the medieval European village, and the New England colonial town—that, despite their orderliness and achievements, were, in fact, caste-like and repressive of minority languages and cultures (see Dewey, 1916/1967, pp. 152–54; Noddings, 1996; Phillips, 1993; Pratt, 1987). Dewey (1916/1967) himself acknowledges the multiple ways in which the word community is used (pp. 20–21, 80–83), recognizing that there are communities that produce evil as well as good: communities of thieves and, by contrast, communities

of respectful and welcoming families (1927/1988a, p. 150). Thus, Dewey attempts to fashion a conception of community that is realistic enough to present a live hypothesis but also ideal enough to be a standard against which to evaluate competing social forms.